

A-Rational Epistemological Disjunctivism

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Abstract

According to epistemological disjunctivism (ED), in paradigmatic cases of perceptual knowledge, a subject, *S*, has perceptual knowledge that *p* in virtue of being in possession of reasons for her belief that *p* which are both factive and reflectively accessible to *S*. It has been argued that ED is better placed than both knowledge internalism and knowledge externalism to undercut underdetermination-based skepticism. I identify several principles that must be true if ED is to be uniquely placed to attain this goal. After that, I use those principles to formulate a diachronic skeptical argument. This argument yields the counterintuitive conclusion that understanding a global skeptical hypothesis is all it takes for a rational subject to lose all her perceptual knowledge of the world. Next, I show that a popular Austinian move must reject one or another of the principles that underlie ED. I close by delineating a novel strategy that can block the diachronic skeptical argument while preserving all the principles. The key idea is that perceptual knowledge is grounded in primitive, perceptual and recognitional abilities. This view sheds new light on some puzzling features of global skepticism that have been noted by Descartes and Hume, among others.

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During her visit to the local zoo, Hannah—a normal adult human—sees a zebra in a pen and forms the belief that there is a zebra in the pen. Hannah is of sound mind, she is fully alert, and she lacks any reasons for doubt. The zebra is also plainly visible, and the illumination conditions are normal. Therefore, Hannah knows that there is a zebra in the pen (Dretske, 1970).

How should we characterize the epistemic support that perception confers on Hannah's perceptual knowledge? Epistemological disjunctivism (ED) offers an influential answer:

ED EPISTEMOLOGICAL DISJUNCTIVISM

In paradigmatic cases of perceptual knowledge, a subject, *S*, has perceptual knowledge that *p* in virtue of being in possession of reasons for her belief that *p* which are both *factive* and *reflectively accessible* to *S* (Pritchard, 2012: 13).¹

ED is an account of the perceptual knowledge enjoyed by adult humans. ED is also restricted to paradigmatic cases of perceptual knowledge, i.e., those cases that offer the most favorable conditions to acquire perceptual knowledge. For ease of exposition, let us call them 'good cases'. ED appeals to reflective access, which we can gloss as knowledge grounded in the capacity for reflection. This is the capacity one deploys when one searches one's memories or makes the contents of one's experiences explicit (Cunningham, 2016). Although this is not a substantial characterization, it will do for our current purposes.²

In our original example, Hannah is a normal adult human who finds herself in a good case. Given ED, Hannah knows that there is a zebra in the pen in virtue of *seeing that there is a zebra in the pen*. Her reason is factive because it entails that *there is a zebra in the pen*. And she can know that she has this factive reason at her disposal by deploying her capacity for reflection.³

It has been argued that ED is better placed than both knowledge internalism and knowledge externalism to undercut some forms of global skepticism (Kern, 2017; McDowell, 1995, 2002a, 2008a, 2011, 2019; Pritchard, 2012, 2016; Rödl, 2007).⁴ That is why Duncan Pritchard has described ED as 'the holy grail of epistemology' (Pritchard, 2012: 1). In this article, I show that ED has skeptical consequences. I also suggest that a popular Austinian move to avoid skepticism must reject one or another of the core principles that underlie ED. Finally, I suggest that one can avoid the skeptical consequences while keeping all the core principles if one rejects ED's rationalist commitment to explaining perceptual knowledge in virtue of the possession of reflectively accessible perceptual reasons.

¹ See also Kern (2017), McDowell (1995, 2002a, 2011, 2019), Neta (2008, 2009, 2011), and Rödl (2007).

² For an attempt at characterizing reflective knowledge beyond these platitudes, see Neta (2009, 2011, 2018). I come back to reflective knowledge in Section 5.

³ There has been some discussion about the characterization of perceptual reasons. For example, Neta (2009, 2011, 2018, 2019) has argued that ED only needs conclusive reasons, i.e., reasons that *require* the truth of the target proposition. A reason for *p* can require the truth of *p* without entailing it. This can occur if perceptual reasons are denoted by noun phrase constructions like '*S* sees *x*'. In these cases, the whole state requires the truth of propositions of the form <There is an *x*> or <That is an *x*>. For similar views, see Dretske (1969, 1971) and French (2016). I will focus on factive constructions. However, my arguments generalize to non-factive views that introduce a reflective accessibility requirement.

⁴ Hereafter, I abbreviate 'knowledge internalism' and 'knowledge externalism' to 'internalism' and 'externalism' respectively. By 'global skepticism' I mean the proposition that we know nothing or very little about the external world. By a 'global skeptical hypothesis' I mean a proposition that describes a scenario in which we know nothing or very little about the external world. This includes various versions of the brain in a vat scenario (BIV) (Putnam, 1981; Pritchard, 2005; Williams, 2001) and the evil demon scenario (Descartes, 1996).

The article proceeds as follows. I start with a reconstruction of ED's response to underdetermination-based skepticism (Section 1). Next, I identify several principles that must be true if ED is to be uniquely placed to undercut underdetermination-based skepticism and offer a plausible account of rational deliberation (Section 2). I then use those principles, plus the underdetermination principle at work in underdetermination-based skepticism, to formulate a diachronic skeptical argument. The diachronic skeptical argument yields the counterintuitive conclusion that a rational subject who initially has reflectively accessible factive perceptual reasons, but then understands a global skeptical hypothesis, inevitably loses all her perceptual knowledge of the world (Section 3). Section 4 examines an Austinian response to the diachronic skeptical argument and shows that it compromises ED's core principles. In Section 5, I sketch an alternative response to the diachronic skeptical argument that preserves all the core principles. The proposed solution rejects ED's rationalist explanation of adult human perceptual knowledge as knowledge based on reflectively accessible reasons. Instead, we should think of adult human perceptual knowledge as having a-rational grounds. This explanation sheds new light on some puzzling features of global skepticism that have been noted by Descartes and Hume, among others.⁵

1 | THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL HOLY GRAIL

Let us work with a representative example of a global skeptical hypothesis:

BIV BRAIN IN A VAT. Some scientists have captured Hannah while she was sleeping, drugged her, and removed her brain, which they kept alive in a vat of nutrients. After that, they implanted electrodes in the afferent nerve pathways to Hannah's brain. These electrodes are now controlled by a supercomputer to exactly mimic the pattern of nerve firing that would be produced if Hannah was currently seeing a zebra in the pen and had formed the belief that there is a zebra in the pen.⁶

⁵ Recent work on the anti-skeptical scope of ED includes Ashton (2015), Coliva (2021), Lockhart (2018), Millar (2019), Neta (2008a, 2016), Stuchlik (2020), Zalabardo (2015), and some of the essays in Doyle, Milburn & Pritchard (2019). The diachronic skeptical argument has not been discussed in any of those works. McDowell (2013: 269) briefly mentions "a potential fragility in self-conscious awareness of the warranting character of one's experience". This concession comes close to the conclusion of the diachronic skeptical argument. However, the latter supports a stronger conclusion: the alleged fragility follows from principles that defenders of ED are committed to. The diachronic skeptical argument is reminiscent of some forms of epistemic contextualism. According to Neta (2003: 22), "what counts as evidence is relative to a context of attribution of evidence" (see also Neta, 2002). In everyday contexts, Hannah's evidence can include such things as seeing that there is a zebra in the pen. However, when Hannah becomes aware of a global skeptical hypothesis, she enters a skeptical context that creates a gap between her visual evidence and the world. Thus, the evidence that can be truthfully ascribed to Hannah shrinks to being non-factive evidence (e.g., <It seems to me that there is a zebra in the pen>). Other brands of epistemic contextualism hold that, given that 'knows' is a context-sensitive term, one can lose one's perceptual knowledge by merely reflecting on global skeptical hypotheses (Lewis, 1996; Williams, 1991, 2001; but see DeRose, 2009, 2017 for a contextualist critique of this claim). The diachronic skeptical argument does not rely on any contextualist analysis of epistemic words like 'knows', 'evidence', and 'reasons'. So, it is not prey to the usual objections to various forms of epistemic contextualism, like the problem of semantic blindness, the introduction of a linear hierarchy of epistemic standards, the tendency to think of skepticism as a semantic rather than an epistemological problem, and the alleged conflation of the conditions for warranted assertibility with the conditions for true assertion (Conee, 2005; Feldman, 1999; Pritchard, 2016; Rysiew, 2001; Schiffer, 1996). I discuss some ramifications of my approach for epistemic contextualism in footnotes 15 and 24.

⁶ See Williams (2001: 70). Notice that Hannah has not lived an entire envatted existence. Thus, it is hard to dismiss this BIV hypothesis on behalf of an externalist theory of content (Davidson, 1986; Putnam, 1981). The limitations of externalist

One can use the BIV hypothesis to formulate different skeptical arguments. By a ‘skeptical argument’ I mean a valid argument that reaches a counterintuitive conclusion with premises that one is, or seems to be, committed to. Pritchard (2016) has argued that ED is ideally placed to block an underdetermination-based skeptical argument. I will follow him on this score.⁷

Underdetermination-based skepticism

Premise 1. One cannot have reflectively accessible reasons that favor an external world proposition over the BIV hypothesis.

Premise 2. If one cannot have reflectively accessible reasons that favor an external world proposition over the BIV hypothesis, then one does not have knowledge of external world propositions based on reflectively accessible reasons.

Conclusion. One does not have knowledge of external world propositions based on reflectively accessible reasons [from premises 1 and 2 by modus ponens].

Let us use the phrase ‘external world’ to refer to any entity that exists in space. This includes animals, plants, stones, mountains, artifacts, buildings, and shadows (Moore, 1939). So, an external world proposition is any proposition that concerns one or another of these types of entities.

The Conclusion expresses a form of skepticism. We can appreciate the skeptical character of the Conclusion by recalling the story of the chicken sexers. The chicken sexers are subjects who reliably form beliefs about the sex of chickens but who also lack reflectively accessible reasons in favor of those beliefs (Brandom, 1998; Foley, 1987). The Conclusion tells us that, if one has *any* knowledge of external world propositions, *all* that knowledge is analogous to the knowledge possessed by the chicken sexers (Pritchard, 2005: 115, 206, 2016: 35–6). But this seems wrong, even by externalist lights. To be sure, externalists would insist that the chicken sexers do have knowledge (Sosa, 2007). Nevertheless, they should also grant that there are cases in which subjects are in a better epistemic position than the chicken sexers. This will happen when subjects have reflectively accessible reasons in favor of their beliefs. Externalists should also grant that a large portion of adult human knowledge of external world propositions is based on reflectively accessible reasons (Pritchard, 2016: 75–6). Alas, if premises 1–2 are true, these intuitive claims are false. If one has *any* knowledge of external world propositions, *all* that knowledge is of the same type as the crude, externalist knowledge that externalists ascribe to the chicken sexers. And that seems wrong.

Pritchard (2016) thinks that externalism and internalism *cannot* avoid this skeptical Conclusion. He also thinks that *only* ED can avoid the skeptical Conclusion. Rather than examining these negative claims, I shall discuss one representative version of each view. This will enable us to see why ED has been thought to be ideally placed to avoid the skeptical Conclusion. I shall revisit the negative claims in Section 2.

Consider a radical externalist. Our radical externalist holds that, if a true belief has satisfied an external condition (reliability, safety, sensitivity, and so on), we have necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge. Our radical externalist seems to be committed to the truth of Premise 1. After all, there is nothing in her theory of knowledge that licenses the claim that one can have

theories of content in dealing with these types of hypotheses have been underscored in previous work. See Chalmers (2018), Nagel (1986), Neta (2003), Pritchard (2005, 2016), and Williams (2001).

⁷ Neta (2003) has employed a view like ED to handle both closure- and underdetermination-based skeptical arguments. For attempts at using ED to undercut closure-based skepticism, see McDowell (1986: 238f.) and Pritchard (2012). Kern (2017) has used ED to block the regress argument. I leave the discussion of the closure and regress arguments for another occasion.

reflectively accessible reasons that favor an external world proposition over the BIV hypothesis. This creates a problem, though. If one cannot have reflectively accessible reasons that favor an external world proposition over the BIV hypothesis, and Premise 2 is true, one must accept the skeptical Conclusion: One does not have knowledge of external world propositions based on reflectively accessible reasons.⁸

Consider a radical internalist. Our radical internalist holds that knowledge requires the possession of reflectively accessible reasons that favor an external world proposition over some incompatible propositions. So, our radical internalist denies that the chicken sexers have knowledge of the sex of chickens. However, our radical internalist construes reflectively accessible reasons as purely internal to the subject. This view hinges on what is known as the NEW EVIL DEMON INTUITION:

NEW EVIL DEMON INTUITION. The reasons that are reflectively accessible in the good cases are of the same type as the reasons that are reflectively accessible to a BIV.⁹

If one grants NEW EVIL DEMON INTUITION, it is hard to see how one could reject Premise 1. If the reasons that are reflectively accessible in the good cases are of the same type as the reasons that are reflectively accessible to a BIV, nothing in the internalist theory seems to license the claim that one can have reflectively accessible reasons that favor an external world proposition over the BIV hypothesis. To paraphrase Pritchard (2016: 40), purely internal reasons are “completely indifferent to whether or not we are the victims of a radical skeptical scenario”. But, if one cannot have reflectively accessible reasons that favor an external world proposition over the BIV hypothesis, and Premise 2 is true, the skeptical Conclusion follows: One does not have knowledge of external world propositions based on reflectively accessible reasons.

These frustrating results might lead some philosophers to reject Premise 2. However, Premise 2 relies on a seemingly intuitive principle:

UNDERDETERMINATION. If *S* knows that *p* and *q* are incompatible propositions, and yet *S* lacks reflectively accessible reasons that favor *p* over *q*, then *S* lacks knowledge of *p* based on reflectively accessible reasons.¹⁰

Suppose that Hannah knows that <There is a zebra in the pen> and <There is a crocodile in the pen> are incompatible propositions—let us assume that there is only one animal in the pen. Suppose also that Hannah lacks reflectively accessible reasons that favor <There is a zebra in the pen> over <There is a crocodile in the pen>. Then, it seems to follow that Hannah lacks knowledge that there is a zebra in the pen based on reflectively accessible reasons. UNDERDETERMINATION offers us an elegant explanation of this pattern of reasoning.

If we want to stick to UNDERDETERMINATION and avoid the skeptical Conclusion, we need an alternative view. So, perhaps we could keep UNDERDETERMINATION by developing an account of perceptual knowledge that incorporates the insights of both radical externalism and radical

⁸ In Echeverri (2022), I examine weaker forms of externalism that could avoid the skeptical Conclusion. See also Greco (2014).

⁹ There are different formulations of NEW EVIL DEMON INTUITION. Moreover, its status as an intuition has been challenged. See the essays in Dorsch & Dutant (forthcoming).

¹⁰ See Pritchard (2016: 34). For similar principles, see Brueckner (1994: 830ff.), Cohen (1998: 145), Greco (2000: 37), Neta (2003: 7), Peacocke (2004: 9), Vogel (2004: 427), and Yalçin (1992: 8).

internalism. It is here that ED comes into scene. For Pritchard, Premise 1 relies on INSULARITY OF REASONS:

INSULARITY OF REASONS. The reasons we have reflective access to in the good cases are compatible with the widespread falsity of external world propositions (Pritchard, 2016: 3, 55–6, 172).

If we reject INSULARITY OF REASONS, we can reject Premise 1 but retain Premise 2. As a result, the transition to the skeptical Conclusion is blocked. Interestingly, ED offers us the materials to reject INSULARITY OF REASONS. Assume that Hannah is in a good case. Given ED, Hannah has a reflectively accessible reason that favors the external world proposition <There is a zebra in the pen> over the BIV hypothesis, namely, her seeing that there is a zebra in the pen. Once we have rejected Premise 1 on behalf of ED, we do not need to reject UNDERDETERMINATION to avoid the skeptical Conclusion. So, we are not compelled to assimilate *all* our perceptual knowledge to the knowledge possessed by the chicken sexers.

2 | FOUR PRINCIPLES

Defenders of ED not only claim that ED is ideally placed to block underdetermination-based skepticism while retaining UNDERDETERMINATION. They also think that ED is the *only* account of perceptual knowledge that can succeed in that task. Why do they think so? I will show that they are committed to the truth of four principles. Three of those principles are necessary to secure ED's status as the only account of perceptual knowledge capable of rejecting Premise 1. A fourth principle must be added if ED is to offer a credible picture of rational deliberation.¹¹

As it happens, I find the four principles plausible. However, I won't be able to fully defend them in this already lengthy paper. Instead, I will briefly indicate why I find the principles plausible and show that defenders of ED are committed to them.

EPISTEMIC PURISM. If S 's reasons R_1, \dots, R_n favor p over an incompatible proposition q , then R_1, \dots, R_n speak to the truth of p (and the falsity of q).

Let us work with an intuitive understanding of the phrase 'speak to the truth'. An *epistemic* reason for p (and against q) is a consideration that speaks to the truth of p (and the falsity of q). EPISTEMIC PURISM is the claim that only *epistemic* reasons can favor a proposition over an incompatible proposition (Neta, 2011: 661; Peacocke, 2004: 11; Pritchard, 2016: 80, 2021: 3656).

It has been observed that non-epistemic factors play a crucial role in the *fixation* of belief. It has also been argued that non-epistemic factors can partly determine what a subject *ought* to believe—in a broad sense of 'ought' (James, 1896; Peirce, 1877). EPISTEMIC PURISM is consistent with those views. It only rules out views that include practical considerations among the reasons that can favor a proposition p over an incompatible proposition q .

ED's response to underdetermination-based skepticism relies on EPISTEMIC PURISM. To see why, suppose that practical reasons could figure among the reasons that can favor p over an incompatible proposition q . If this view was on the table, it would be hard to justify the claim that externalism and internalism cannot reject Premise 1. For example, it is less costly and more fruitful

¹¹ Those who think that epistemic principles are not assessable as true or false can rephrase them as imperatives.

to believe only those external world propositions whose truth is presupposed in our everyday lives than to believe the BIV hypothesis. If one could factor in reflectively accessible practical reasons into the favoring relation, then externalists and internalists could argue that, on balance, one's reflectively accessible reasons do favor an external world proposition over the BIV hypothesis. Thus, ED would not be the only way of blocking Premise 1. In sum, without EPISTEMIC PURISM, reflectively accessible practical reasons could do all the work that ED seeks to do via perceptual reasons that are both factive and reflectively accessible.

EXCLUSIVITY. If S 's reasons R_1, \dots, R_n favor p over a global skeptical hypothesis q , then: If q were true, then S would not have R_1, \dots, R_n .

EXCLUSIVITY is implicit in Pritchard's (2016: 40) complaint that purely internal reasons are "completely indifferent to whether or not we are the victims of a radical skeptical scenario" (Section 1). This observation encapsulates the core intuition behind EXCLUSIVITY: if one retained exactly the same reasons across the good and the bad cases, how could one's reasons speak to the falsity of global skeptical hypotheses?¹²

Defenders of ED are committed to EXCLUSIVITY. Indeed, EXCLUSIVITY is entailed by any treatment of underdetermination-based skepticism that rejects INSULARITY OF REASONS. Suppose that, in the good cases, Hannah knows that p in virtue of reflectively accessible reasons R_1, \dots, R_n . If Hannah were a BIV and she could still have R_1, \dots, R_n , then the possession of R_1, \dots, R_n would be compatible with the widespread falsity of Hannah's beliefs. So, the only way of denying INSULARITY OF REASONS is to endorse EXCLUSIVITY. ED satisfies EXCLUSIVITY. If Hannah is in a good case, she has the reflectively accessible reason that she sees that p . Since this reason entails p , and p is false in the BIV scenario, if Hannah was a BIV, she would not have this factive perceptual reason.¹³

MINIMAL EMPIRICISM. If S 's reasons R_1, \dots, R_n favor an external world proposition p over an incompatible proposition q , then at least some of R_1, \dots, R_n are grounded in perception.

Theories of a priori knowledge and justification have enjoyed some popularity in the last few years (BonJour, 1998; Peacocke, 2004; but see Williamson, 2007). Defenders of ED need not deny the existence of a priori knowledge and justification. Yet, they are committed to imposing strict limits on a priori knowledge and justification. These limits are encapsulated in MINIMAL EMPIRICISM, and for good reason. External world propositions and their denials concern *specific* and *contingent* features of entities that exist in space. If MINIMAL EMPIRICISM was false, it should be possible to come to know or have justified beliefs about the instantiation of specific and contingent features of entities that exist in space without relying on perception. That seems to commit us to a magic source of knowledge and justification.

Suppose that MINIMAL EMPIRICISM was false. Then, it would be hard to see why defenders of ED have thought that internalism cannot block Premise 1. As an illustration, some internalists have argued that we have a priori reasons that speak to the falsity of the BIV hypothesis (BonJour, 1998; Cohen, 1999; Silins, 2007; Wright, 2004). If these a priori reasons were available, internalists could argue that, on balance, one's reflectively accessible reasons do favor an external world

¹² Pryor (2000, 2004) seems to be unimpressed by this consideration.

¹³ EXCLUSIVITY is not identical to sensitivity: S 's belief in p is sensitive if and only if S wouldn't believe that p if p was false (Nozick, 1981). Sensitivity is a more general principle. Moreover, it concerns belief, not reasons.

proposition over the BIV hypothesis. This type of move would bypass any appeal to reflectively accessible factive perceptual reasons, threatening the claim that ED is uniquely placed to reject Premise 1.¹⁴

The three principles above are key to ED's anti-skeptical strategy. The fourth principle concerns ED's conception of adult human perceptual knowledge as *rationally based* knowledge. Intuitively, any account of rationally based knowledge should cohere with a plausible account of rational deliberation. The fourth principle seems necessary to offer a plausible account of rational deliberation.

ACCESS LOSS. If a subject, *S*, believes *p* based on reason *R*, and *S* recognizes *h* as an undercutting hypothesis of *S*'s pair $\langle p, R \rangle$, then *R* is not reflectively accessible to *S*.

Suppose that *S* believes *p* based on reason *R*. An undercutting hypothesis of *S*'s pair $\langle p, R \rangle$ is a hypothesis that says (or implies) that:

- (1) *R* does not speak to the truth of *p*,
- (2) *S* falsely takes *R* to speak to the truth of *p*,
- (3) *S* lacks the power to discriminate whether *R* speaks to the truth of *p*.

In a nutshell, an undercutting hypothesis says that *S*'s reason for *p* is misleading (conditions 1–2), and that *S* cannot detect the misleading character of that reason (condition 3). *ACCESS LOSS* tells us that, if *S* recognizes a hypothesis that satisfies conditions 1–3, then *S*'s reason is not reflectively accessible to *S*. *ACCESS LOSS* enables us to explain why we classify some reactions to error possibilities as irrational and other reactions as rational. To see why, let us consider two examples.

Example 1. After seeing the zebra in the pen, Hannah believes that there is a zebra in the pen. When she expresses her belief, Jack asserts:

“The old zebra died. Given that zebras are in short supply, the zookeepers had to replace it with a mule cleverly disguised to look like a zebra. Believe it or not, the zookeepers are so versed in the art of trickery that normal adult humans cannot distinguish that painted mule from a real zebra, at least from your current point of view. Alas, you are a normal human who lacks extraordinary visual discriminatory powers”.

In this case, Jack has introduced an undercutting hypothesis of Hannah's pair $\langle \text{There is a zebra in the pen, I see that there is a zebra in the pen} \rangle$. The intuitive verdict is that it would be irrational for Hannah to cite the deliverances of her visual system to dismiss this undercutting hypothesis

¹⁴ To be sure, the authors listed above have different views of a priori knowledge and justification. If a priori reasons against the BIV hypothesis are grounded in practical considerations, they violate *EPISTEMIC PURISM*. If they are internal to the subject, they violate *EXCLUSIVITY*. *Mind and World* is a sustained defense of a view stronger than *MINIMAL EMPIRICISM*: the very idea of a thought being about the world only makes sense if that thought is grounded in perceptual reasons (McDowell, 1996). Pritchard's discussion of the 'access problem' for ED presupposes *MINIMAL EMPIRICISM* as well. The access problem says that, if ED is true, "one ought to be able to come to know specific facts about one's environment simply through reflection, and for most this would be a reductio" (Pritchard, 2012: 19; see also Pritchard, 2016: 129-30). Neta's (2011: 674-5) No Divination principle is akin to *MINIMAL EMPIRICISM*. Neta has convincingly argued that Hawthorne's (2002) famous defense of a priori knowledge of deeply contingent truths relies on empirical reasons. In recent work, Neta (2019: 178) has defended a broadly empiricist outlook.

and stick to her belief that there is a zebra in the pen—even if the reason delivered by her visual system turns out to be factive. To rationally dismiss the undercutting hypothesis, Hannah should cite independent considerations. ACCESS LOSS explains this verdict. The reason why it would be irrational for Hannah to cite the deliverances of her visual system to dismiss the cleverly disguised mule hypothesis and stick to her prior belief is that, upon recognizing the undercutting hypothesis, the reason provided by her visual system is not reflectively accessible to her.

Example 2. After seeing the zebra in the pen, Hannah believes that there is a zebra in the pen. This time, Paul asserts, “There is no zebra in the pen. You are currently seeing a crocodile”. In this case, it would be perfectly rational for Hannah to cite her reflectively accessible factive perceptual reason to dismiss this alternative hypothesis. “Are you kidding me? I can see that there is a zebra in the pen”. Although the crocodile hypothesis seems to imply that Hannah’s perceptual reason does not speak to the truth of the target proposition, and that Hannah is wrong to think that she has that perceptual reason at her disposal, nothing in the crocodile hypothesis suggests that Hannah lacks the power to discriminate whether her perceptual reason speaks to the truth of the target proposition. Therefore, Hannah’s response is rational.

The key difference lies in the explanatory gloss that is provided in example 1 but which is missing in example 2: the zookeepers are so versed in the art of trickery that normal adult humans cannot distinguish that painted mule from a real zebra, at least from Hannah’s current point of view. Moreover, Hannah is a normal human who lacks extraordinary visual discriminatory powers. A virtue of ACCESS LOSS is that it helps us explain why it would be irrational to cite one’s factive seeing in example 1 but why it is perfectly rational to do so in example 2.¹⁵

The concept of ACCESS LOSS might remind some readers of the related concept of undercutting defeat (Pollock & Cruz, 1999). Although both concepts characterize *epistemic effects* on a subject’s reasons to believe a proposition, each concept characterizes a *different* epistemic effect. In any form of defeat, a subject’s *justification* to believe a proposition is either lost or downgraded. On some views, only justified, undercutting hypotheses can introduce genuine defeaters. ACCESS LOSS is neutral on what it takes for a hypothesis to introduce a genuine defeater; it only tells us that *S*’s recognition of an undercutting hypothesis of *S*’s pair $\langle p, R \rangle$ makes *R* *reflectively inaccessible* to *S*. This observation is consistent with the claim that the subject’s overall justification can remain unaltered after she recognizes an undercutting hypothesis. This would happen if our subject could avail herself of independent reasons in favor of *p*.¹⁶

ACCESS LOSS is consistent with various versions of ED. For example, Pritchard (2012: 85, 99, 2016: 26–7) thinks that the recognition of a global skeptical hypothesis is sufficient to ‘neutralize’ a subject’s empirical reasons, making those reasons reflectively unavailable. Similarly, McDowell (2008a: 384) has pointed out that, even if we do have reflectively accessible factive reasons in

¹⁵ My account of undercutting hypotheses has been influenced by Neta’s (2002, 2003) remarks on ‘uneliminated counterpossibilities’. There are important differences, though. Neta uses the concept of an ‘uneliminated counterpossibility’ to formulate a contextualist rule for the attribution of evidence. By contrast, I use undercutting hypotheses to formulate ACCESS LOSS, a principle of rational deliberation. To my mind, ACCESS LOSS should appeal to theorists who are sympathetic to invariantist accounts of evidence possession. To see why, note that the two approaches make different predictions. Any form of attributer contextualism predicts that the context of attribution determines what evidence (or knowledge) can be truthfully attributed to a subject, even in *third-person attributions* (DeRose, 2009). By contrast, ACCESS LOSS makes no such predictions.

¹⁶ ACCESS LOSS is congenial to Pryor’s (2004) remarks on ‘rational obstruction’.

the good cases, reliance on those reasons in a Moorean anti-skeptical argument would beg the question.

ACCESS LOSS is also consistent with different ways of spelling out the epistemic effects of the recognition of an undercutting hypothesis. If the subject is led to withhold her belief in p , and belief in p is necessary to see that p , then ACCESS LOSS will lead her to lose her seeing that p (Dretske, 1969: 6; McDowell, 1982: 390 n 37, 1993: 430, 2002a: 282, 2011: 47, 2013: 269). Alternatively, one might hold that, although the subject continues to see that p , “her seeing that p can no longer be part of the rational support reflectively available to her in support of her knowledge that p ” (Pritchard, 2016: 212 n 4; see also Pritchard, 2012: 27).¹⁷ The argument from Section 3 is consistent with any of these views. However, for the sake of simplicity, I will assume that a subject can see that p even though she lacks reflective access that she sees that p .¹⁸

3 | THE DIACHRONIC SKEPTICAL ARGUMENT

ED can block underdetermination-based skepticism. However, ED only deserves to be called ‘the epistemological holy grail’ if one accepts five principles: UNDERDETERMINATION, EPISTEMIC PURISM, EXCLUSIVITY, MINIMAL EMPIRICISM, and ACCESS LOSS. In this section, I use these principles to present a diachronic skeptical argument against ED. The argument grants that, in the good cases, subjects can have perceptual reasons that are both factive and reflectively accessible to them. Yet, it shows that those subjects cannot rationally retain their reflective access to their factive perceptual reasons. If one further assumes that adult human perceptual knowledge is rationally based knowledge, as defenders of ED do, it follows that the mere consideration of a global skeptical hypothesis inevitably leads rational subjects to lose all their perceptual knowledge.

The diachronic skeptical argument focuses on those subjects who have understood the BIV hypothesis. What it takes to understand the BIV hypothesis will become clear as we proceed. I shall refer to those subjects as ‘reflective subjects’ (Pritchard, 2005: 210, 246; Stroud, 1984: 80–1) and denote them with an ‘ S ’. I will make one assumption about reflective subjects: they are motivated to respond to the BIV hypothesis in a rational manner. This is, I take it, a reasonable characterization of how many people initially react to global skepticism. We will revisit this assumption in Section 5.

DIACHRONIC SKEPTICISM

Premise 1. S believes that p based on her seeing that p and S recognizes the BIV hypothesis as an undercutting hypothesis of S ’s pair $\langle p, I \text{ see that } p \rangle$.

Premise 2. If S believes that p based on her seeing that p and S recognizes a hypothesis h as an undercutting hypothesis of S ’s pair $\langle p, I \text{ see that } p \rangle$, then S ’s seeing that p is not reflectively accessible to S .

Conclusion 1. S ’s seeing that p is not reflectively accessible to S [from premises 1–2 by *modus ponens*].

Premise 3. S recognizes her seeing that p and the BIV hypothesis as incompatible, and yet S lacks reflectively accessible reasons that favor her seeing that p over the BIV hypothesis.

¹⁷ Some of McDowell’s writings are consistent with this diagnosis (McDowell, 2002b: 277–8, 2003: 680–1).

¹⁸ In Section 5, I argue that, at least in some cases, a subject can retain her seeing that p even though she lacks reflective access to it.

Premise 4. If S recognizes her seeing that p and the BIV hypothesis as incompatible, and yet S lacks reflectively accessible reasons that favor her seeing that p over the BIV hypothesis, then S lacks knowledge that she sees that p based on reflectively accessible reasons.

Conclusion 2. S lacks knowledge that she sees that p based on reflectively accessible reasons [from premises 3–4 by *modus ponens*].

Premise 5. If S 's seeing that p is not reflectively accessible to S and S lacks knowledge that she sees that p based on reflectively accessible reasons, S lacks reasons for her belief that p which are both factive and reflectively accessible to S .

Conclusion 3. S lacks reasons for her belief that p which are both factive and reflectively accessible to S [from conclusion 1, conclusion 2, and premise 5 by *modus ponens*].

Premise 6. If S lacks reasons for her belief that p which are both factive and reflectively accessible to S , S lacks perceptual knowledge that p .

Conclusion 4. S lacks perceptual knowledge that p [from conclusion 3 and premise 6 by *modus ponens*].

I will use the principles identified in sections 1–2 to defend the key premises of this argument. As for the other premises, I will show that they are either independently plausible or licensed by ED. For ease of exposition, I will divide the argument into four stages.

3.1 | Stage 1: S loses reflective access to her seeing that p

Premise 1. S believes that p based on her seeing that p and S recognizes the BIV hypothesis as an undercutting hypothesis of S 's pair $\langle p, I \text{ see that } p \rangle$.

Premise 2. If S believes that p based on her seeing that p and S recognizes a hypothesis h as an undercutting hypothesis of S 's pair $\langle p, I \text{ see that } p \rangle$, then S 's seeing that p is not reflectively accessible to S .

Conclusion 1. S 's seeing that p is not reflectively accessible to S .

Premise 1 states a plausible assumption about reflective subjects. If a subject has genuinely understood the BIV hypothesis, she has recognized it as an undercutting hypothesis of her factive perceptual reasons. This point holds even if our subject lacks the terminology of undercutting hypotheses. Most subjects have the gut reaction that citing one's seeing that p to block the BIV is not alright. Perhaps it begs the question, or it reveals some lack of understanding of what the BIV says, or it implies that one has tacitly rejected the claim that one cannot discriminate one's own case from the BIV scenario.

Premise 2 is an application of ACCESS LOSS to factive perceptual reasons. Suppose that Hannah believes that there is a zebra in the pen based on a reason that is both factive and reflectively accessible to Hannah: $\langle I \text{ see that there is a zebra in the pen} \rangle$. Suppose further that Hannah recognizes the hypothesis $\langle I \text{ am a BIV} \rangle$ as an undercutting hypothesis of Hannah's pair $\langle \text{There is a zebra in the pen, } I \text{ see that there is a zebra in the pen} \rangle$. Given ACCESS LOSS,

Hannah's seeing that there is a zebra in the pen is not reflectively accessible to her. This accords with intuition. It would be irrational for Hannah to cite her seeing that there is a zebra in the pen to dismiss the BIV hypothesis.

It might be objected that there is a key difference between the cleverly disguised mule hypothesis and the BIV hypothesis. While the former casts doubt on a *limited portion* of S 's external world beliefs, the latter casts doubt on the *totality* of S 's external world beliefs. The difference is real,

and it will become important later. For the time being, let us recall that the BIV hypothesis is an undercutting hypothesis. So, without further ado, factive perceptual reasons are not reflectively accessible to *S* to rationally dismiss the BIV hypothesis.¹⁹

Taken together, premises 1–2 support Conclusion 1: *S*'s seeing that *p* is not reflectively accessible to *S*.

3.2 | Stage 2: *S* fails to rationally regain reflective access to her seeing that *p*

Premise 3. *S* recognizes her seeing that *p* and the BIV hypothesis as incompatible, and yet *S* lacks reflectively accessible reasons that favor her seeing that *p* over the BIV hypothesis.

Premise 4. If *S* recognizes her seeing that *p* and the BIV hypothesis as incompatible, and yet *S* lacks reflectively accessible reasons that favor her seeing that *p* over the BIV hypothesis, then *S* lacks knowledge that she sees that *p* based on reflectively accessible reasons.

Conclusion 2. *S* lacks knowledge that she sees that *p* based on reflectively accessible reasons.

ACCESS LOSS has led *S* to lose reflective access to her seeing that *p* (Conclusion 1). We are assuming, however, that *S* is motivated to rationally dismiss the BIV hypothesis. So, *S* will feel compelled to try to 'regain' her reflective knowledge of her seeing that *p* by identifying independent reasons that favor her seeing that *p* over the BIV hypothesis. Premise 3 tells us that *S* lacks reflectively accessible reasons that favor her seeing that *p* over the BIV hypothesis. Why? The principles that underlie ED's treatment of underdetermination-based skepticism entail that these independent reasons are unavailable.

Seeming reasons. The BIV hypothesis says that Hannah's current experience is indiscriminable from the experiences of a BIV. Many defenders of ED have granted this point (McDowell, 1982: 385–6, 2013: 260; Pritchard, 2012: Part Two, 2016: 130–2). Thus, Hannah has something in common with her envatted counterpart: it seems to each of them that there is a zebra in the pen. Call this common factor 'seeming reasons'.²⁰ By ED's lights, seeming reasons do not favor *S*'s seeing that *p* over the BIV hypothesis because they violate EXCLUSIVITY. If Hannah was a BIV, she would still have her seeming reasons. Therefore, Hannah's seeming reasons do not favor <I see that there is a zebra in the pen> over the BIV hypothesis.

Background empirical reasons. It has been argued that adult humans have background empirical reasons that enable them to dismiss at least some undercutting hypotheses (Neta, 2008, 2021; Pritchard, 2012, 2016; Vogel, 1990a; Williams, 2001). One such reason is <The current state of technology does not enable anyone to exactly mimic the pattern of nerve firing that underlies Hannah's current experience>. Unfortunately, ED's principles rule out background empirical reasons. If one construes them as internally individuated, they violate EXCLUSIVITY. If one construes them as externally individuated, ACCESS LOSS has made them reflectively unavailable. Pritchard seems to endorse the latter view when he observes that *S*'s background empirical reasons are unavailable

¹⁹ In Section 4, I show that the Austinian attempt at treating local and global skeptical hypotheses differently is in tension with the principles from sections 1–2.

²⁰ Seeming reasons are consistent with what Schellenberg (2018) calls 'phenomenal evidence'. I avoid the adjective 'phenomenal' to make room for disjunctivist theories of phenomenal character (Martin, 2006; Soteriou, 2016).

because they have been “called into question by this error-possibility” (Pritchard, 2012: 126; see also 85, 123, 2016: 137–8).²¹

Pragmatic reasons. Hannah certainly has reflectively accessible pragmatic reasons to retain her belief that she sees that p over the BIV hypothesis: <It is a waste of time to take seriously far-fetched hypotheses that have not been rationally motivated>, <Taking far-fetched hypotheses seriously would lead me to cognitive paralysis>, and so on. If EPISTEMIC PURISM is true, these considerations do not favor S 's seeing that p over the BIV hypothesis. If pragmatic reasons are purely internal, they violate EXCLUSIVITY. If pragmatic reasons are not partly grounded in perception, they are ruled out by MINIMAL EMPIRICISM. Thus, pragmatic reasons are not available to defenders of ED.

A priori reasons. Suppose for a *reductio* that S has a priori reasons against the BIV hypothesis. Given EPISTEMIC PURISM, those reasons speak to the falsity of the BIV hypothesis. The BIV hypothesis says, among other things, that external world propositions are false. So, having a priori reasons against the BIV hypothesis entails having a priori reasons that favor *specific* and *contingent* propositions involving entities that exist in space. So, if one has the relevant a priori reasons, MINIMAL EMPIRICISM is false. Given that ED is committed to MINIMAL EMPIRICISM, ED is committed to claiming that S lacks a priori reasons against the BIV hypothesis. Moreover, if a priori reasons are internally individuated, they violate EXCLUSIVITY. If they are grounded in pragmatic considerations, they clash with EPISTEMIC PURISM.

To my mind, we have offered an exhaustive inventory of all types of independent reasons available to S . So, we can conclude that, by ED's lights, there is no rational way for S to ‘tip the scales’ in favor of her seeing that p via independent reasons.²²

What about Premise 4? Replace < S sees that p > with < p > and the BIV hypothesis with < q > and you will see that Premise 4 is an instance of UNDERDETERMINATION. Given that ED relies on an unrestricted endorsement of UNDERDETERMINATION (Section 1), defenders of ED should have no objection to Premise 4.

In sum, premises 3–4 support Conclusion 2: S lacks knowledge that she sees that p based on reflectively accessible reasons.

Conclusion 2 is confirmed by an additional consideration. Suppose that a subject could avail herself of independent reasons to rationally ‘regain’ her reflective access to her seeing that p . If those independent reasons were sufficient to favor her seeing that p over the BIV hypothesis, they should also be sufficient to favor p over the BIV hypothesis. After all, seeing that p entails p . But, if a subject could avail herself of independent reasons that favor p over the BIV hypothesis, then reflectively accessible factive perceptual reasons would be unnecessary to block Premise 1 of underdetermination-based skepticism.

²¹ See also McDowell (1982: 273–4, 391–2, 1995: 398) and Williams (2001: 186).

²² Inference to the best explanation (BonJour, 1985; Peacocke, 2004; Russell, 1912; Vogel, 1990b) would also flout one or another of ED's principles. On anti-realist accounts, inference to the best explanation relies on pragmatic virtues that do not speak to the truth of a given proposition (Lycan, 1988: 134; van Fraassen, 1980: 8). So, on anti-realist accounts, inference to the best explanation is inconsistent with EPISTEMIC PURISM. Pritchard (2005: 122 n 11, 245–6) seems to be committed to an anti-realist account when he holds that inference to the best explanation can at best support *acceptance* of a proposition. On realist versions, inference to the best explanation does speak to the truth of some propositions. However, it does so by appealing to empirical assumptions concerning initial conditions about the external world (Forster & Sober 1991; Sober, 1975). Given ACCESS LOSS, these empirical assumptions are rationally unavailable in the current context (Pritchard 2016: 26–7). For further criticism of inference to the best explanation, see Alston (1993) and Plantinga (1993).

3.3 | Stage 3: S is led to reflective skepticism

Conclusion 1. *S*'s seeing that *p* is not reflectively accessible to *S*.

Conclusion 2. *S* lacks knowledge that she sees that *p* based on reflectively accessible reasons.

Premise 5. If *S*'s seeing that *p* is not reflectively accessible to *S* and *S* lacks knowledge that she sees that *p* based on reflectively accessible reasons, *S* lacks reasons for her belief that *p* which are both factive and reflectively accessible to *S*.

Conclusion 3. *S* lacks reasons for her belief that *p* which are both factive and reflectively accessible to *S*.

ED holds that *S*'s seeing that *p* is her reflectively accessible factive perceptual reason to believe that *p*. Suppose now that *S* proceeds in a rational manner. If *S*'s seeing that *p* is not reflectively accessible to *S*, and *S* lacks knowledge that she sees that *p* based on reflectively accessible reasons, then *S* lacks reasons for her belief that *p* which are both factive and reflectively accessible to *S*. Conclusions 1–2 tell us that the antecedent of this conditional is satisfied. So, Conclusion 3 follows: *S* lacks reasons for her belief that *p* which are both factive and reflectively accessible to *S*.

3.4 | Stage 4: S's reflective skepticism leads S to first-order skepticism

Conclusion 3. *S* lacks reasons for her belief that *p* which are both factive and reflectively accessible to *S*.

Premise 6. If *S* lacks reasons for her belief that *p* which are both factive and reflectively accessible to *S*, *S* lacks perceptual knowledge that *p*.

Conclusion 4. *S* lacks perceptual knowledge that *p*.

Premise 6 follows from the definition of ED: "In paradigmatic cases of perceptual knowledge, a subject, *S*, has perceptual knowledge that *p* in virtue of being in possession of reasons for her belief that *p* which are both *factive* and *reflectively accessible* to *S*" (Pritchard 2012: 13; emphasis mine). This point holds for most incarnations of ED I am aware of. For McDowell (1995, 2002a, 2011, 2019), adult human knowledge *requires* the possession of reflectively accessible factive reasons. Similarly, Pritchard (2016: 36) thinks that it would be revisionary to hold that adult human perceptual knowledge "does not entail" the possession of reflectively accessible reasons. Similarly, Neta (2009, 2011) has endorsed an infallibilist form of Cartesianism according to which adult human knowledge requires the possession of reflectively accessible, conclusive reasons. So, in the absence of reflectively accessible factive (or conclusive) perceptual reasons, adult humans lack perceptual knowledge of external world propositions. With these materials in place, Conclusion 4 follows: *S* lacks perceptual knowledge that *p*.^{23, 24}

²³ Conclusion 4 also applies to Kern (2017) and Rödl (2007). Pritchard (2019) has recently defended a moderate view. He has suggested that ED is a theory of perceptual knowledge in *paradigmatic* cases of perceptual knowledge. This leaves room for a separate account of perceptual knowledge in non-paradigmatic cases. So, perhaps this separate account of perceptual knowledge could be used to explain *S*'s retention of perceptual knowledge of external world propositions. There are three problems with this strategy, though. First, whatever solution Pritchard advocates, it should be consistent with his claim that adult human perceptual knowledge entails the possession of reflectively accessible reasons. Second, if the relevant reasons are not conclusive, one should reject EXCLUSIVITY, compromising ED's treatment of underdetermination-based skepticism. Third, this view yields a disunified account of adult human perceptual knowledge.

²⁴ A contextualist like Neta (2002, 2003) might be unimpressed by Conclusion 4. Let me make some speculative remarks on this score. If Neta grants Conclusion 4, it is hard to see why he claims that "Cartesian Infallibilism is under no pressure

3.5 | How to block the diachronic skeptical argument

I can find no reason to reject Stage 3. Moreover, Stage 4 follows from ED's explanation of perceptual knowledge in virtue of a subject's possession of perceptual reasons that are both factive and reflectively accessible. So, defenders of ED should reject one or another of the premises from stages 1–2. In Section 4, I show how one could try to make use of an Austinian observation to achieve this goal. As we shall see, the Austinian observation is in tension with the principles from sections 1–2.

4 | THE AUSTINIAN RESPONSE

In "Other Minds", Austin examines the conditions under which challenges to a knowledge claim are deemed *reasonable* in everyday life. In everyday conversations, we do not insist on knowing that one is not dreaming as a condition to know everyday propositions. Austin extracts at least one important lesson from this observation. Error possibilities are reasonable only if we have some reason to think that those error possibilities might obtain in the current situation: "The special cases where doubts arise and require resolving, are contrasted with the normal cases which hold the field *unless* there is some special suggestion that deceit &c., is involved" (Austin, 1946: 81). In the absence of reasons to think that one might be a BIV, it is not necessary to rule out the BIV hypothesis.

In recent work, some defenders of ED have made use of Austin's remark. Here is Pritchard:

The mere presentation of a radical skeptical hypothesis [...] doesn't suffice to turn one's epistemic situation into a suboptimal one (i.e., such that by epistemological disjunctivist lights factive rational support is no longer reflectively available). To argue otherwise is, I would contend, to concede far too much to the radical skeptic (Pritchard, 2016: 210, footnote 21; see also McDowell, 2014: 319–20).

It is true that the diachronic skeptical argument concedes too much to the skeptic. However, the interesting question is whether ED can concede less to the skeptic. I will argue that ED cannot concede less to the skeptic without compromising its status as *the* epistemological holy grail. I will focus on Pritchard's discussion. However, my arguments generalize to McDowell's view.²⁵

to accept any form of skepticism" (Neta, 2011: 685). Conclusion 4 is a form of skepticism. Perhaps skepticism is to be understood as the claim that we lack knowledge, *independently of what we may say or think about it* (Neta, 2003: 27). Since the diachronic skeptical argument is dependent on our own thoughts, it does not count as skepticism. I see no reason to impose this restriction. Indeed, I find it worrisome that we can lose *all* our perceptual knowledge just by thinking about global skeptical hypotheses. Perhaps Neta thinks that Conclusion 4 is not worrisome from a contextualist perspective. As he writes: "when the skeptic is not around... , our evidence can truthfully be said to include such states as my *seeing that* I have hands, my *remembering that* I had eggs for breakfast this morning, and so on" (Neta, 2003: 3). But this strikes me as an unsatisfactory answer. If perceptual knowledge must be based on reflectively accessible reasons, and we end up losing all our reflectively accessible reasons, it is unclear how we could regain these perceptual reasons just by changing the topic. Indeed, if one grants the principles at work in the diachronic skeptical argument, one cannot *rationaly* regain reflective access to one's factive perceptual reasons. See Pritchard (2005) for a similar line of argument.

²⁵ Contrary to McDowell and Pritchard, Kern (2017: 67-8, 79-84) and Neta (2003: 7-8) think that the Austinian response is in tension with (views akin to) ED.

For Pritchard, a subject can rationally dismiss an error possibility in two different ways. If the error possibility is rationally motivated, the subject should provide independent reasons that speak to the reasons offered in support of the error possibility. If the error possibility is not rationally motivated (but is ‘merely raised’), the subject may ignore the error possibility because it lacks rational support. Pritchard supplements this two-pronged strategy with a second element. On his view, global skeptical hypotheses are *never* rationally motivated because there can be no empirical considerations that speak in favor of them. As we have seen, global skeptical hypotheses call into question *all* our empirical reasons. So, defending these hypotheses with empirical considerations would be self-defeating (Pritchard, 2012: 125–9; see also Neta, 2021: 3590). Moreover, it has been argued that one cannot successfully motivate global skeptical hypotheses on behalf of a priori considerations (Echeverri, 2017a; Kung, 2011; Levin, 2000). Given this analysis, *S* may ignore global skeptical hypotheses:

[I]f this just means the mere presentation of a *not-p* possibility, then there is nothing inherently suspect about the idea that our agent can continue to cite the factive rational support she has for the target proposition, and hence regard this error possibility as excluded. Effectively, she is treating this particular evidence for *not-p* as misleading (though ‘evidence’ is not quite the right word, given that the error possibility isn’t rationally motivated) (Pritchard, 2016: 211, footnote 19).

Let us examine three interpretations of this response.

One might read the Austinian response as an attempt at blocking Premise 2. When an error possibility cannot be rationally motivated, the subject *does not lose* reflective access to her seeing that *p*. Therefore, we should impose a restriction on ACCESS LOSS. It is not true that, in all cases in which *S* recognizes an undercutting hypothesis of *S*’s pair $\langle p, R \rangle$, *R* is not reflectively accessible to *S*. Undercutting hypotheses that cannot be rationally motivated are an exception to this principle.

I find this response implausible. A normal subject will need to do some epistemic work *before* she can determine whether a global skeptical hypothesis cannot be rationally motivated. To undertake this epistemic work, the subject must initially keep an open mind on the rational credentials of the global skeptical hypothesis. Yet, it would be hard to explain how the subject could initially keep an open mind on the rational credentials of the global skeptical hypothesis if she was permitted to avail herself of her seeing that *p* *before* she recognizes that the error possibility cannot be rationally motivated. So, it is more plausible to hold that all undercutting hypotheses have the power of blocking a subject’s reflective access to her factive perceptual reasons, at least during the stretch of time that is necessary for her to realize that global skeptical hypotheses cannot be rationally motivated.

This leads us to an alternative interpretation of the Austinian response. On this view, whenever the subject recognizes an undercutting hypothesis, she does momentarily lose reflective access to the relevant reason. That perceptual reason is, so to speak, ‘neutralized’ by the error possibility (Pritchard, 2012: 85, 99; 2016: 26–7). Therefore, Premise 2 is true. Nevertheless, Stage 2 fails because Premise 3 is false. Realizing that global skeptical hypotheses cannot be rationally motivated would enable a subject to ‘regain’ reflective access to her factive perceptual reasons. Hence, it is not true that, after recognizing her seeing that *p* and the BIV hypothesis as incompatible, *S* lacks knowledge that she sees that *p* based on reflectively accessible reasons. When *S* realizes that the error possibility cannot be rationally motivated, *S*’s knowledge that she sees that *p* can be based on her seeing that *p*.

Unfortunately, this version of the Austinian response is at odds with the principles identified in Section 2. First, it is unclear how this Austinian response could respect EPISTEMIC PURISM. Without further ado, the fact that an error possibility cannot be rationally motivated does not seem to speak to the falsity of that error possibility.²⁶ Moreover, the Austinian response violates EXCLUSIVITY. Were Hannah a BIV, she could still recognize that the BIV hypothesis cannot be rationally motivated. The Austinian response is “completely indifferent to whether or not we are the victims of a radical skeptical scenario” (Pritchard, 2016: 40).

Perhaps one could use the Austinian response to block Premise 4 of Stage 2. On this view, when the subject recognizes her seeing that p and the BIV hypothesis as incompatible, and yet S lacks reflectively accessible reasons that favor her seeing that p over the BIV hypothesis, S does not lack knowledge that she sees that p based on reflectively accessible reasons. When an undercutting hypothesis of S 's pair $\langle p, I \text{ see that } p \rangle$ cannot be rationally motivated, S can know that she sees that p based on her seeing that p .

Unfortunately, Premise 4 is an instance of UNDERDETERMINATION. So, this version of the Austinian response leads us to introduce a restriction on UNDERDETERMINATION. We have seen, however, that ED is motivated by an unrestricted endorsement of UNDERDETERMINATION (Section 1). It is this unrestricted endorsement of UNDERDETERMINATION that has led defenders of ED to focus on Premise 1 of the underdetermination-based skeptical argument. If defenders of ED are willing to restrict the scope of UNDERDETERMINATION, there is no bar for an internalist treatment of underdetermination-based skepticism. Internalists might grant that one cannot have reflectively accessible reasons that favor an external world proposition over the BIV hypothesis. However, this wouldn't be a problem, for global skeptical hypotheses would lie beyond the scope of a restricted version of UNDERDETERMINATION. Still, when it comes to pairs of incompatible, external world propositions p and q , one can have reflectively accessible reasons that favor p over q . For example, Hannah's reflectively accessible, non-factive reasons can favor the proposition $\langle \text{There is a zebra in the pen} \rangle$ over the proposition $\langle \text{There is a crocodile in the pen} \rangle$.

In sum, while the Austinian response might sound intuitive, it sits uncomfortably with the five principles identified in sections 1–2. For reasons of space, I won't examine other responses to the diachronic skeptical argument. I do think, however, that the Austinian response is sufficiently representative. In my view, other responses are fraught with similar problems. I will use the remainder of this article to present my own solution.²⁷

5 | A-RATIONAL EPISTEMOLOGICAL DISJUNCTIVISM

ED is committed to a series of principles that restrict the sorts of reasons that can do anti-skeptical work *and* attempts to use those reasons to explain perceptual knowledge as rationally based knowledge. This combination of commitments makes ED vulnerable to the diachronic skeptical argument. One might try to escape first-order skepticism by rejecting one or another of the prin-

²⁶ Pritchard seems to tacitly concede this point: “[S]ince the radical skeptic doesn't offer any rational basis for thinking that we are not in such conditions, it follows that [...] we can *reasonably suppose* that our beliefs enjoy factive rational support” (Pritchard, 2021: 3661; emphasis mine). *Supposing that p* is a permissive attitude one can have when one lacks any epistemic reasons that speak to the truth of p . Crucially, this attitude falls short of knowledge.

²⁷ In my view, responses on behalf of Wittgenstein's (1969) hinge epistemology will replicate the problems identified in the Austinian response. However, Wittgenstein's views raise many exegetical issues that I cannot address here. But see Coliva's (2021) and Neta's (2021) recent exchanges with Pritchard (2021).

principles. However, this would compromise ED's status as *the* epistemological holy grail. Another strategy would be to preserve those principles but give up on the project of explaining perceptual knowledge as rationally based knowledge. One option would be to develop a primitivist view of perceptual knowledge. If perceptual knowledge is primitive, one might insist that it is not the sort of thing that one can lose by losing one's reflectively accessible reasons. It is unclear, however, how defenders of primitivism could avoid some form of irrationality. If the five principles are in order, it seems to follow that at least some pieces of knowledge are irrational (Lasonen-Aarnio, 2010; Williamson, 2014). That strikes me as an unattractive result. So, in what follows, I sketch a different solution. While I grant the primitivist claim that we cannot offer a Boolean analysis of knowledge, I am reluctant to conclude that there is no analysis of knowledge (Kelp, 2021; Kern, 2017; Sosa, 2017). So, I suggest that we revise the role of reflectively accessible factive perceptual reasons in the epistemology of perception and use the resulting view to explain how one could retain one's perceptual knowledge without classifying it as irrational knowledge.

I start by introducing an alternative form of epistemological disjunctivism that I call 'A-Rational Epistemological Disjunctivism' (AED) (Section 5.1). Next, I flesh out AED (Section 5.2). I then show that AED can mimic ED's treatment of underdetermination-based skepticism without incurring any additional costs (Section 5.3). Finally, I show how AED can block the diachronic skeptical argument while preserving the five principles (Section 5.4).

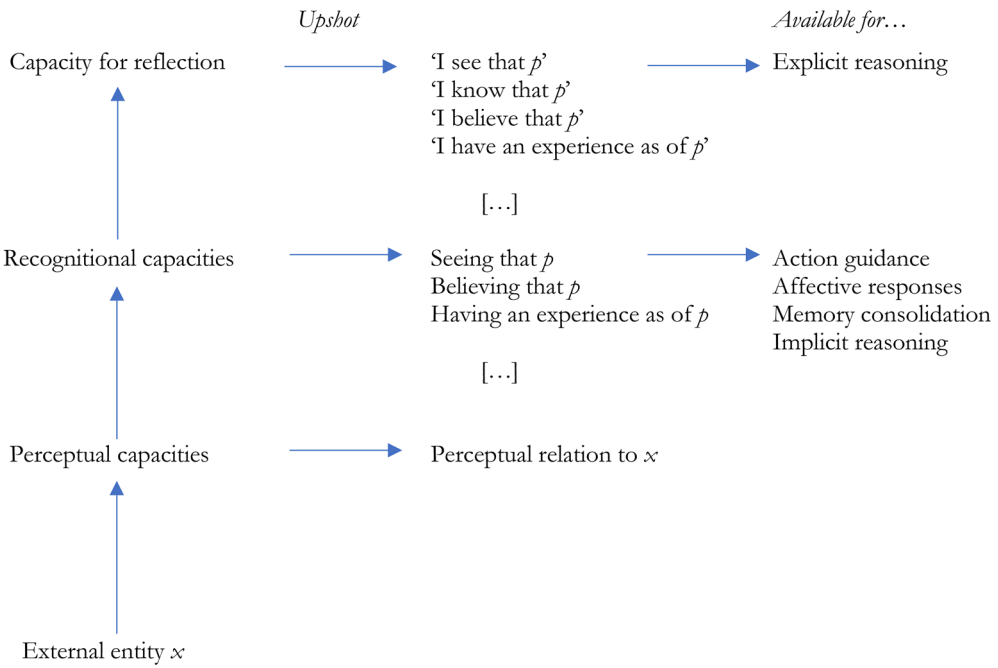
5.1 | A-rational epistemological disjunctivism

AED A-Rational Epistemological Disjunctivism

A subject, *S*, has perceptual knowledge that *p* in virtue of being in possession of a-rational perceptual grounds for her belief that *p*. In the most favorable epistemic conditions, this perceptual knowledge can in turn offer reasons that are reflectively accessible to the subject.

Defenders of ED insist that normal adult humans have reflectively accessible factive perceptual reasons. AED can accept this claim. What distinguishes AED from ED is its view on what constitutes perceptual knowledge. AED denies that normal adult humans have perceptual knowledge *in virtue of* being in possession of reflectively accessible reasons. This does not mean that perceptual knowledge is groundless. In a metaphysical sense, a ground of *x* is something in virtue of which *x* exists. Both ED and AED posit grounds of perceptual knowledge. However, they differ in their conception of those grounds. For ED, the grounds of perceptual knowledge are epistemic reasons, i.e., entities that not only explain the existence of adult human perceptual knowledge, but also considerations that speak to the truth or falsity of some propositions. AED denies that this is the case. For AED, some epistemic grounds are not epistemic reasons, at least on this specific understanding of reasons. Hence, a subject can have perceptual knowledge even though she lacks any reflectively accessible reasons. Still, in the most favorable epistemic conditions, a subject's perceptual knowledge can offer reasons that are reflectively accessible to the subject.²⁸

²⁸ Some authors work with a liberal view of epistemic reasons as justification-makers (Neta, 2009, 2011). On this view, perceptual relations to objects, epistemic virtues, and reliable processes can count as epistemic reasons. I find this liberal use of 'reason' hard to square with the role of reasons in our epistemic lives. If a reason is a consideration that speaks to the truth (or falsity) of some propositions, it can work as a premise of reasoning. In my view, this role is best filled by entities that are or have proposition-like contents. See Brandom (1997: 128), Brewer (1999: 151), Burge (2010), Echeverri (2013: 28-9),



SCHEMA The three-level model of perceptual knowledge

There are different ways of fleshing out AED. In Section 5.2, I present my own version of AED. Although Section 5.2 is somewhat speculative, I will try to make it plausible.

5.2 | The three-level model of perceptual knowledge

3LM THE THREE-LEVEL MODEL OF PERCEPTUAL KNOWLEDGE

In objectively good cases, a subject, S , can have perceptual knowledge that p in virtue of employing perceptual and recognitional capacities. In objectively and subjectively good cases, a subject, S , can enjoy reflective access to her perceptual knowledge.²⁹

The following [schema](#) can help us clarify 3LM:

3LM relies on Pritchard’s apt distinction between ‘objectively good’ and ‘subjectively good’ cases. A case is objectively good just in case the subject finds herself in an environment that allows for the reliable formation of perceptual beliefs and her cognitive and perceptual capacities are functioning properly (Pritchard, 2012: 29). A case is subjectively good just in case the subject lacks any doubts about the target proposition (Pritchard, 2012: 30).

In an objectively good case, a subject can have perceptual knowledge in virtue of employing perceptual and recognitional capacities. 3LM is consistent with different accounts of capacities (Greco, 2010; Kern, 2017; Pritchard, 2005; Schellenberg, 2018; Sosa, 2007, 2017; Millar, 2019). It

McDowell (1996: 7), Pryor (2007), and Williamson (2000: 195). Neta (2008) has argued that all evidence is propositional. I think his argument can be generalized to epistemic reasons.

²⁹ For the sake of simplicity, I focus on visual knowledge. However, 3LM can be generalized to perceptual knowledge gained through (the interplay of) different sensory modalities.

is crucial, however, that we draw a distinction between three types of capacities: perceptual, recognitional, and reflective.

When Hannah sees a zebra in the pen, she stands in a visual relation to the zebra ‘right there’. This visual relation is the result of Hannah’s employment of her perceptual capacities. Those capacities enable Hannah to segment the zebra from the background. Had Hannah failed to segment the zebra from the background, there would be no salient boundaries between the animal and its surroundings. This would happen if the zebra was perfectly camouflaged (Campbell, 2002; Dretske, 1969; Echeverri, 2016).

When Hannah sees that there is a zebra in the pen, she goes beyond visual segmentation: she applies the concept ZEBRA to the segmented animal in a conceptually structured state (Dretske, 1969; Williamson, 2000). 3LM assumes, as many other philosophers do, that seeing that *p* is a conceptually structured state. It also assumes that seeing that *p* is a way of knowing that *p* (Dretske, 1969; French, 2016; Millar, 2019; Peacocke, 2004; Stroud, 2018; Williamson, 2000). So, if one sees that *p*, one believes that *p*. This type of knowledge is the upshot of employing perceptual *and* recognitional capacities. Given that those capacities explain the existence of perceptual knowledge, perceptual knowledge is not groundless. Indeed, when Hannah sees that there is a zebra in the pen, it is not as if she had a groundless commitment to the existence of a zebra in a pen. She is visually aware of the presence of the animal ‘right there’. If one assumes that reasons are or have proposition-like contents, there is a sense in which Hannah is not visually aware of an epistemic reason. She is visually aware of an external entity. However, the upshot of her perceptual and recognitional abilities is a propositional state that can provide Hannah with epistemic reasons.³⁰

Consider now cases that are both objectively and subjectively good. In those cases, the subject can employ her capacity for reflection to make explicit the visual knowledge that she has at her disposal. In doing so, she will make first-person judgments of the form ‘I see that *p*’, ‘I know that *p*’, and so on. If we assume that the subject finds herself in a case that is both objectively and subjectively good, it seems plausible to hold that her first-person judgments are pieces of reflective knowledge that she sees that *p*, that she knows that *p*, and so on. In those circumstances, the subject can use her pieces of reflective knowledge as premises in theoretical and practical deliberation. I refer to both forms of deliberation as ‘explicit reasoning’.

The situation would be different in cases that are objectively good, but subjectively bad. In those cases, the subject will lose her reflective access to her seeing that *p*. As a result, she may retreat to weaker self-ascriptions of the form ‘I believe that *p*’ or ‘I have an experience as of *p*’. However, in some cases, the subject may retain her seeing that *p*. When that happens, we can say that *S* has unreflective visual knowledge. *S*’s unreflective visual knowledge can become manifest in her actions, emotional responses, memory consolidation, and implicit reasoning.³¹

Finally, consider cases that are objectively bad and subjectively bad. There is some debate on whether, in those cases, the subject will still employ her perceptual and recognitional capacities (Millar, 2019; Schellenberg, 2018; Sosa, 2017) and whether she will count as having genuine expe-

³⁰ On some views, the employment of perceptual capacities yields a contentless, perceptual relation to an external entity (Brewer, 2011; Campbell, 2002; Travis, 2004). On other views, it yields a state or episode that has a more primitive, non-propositional content (Burge, 2010; Echeverri, 2017b; McDowell, 2008b). I shall remain neutral on these two options.

³¹ In the psychological literature, implicit reasoning has often been associated with ‘System 1 processing’. For an overview, see Kahneman (2011). Readers unfamiliar with this literature can think of unreflective knowledge as close to what Sosa (2007) terms ‘animal knowledge’.

riences. I shall remain neutral on these two options. Nevertheless, we can say that the subject can still apply concepts. So, we might say that *S* seems to see that *p*.

5.3 | Underdetermination-based skepticism revisited

ED offers a characterization of the perceptual reasons available in (objectively and subjectively) good cases as factive and reflectively accessible. This idea gets support from everyday conversations. People often use factive constructions in their reason-giving practices. If we grant that people can be in objectively and subjectively good cases, we can take those factive constructions at face value and say that they can express reflectively accessible factive perceptual reasons (McDowell, 2002a: 280, 2002b: 98; Pritchard, 2012: 17, 2016: 134).

It is unclear, however, whether our reason-giving practices also support ED's rationalist-explanatory commitments. More specifically, it is unclear whether we have perceptual knowledge that *p in virtue of seeing that p*. Indeed, our reason-giving practices are consistent with the claim that seeing that *p* is a way of knowing that *p*. This leaves room for an alternative response to the underdetermination-based skeptical argument. If a subject is in an objectively and subjectively good case, her own perceptual knowledge is reflectively accessible to her. Plausibly enough, perceptual knowledge can give one epistemic reasons. So, even if seeing that *p* is a way of knowing that *p*, a subject who is in an objectively and subjectively good case can enjoy reflectively accessible factive perceptual reasons. Thus, AED can say that, in cases that are both objectively and subjectively good, one does have reflectively accessible reasons that favor an external world proposition over the BIV hypothesis, namely, one's reflectively accessible perceptual knowledge. Having rejected Premise 1, AED can retain UNDERDETERMINATION and avoid the skeptical Conclusion.³²

Recall now the danger of equating all our knowledge of external world propositions with the knowledge possessed by the chicken sexers. AED tells us that, at the fundamental level, adult human knowledge has the same structure as the knowledge enjoyed by small children and some non-human animals. All of us acquire perceptual knowledge in virtue of employing perceptual and recognitional capacities. Does this put us in the precarious, epistemic position of the chicken sexers? I do not think so. It is tempting to think of the chicken sexers as completely in the dark about how they manage to recognize the sex of chickens. AED rejects this crude picture. When Hannah sees the zebra in the pen, she is aware of the zebra as bearing a spatiotemporal relation to her. She is also aware of some of the properties that enable her to recognize the zebra as a zebra. However, some reflective opacity remains. She may be unsure about the role of contextual cues, or whether she is exploiting perspectival properties in visual recognition. Moreover, in cases that are both objectively and subjectively good, various pieces of perceptual knowledge can become reflec-

³² Sellars (1997: §36) himself has described knowing as a standing in the space of reasons, which is naturally understood as the claim that knowledge itself provides reasons. McDowell seems to grant this interpretation, characterizing knowing as a source of *justification* (McDowell, 1993: 427; see also Neta, 2003: 21). So, one can respect the spirit of this approach without explaining adult human perceptual knowledge via perceptual reasons that are both factive and reflectively accessible. The view under consideration is also consistent with anti-luminosity arguments (Williamson, 2000). One can grant that the KK principle is false without holding the much stronger (and, so far, unsupported) claim that one never knows that one knows (Neta, 2019: 251-2). More specifically, even if there are counterexamples to the KK principle, one can stick to the idea that, in the most favorable epistemic conditions, one can know that one knows. The view under consideration is also neutral on Williamson's claim that a subject's evidence consists of all and only what the subject knows (E=K). Even if entities other than knowledge can be part of one's evidence, one can grant the weaker claim that one's knowledge can provide evidence (or epistemic reasons) for belief.

tively accessible to Hannah, providing her with a decisive epistemic advantage over the chicken sexers.

In sum, AED has the same anti-skeptical power as ED to block underdetermination-based skepticism. In Section 5.4, I show that AED has additional anti-skeptical potential, for it can block the diachronic skeptical argument while retaining the five principles.

5.4 | Diachronic skepticism revisited

Stage 1 concludes that *S* loses her reflective access to her seeing that *p* (Conclusion 1). Given that we have granted ACCESS LOSS, we are committed to accepting Conclusion 1. This strikes me as a good result. When we recognize global skeptical hypotheses as undercutting hypotheses, our gut reaction is to immediately set aside our seeing that *p* as an inadequate basis to *rationaly dismiss* those global skeptical hypotheses. The rational unavailability of our seeing that *p* explains why some of the best thinkers have felt compelled to explore indirect, rational strategies to respond to skeptical challenges. Historically, these strategies consist of transcendental arguments or inferences to the best explanation. In my view, the anti-skeptical potential of these strategies is limited. However, the attraction that they have exerted on many theorists is evidence of a widespread intuition: one's seeing that *p* is rationally unavailable to dismiss global skeptical hypotheses.

Stage 2 concludes with *S*'s failure to rationally regain reflective access to her seeing that *p* (Conclusion 2). Given that we have granted EPISTEMIC PURISM, EXCLUSIVITY, and MINIMAL EMPIRICISM, we must accept Conclusion 2 as well. Once again, this strikes me as a good result: it accommodates our feeling of *rational impotence* to dismiss global skeptical hypotheses. As Hume (2000) famously pointed out, it seems impossible to rationally vindicate our belief in the existence of outer objects. This observation partly explains why some have argued that it is a mistake to try to refute global skepticism on its own terms. The philosophical task should be modest: develop an account of perceptual knowledge that has no skeptical consequences (Pryor, 2000). AED vindicates this line of reasoning. If perceptual knowledge has a-rational grounds, it is no surprise that we cannot rationally vindicate our perceptual knowledge of external world propositions.

AED grants Stage 3, which leads to *S*'s reflective skepticism (Conclusion 3). However, AED rejects Stage 4, which moves from *S*'s reflective skepticism to *S*'s lack of perceptual knowledge (Conclusion 4). AED's a-rational explanation of perceptual knowledge justifies the rejection of Stage 4. If perceptual knowledge is not grounded in perceptual reasons that are both factive and reflectively accessible, perceptual knowledge can survive the reflective inaccessibility of those reasons.

Some might find this combination of views problematic. I rather see this combination of views as an argument *in favor of* AED. As Williams (2001: 61) rightly points out, global skepticism “produces a kind of intellectual split personality. And this is why it is a problem”. AED accommodates Williams' remark. On the one hand, our rational impotence leads us to reflective skepticism. We feel unable to offer any reasons to back up our perceptual beliefs. On the other hand, we keep behaving as if we remained in possession of our perceptual knowledge. AED explains this intellectual split personality by positing a mismatch between the perceptual knowledge that is reflectively accessible to us at the end of the diachronic argument (none) and the perceptual knowledge that is unreflectively available to us at the end of that argument (a lot). This point is important, so let me defend it further.

I am currently unable to offer you any epistemic reasons to dismiss the BIV hypothesis. However, I can still retain the capacity to bear a-rational, perceptual relations to external entities.

Moreover, I can still recognize some of these entities in one way or another. For example, I have recognized a nearby entity as my dog. In doing so, I have formed a thought with the content <That is my dog>. Despite my rational impotence to dismiss the BIV hypothesis, I display a strong commitment to the truth of that thought. Indeed, this commitment is hard to distinguish from a bona fide belief. First, I rely on the truth of <That is my dog> to guide my actions, like the movements of my hand when I am petting my dog.³³ Second, my recognition of that animal as my dog (and not as someone else's dog) enables me to emotionally react in ways that are appropriate only if that animal is my dog. For instance, it is appropriate for me to be ashamed if I see that my dog is playing with my friend's cashmere sweater. If it was someone else's dog, shame wouldn't be an appropriate, emotional response. Third, if I were to talk to another friend a few days later, I might tell her that I managed to save my friend's cashmere sweater from my dog's jaws. Fourth, I am disposed to use <That is my dog> in implicit inferences. For example, I can update that thought in response to perceptual intake. Were my dog to run away, I would come to think that my dog left. If I were to hear my dog bark, I would automatically infer that it wants to go for a walk. In sum, the functional profile of this thought strongly suggests that *I do not merely entertain* the content <That is my dog>. I bear the belief relation to that thought. So, even if my skeptical ruminations have led me to lose my reflective knowledge that *I see that that is my dog*, I have retained my unreflective belief that *that is my dog*. Given that this thought is representative of many of the thoughts I keep forming at the end of the diachronic skeptical argument, the conclusion generalizes to many other cases.

Interestingly, nothing prevents this and other first-order, perceptual beliefs from being true in a non-accidental way. Recall the Gettier (1963) problem. This problem has taught us that, whether a belief is non-accidentally true depends on there being an objective connection between my belief being true and the truth. Objective conditions of this sort can be satisfied even if I am unable to rationally dismiss the BIV hypothesis. Suppose that I stand in an a-rational, visual relation to my dog, and that I have received the required training to apply the concept MY DOG when I stand in that kind of visual relation to my dog. When I apply that concept under those circumstances, it seems to follow that my true belief that that is my dog is creditable to me. After all, not all forms of epistemic credit require that one respond to epistemic reasons (Greco, 2010; Sosa, 2007, 2017). If there are no dog-façades in the vicinity, I can also satisfy another popular constraint for the possession of a non-accidentally true belief (Goldman, 1976; but see Sosa, 2007, 2017 for an alternative treatment). So, it seems reasonable to conclude that I can form this and many other true beliefs in a non-accidental manner, despite my declared inability to rationally dismiss the BIV hypothesis.

Of course, I have not shown that these are all and the only conditions for perceptual knowledge. Still, these remarks are all we need to make a point of broader significance. In the absence of reasons to think otherwise, it is not unreasonable to hold that unreflective forms of perceptual knowledge can coexist with one's rational inability to dismiss the BIV hypothesis—even if I happen to be a normal adult human. Interestingly, AED can help us explain why that is possible. Given that belief involves strong commitments to the truth that go beyond what one has reflective access to, and that knowledge involves the satisfaction of objective conditions that are not within one's reflective ken, perceptual knowledge can survive the reflective skepticism produced by one's encounter with the BIV hypothesis.³⁴

³³ See James (1896), Peirce (1877), and Sosa (2007) for the relevance of action to belief.

³⁴ There might be cases in which reflection leads one to lose one's perceptual knowledge, as when one realizes that one's background reasons are insufficient to rationally dismiss some local skeptical hypotheses (Echeverri, 2020).

This strikes me as the right result. Descartes (1996) and Hume (2000), among others, have argued that global skepticism has a purely ‘intellectual’ character. AED is ideally placed to explain this observation. The explanation lies in the a-rational grounds of perceptual knowledge. If I withhold my belief that *I* have perceptual knowledge, this act must take place at a higher, intellectual level. Descartes, for one, makes it perfectly clear that he cannot stop acting on the truth of external world propositions. So, to conduct his methodical doubt, he is compelled to *suppose*, and even *pretend*, that he is dreaming (Descartes, 1996). Similarly, Hume (2000) insists that skepticism cannot remove his belief in the existence of outer objects, which he takes to be grounded in custom. AED preserves these insights, but in a modified way. What Hume calls ‘custom’ might be partly responsible for a type of functional organization that prevents perceptual belief from being lost by the sole consideration of global skeptical hypotheses. Crucially, AED shows us that we can retain more than mere belief. Our encounter with skepticism can leave us, not only with external world beliefs, but also with genuine perceptual knowledge.³⁵

6 | CONCLUDING REMARKS

ED has been thought to improve upon internalist and externalist treatments of skepticism, for it explains perceptual knowledge via perceptual reasons that are both factive and reflectively accessible to the subject. If successful, this strategy would constitute the epistemological holy grail. I have argued that, given several principles that ED is committed to, understanding a global skeptical hypothesis is all it takes for a rational subject to lose all her perceptual knowledge of the world. Appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, Austin’s popular observations on the limits of reasonable doubt do not help ED’s cause; they rather jeopardize ED’s status as *the* epistemological holy grail. If we want to preserve the principles that ED is committed to, the way out is to rethink the assumption that adult human perceptual knowledge is rationally based. In objectively and subjectively good cases, subjects can have reflectively accessible perceptual knowledge. If reflectively accessible perceptual knowledge can provide epistemic reasons, we can block underdetermination-based skepticism by holding that our reflectively accessible knowledge favors external world propositions over global skeptical hypotheses. If we think of perceptual knowledge as having a-rational grounds, we can explain how we can retain our perceptual knowledge despite our inability to rationally dismiss global skeptical hypotheses.³⁶

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³⁵ The functional organization of our reflective capacities might explain why we automatically ‘regain’ reflective access to our perceptual knowledge once we stop thinking about global skeptical hypotheses. I consider this functional organization as one of the a-rational grounds of reflective knowledge.

³⁶ I presented earlier versions of this paper under the title “Searching for the Epistemological Holy Grail” at the epistemology seminar of UNAM, the epistemology research group of Collège de France, and the researchers’ seminar of the Instituto de Investigaciones Filosóficas at UNAM. I am grateful to the audiences for their comments, especially to Dubian Cañas, Miguel Ángel Fernández, Jean-Baptiste Guillon, Conor McHugh, Ricardo Mena, and Miguel Ángel Sebastián. Work on this project was funded by grants from UNAM-PAPIIT IN 400621 “Alcances y límites del externismo epistémico” and IA 400320 “Experiencia pictórica, percepción y contenido singular de la experiencia”.

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