

## Interview with Duncan Pritchard

by Luca Moretti

Q1. I remember I saw you for the first time in the Department of Philosophy of St Andrews University. That must have been before 2000, I think. You were a PhD student when I was doing my MLitt. Crispin Wright was your supervisor. Could you tell us bit about the topic your PhD thesis?

A1. I had originally planned to write about Davidson's work on truth, and how this related to the realism/anti-realism debate, but a few things altered my course. The first was taking a class of Crispin's on the later Wittgenstein, which prompted me to read, and be blown away by, *On Certainty*. The second was reading three excellent books on radical scepticism: Barry Stroud's *The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism*, Michael Williams' *Unnatural Doubts*, and Marie McGinn's *Sense and Certainty*. Collectively they convinced me both that the problem of radical scepticism is a deep and important issue and that Wittgenstein can help us to resolve this difficulty. Accordingly, I wrote my thesis about how one might understand the Wittgensteinian notion of a hinge proposition such that it enables us to answer the radical sceptical problem.

Q2. Could you say a bit more about the understanding of the Wittgensteinian notion of a hinge proposition proposed in your PhD thesis. Do you still accept it?

A2. Back then I was convinced that the source of the sceptical problem was epistemic internalism. My aim was to try to find a way of reading Wittgenstein which would support this view. Wittgenstein clearly thought that one cannot have rational support for one's most basic commitments (i.e., the 'hinges'), and the standard line is to infer from this that one therefore lacks knowledge of them too. But if one is an epistemic externalist—in particular, if one holds that knowledge can be possessed even in the absence of supporting rational support—then there is scope to reject this entailment. In particular, perhaps the hinge commitments can be known in virtue of purely externalist epistemic support. My PhD thesis tried to make good on this claim, and thereby offer a way of thinking about hinge commitments such that they were in the market for knowledge, albeit never rationally grounded knowledge. There are many advantages to this proposal, particularly in the context of radical scepticism, not least that it enables the proponent of a hinge epistemology to retain the closure principle for knowledge. I developed this view further in my first book, *Epistemic Luck* (Oxford UP, 2005), where I tried to motivate it within a more general methodology that I called *anti-luck epistemology*, but since then my position on hinge commitments

has altered in various ways. Very roughly, I'm no longer convinced that our hinge commitments enjoy any epistemic support, whether internalist or externalist. On the plus side, however, I think there is a way of thinking about how our hinge commitments can be essentially unknown such that this notion can nonetheless make an important contribution to solving the sceptical problem.

Q3. That's really interesting. I'm actually working on hinge propositions and trying to formulate a view that put together a notion of acceptance (in Van Fraassen sense) with a form of externalism. We should talk more about this. But let's go back to your research. It seems to me that you are involved in several research projects presently. Could you tell us something about this?

A3. My most recent project was completing my book on radical scepticism, which appeared a few months ago, entitled *Epistemic Angst: Radical Scepticism and the Groundlessness of Our Believing* (Princeton UP, 2015). There are four key parts to this book. The first part claims that the Cartesian sceptical problem is really two logically distinct problems in disguise, which each trade upon a distinctive sceptical source. The second part claims that there is a way of understanding hinge commitments such that although they are essentially unknown (at least with regard to rationally grounded knowledge at any rate), they can nonetheless offer us the antidote to one aspect of the Cartesian sceptical problem (but not the other). The third part revisits the epistemological disjunctivism that I developed in a previous book—see *Epistemological Disjunctivism* (Oxford UP, 2012)—and shows how this account presents us with the antidote to the other aspect of the Cartesian sceptical problem (but only that aspect). Finally, the fourth part argues that epistemological disjunctivism and hinge epistemology, despite being apparently competing responses to the Cartesian sceptical problem, are in fact not only compatible but also mutually supportive in lots of interesting ways. The result is what I call a *bisopic* treatment of the sceptical problem, one that recognises its dual nature and responds accordingly.

Q4. And do you have other projects, independently of the topic of radical scepticism? Once we had a chat about risk...

A4. Yes. Aside from radical scepticism, I've been working on a bunch of other inter-related topics. For a long time now I've been working on the nature of luck, a topic that grew out of the anti-luck epistemology that I mentioned earlier. These days I also defend a related view of risk (see my 2015 *Metaphilosophy* paper, 'Risk'). While I think luck and risk are two notions that are closely related, I also think that there are some important differences, and that this has implications for a

number of domains. For example, I now believe that we should replace an anti-luck epistemology with an *anti-risk epistemology*, and that this enables us to deal with certain objections that have been levelled against the former (see my paper, ‘Epistemic Risk’, forthcoming in the *Journal of Philosophy*, for details). I’ve also been applying my account of risk to particular domains, such as law and aesthetics (e.g., see my paper ‘Legal Risk, Legal Evidence, and the Arithmetic of Criminal Justice’, forthcoming in *Jurisprudence*).

On a related front, I’ve been developing a theory of knowledge that arises out of anti-luck/risk epistemology, what I call *anti-luck virtue epistemology* (though it is probably better labelled as *anti-risk virtue epistemology* these days). The core statement of the view is in my paper, ‘Anti-Luck Virtue Epistemology’ (*Journal of Philosophy*, 2012), but recently I’ve been extending the view along a number of fronts. This has involved explaining how it can meet objections, showing how knowledge on this proposal relates to other epistemic standings (such as understanding, knowledge-how etc), and developing a stance on some related epistemic notions that are rooted in this proposal, such as epistemic dependence. A key paper in this regard is one that I co-authored with my colleague Jesper Kallestrup where we develop what we call an *epistemic twin earth argument* (‘Virtue Epistemology and Epistemic Twin Earth’, *European Journal of Philosophy*, 2014). This is basically a refinement of my earlier critique of so-called robust virtue epistemic treatments of knowledge (i.e., views that try to analyse knowledge exclusively in terms of the manifestation of virtue, as proposed by Sosa, Greco, Zagzebski and others).

Q5. I know that you are also working in *applied* epistemology. Can you expand on this?

A5. Yes, I’m increasingly working on topics in applied epistemology. I’ve already noted that I’ve been getting interested in legal epistemology. Another topic that I’ve been working on a lot concerns the epistemological ramifications of recent movements in cognitive science, particularly with regard to technologically-extended (and embedded) cognition, and also group cognition. This was something that we have been exploring at *Eidyn* as part of the AHRC-funded ‘Extended Knowledge’ project that I’ve been leading since 2013 (the co-investigators on this project are Andy Clark and Jesper Kallestrup). I think this is very much applied epistemology, particularly once one starts to think through the practical implications of recent technological developments (e.g., the extent to which information is now so easily accessible and often seamlessly incorporated into our cognitive practices). This topic dovetails nicely with another applied epistemology interest of mine, which is the epistemology of education. In broad terms, the overarching question in this field is what the fundamental epistemic goals of education are, and how might one achieve them. My

concern has been to motivate a conception of the epistemology of education that has the intellectual virtues at its core. In terms of the specific question of extended knowledge, the issue in epistemology of education is how best to make sense of our educational practices from an epistemic point of view given that students are increasingly technologically extended in their cognitive capacities, or else (or in addition) occupy technologically embedded environments. We've recently been putting these ideas into practice as part of a number of *Eidyn's* impact initiatives, particularly our philosophy in prisons project, which is devoted to exploring how teaching prisoners critical thinking skills, via the teaching of philosophy (and often in virtual learning environments, and hence via technologically embedded educational contexts), can enhance their intellectual character (and thereby their character more generally).

Q6. You are the Director of the *Eidyn* Research Centre of the University of Edinburgh. Could you please tell us a bit about the *Eidyn*?

A6. Getting approval for a research centre is no easy feat, at least not at the University of Edinburgh anyway. But after the research evaluation exercise in 2008 ('RAE2008', as it was known), it seemed like the natural next step for Philosophy at Edinburgh, in preparation for the next research evaluation exercise ('REF2014'). The strategy that we developed was for a research centre that in the first instance showcased our research in the specific areas of ethics, epistemology and philosophy of mind and cognitive science, but which, if successful, would then broaden its remit to represent Edinburgh's philosophical research as a whole, at least post-REF2014. *Eidyn* was eventually established in 2012. I'm pleased to say that it has far exceeded the goals that we set for it when it was proposed. We have hosted over 30 projects, with most of these externally funded (the rest were pilot projects, many of which have lead in due course to large externally funded projects). The centre is currently directed by myself, with Jesper Kallestrup and Michela Massimi as Deputy Directors.

There are three distinctive features of *Eidyn*. The first is the extent to which the research projects we host are often highly interdisciplinary, taking in such subject areas as Psychology, Informatics, Classics, History, Linguistics, and so on. The second is that from the off *Eidyn* had a strong concern for finding ways for the research we produce to have impact beyond the academy, not just in terms of public engagement but also more specifically in terms of concrete effects on, for example, public policy (the 'Philosophy in Prisons' project that I mentioned earlier, and which I lead, is a good case in point). The third distinctive feature of *Eidyn* is that it was (unusually, for a research centre) part of its remit to contribute to innovative ways of developing research-led

teaching, and to cascade this expertise throughout the curriculum at all levels. So, for example, *Eidyn* has been at the vanguard of developing online educational initiatives, such as high-profile MOOCs (=massive open online courses)—our ‘Introduction to Philosophy’ MOOC is one of the world’s most-popular online courses, and will soon pass 1M enrolments—and a highly successful distinctive research-led online MSc in ‘Epistemology, Ethics, and Mind’. In developing this new kind of pedagogy, we’ve compiled a database of online resources which are available for anyone to use (<http://videos.philosophy.ed.ac.uk>), particularly schools, thereby further enhancing the impact of what we do outside of the academy. Thanks to generous funding from the Templeton foundation, we are now working on creating a suite of new MOOCs, and also a new online MSc (joint with the School of Divinity) on ‘Philosophy, Science, and Religion’.

Q7. Final question: could you please tell me what projects is *Eidyn* running presently?

A6. We’re currently hosting over 20 projects, so I will need to be selective! *Eidyn* has recently been awarded two major ERC grants, so I’ll start with those. Michela Massimi leads an ERC Consolidator Grant (c. €1.6M) entitled, ‘Perspectival Realism: Science, Knowledge, and Truth From a Human Vantage Point’. This project develops a novel view in philosophy of science called perspectival realism, via a three-pronged highly interdisciplinary approach, which combines the philosophy of science, with scientific practice, the history of science and the history of philosophy. In addition, we’ve recently heard that Andy Clark has been awarded an ERC Advanced Grant (c. €1.4M) entitled, ‘Expecting Ourselves: Embodied Prediction and the Construction of Conscious Experience’ (or ‘XSPECT’ for short). This project examines the philosophical implications of an important new movement in cognitive science, predictive coding. Other projects that we host include Laura Candiotti’s Marie Curie Individual Fellowship (‘Emotions First: The Role of Emotions in Reasoning’, c. €185K), Mark Sprevak’s large AHRC project in collaboration with colleagues in English and Classics (‘A History of Distributed Cognition’, c. £600K), and the Edinburgh wing of a major new European Commission Marie Skłodowska-Curie ITN European Training Network (‘DIAPHORA: Philosophical Problems, Resilience and Persistent Disagreement’, c. €3.7M). You can find out more about *Eidyn*’s projects on our webpage (<http://eidyn.ppls.ed.ac.uk/projects>).