

## Are There any Conceptual Truths about Knowledge?

Finn Spicer (University of Bristol)

*This is a draft non-citable version of this paper*

### 0, INTRODUCTION.

From time to time I have suggested in public the possibility that there might be instances of false knowledge; in doing so I have frequently found my audiences objecting that it is just ‘part of our concept of knowledge’ that knowledge is factive—that knowledge implies truth. These objectors clearly intend a sense of ‘its being part of our concept’ on which it follows from its being part of our concept that knowledge that it is therefore *true* that knowledge is factive—i.e., they mean that it is a conceptual truth that knowledge is factive.

Few who think of the factivity of knowledge as a conceptual truth would want to be accused of thinking that a conceptual analysis of knowledge can be found. How can there be room for conceptual truth in a climate in which most agree that there is no analysis of knowledge into necessary and sufficient conditions? It is perfectly consistent to claim that, although there is no combination of concepts that fits perfectly onto the concept KNOWLEDGE,<sup>1</sup> there are nevertheless *conceptual connections* between our concept KNOWLEDGE, and other concepts such as TRUTH and BELIEF—conceptual connections that generate conceptual truths. The truth that  $K(p) \Rightarrow T(p)$  is a clear example of such a conceptual truth, most proponents of this picture would agree; knowledge implies truth because our concepts KNOWLEDGE and TRUTH are connected. Such a picture needs to be underwritten by an account of the concept KNOWLEDGE and its relations to other concepts. In this paper I examine whether there is a viable picture of the concept KNOWLEDGE that can yield the desired notion of conceptual truth.

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<sup>1</sup> I’ll use SMALL CAPITALS to denote concepts.

## 1, INFERENCEAL DESCRIPTIVISM

Understanding the nature of concepts will be helpful towards understanding what is meant by the notion of a *conceptual connection*. There are a variety of views about the nature of the concepts: concepts are mental definitions; they are lists of family-resemblance features; they are representations of prototypes; they are constituted by their inferential roles; they are constituted by what one finds primitively epistemically compelling; they are atomic mental particulars. Underwriting the notion of conceptual truth is a family of views about concepts I'll call *inferential descriptivism* (ID). All the following views of concepts can be thought of as included within the ID family: the classical view of concepts (that concepts are definitions—Carnap: 1959); inferential role theories (Block: 1986); theories of concepts as files containing reference-fixing information (Rey: 1998), and epistemic theories such as Peacocke's (1992).

ID claims that there are conceptual connections between concepts that determine the identity and semantic value of the concepts related; these conceptual connections are embodied<sup>2</sup> in our dispositions to draw inferences that relate distinct concepts. I will elaborate the claims of ID by reference to the example of the concept KNOWLEDGE, so from now on, when I talk of ID, I mean ID *about* KNOWLEDGE. ID involves the following three claims:

- *Universality Claim*: there is a set of inferences that *all* possessors of the concept KNOWLEDGE are disposed to draw (let's call these the *core inferences*);

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<sup>2</sup> The term 'embodied' here is meant to cover a range of options concerning the relation between conceptual connections and inferential dispositions. Depending on what view one holds in the ID family, one will have different views on how these two are related: on which is prior to the other, and what the exact relationship is.

- *Identity Claim*: the identity of the concept is fixed by its core inferences;
- *Semantic Claim*: the semantics of the concept KNOWLEDGE is fixed by its core inferences.

With this picture of concepts in place, we are now in a position to make sense of talk of conceptual truths about knowledge.

## 2, THE MEANING OF 'CONCEPTUAL TRUTH'

Now we have the ID picture of concepts on the table, we can spell out the notions of *being part of our concept* and of *conceptual truth* precisely. The claim that the principle  $K(p) \Rightarrow T(p)$  is part of our concept KNOWLEDGE just means that the disposition to infer  $\text{TRUE}(p)$  from  $\text{KNOWS}(p)$  is one of the core inferences universal among everyone who possesses the concept KNOWLEDGE. The claim is just that every possessor of KNOWLEDGE tacitly accepts the principle  $K(p) \Rightarrow T(p)$ . Perhaps this tacit acceptance involves storing a copy of the conditional  $\text{KNOWS}(p) \rightarrow \text{TRUE}(p)$ ; perhaps it means that the representation  $\text{TRUE}$  is in a list of necessary features that constitute KNOWLEDGE; perhaps the tacit acceptance of this principle is realised some other way – one's position on such details will locate one within the ID-family, but they do not matter for the present paper.

We can think of the core inferences of KNOWLEDGE as forming part of a *body of principles* about knowledge that the possessor of the concept tacitly accepts. These principles we might say form a *folk theory* of knowledge, acceptance of which constitutes the subject's possession of KNOWLEDGE – let's call this folk theory *folk epistemology*. For now we can think of folk epistemology as just the set of core inferences involving KNOWLEDGE; later we will consider the possibility that folk epistemology involves other principles over and above the core inferences. ID, then, views the concept KNOWLEDGE as having the structure of a theory. Such a 'theory-theory' picture of concepts has recently received criticism from opponents of conceptual analysis;

Ramsey (1998) argues that the program of conceptual analysis is premised on the claim that the concepts being analysed have a theory-structure, but he then goes on to argue against conceptual analysis by appeal to the empirical work that seems to show that many concepts lack this structure—being structured rather as representations of prototypes. For this paper, I will *grant* the defender of AE the claim that KNOWLEDGE has the structure of a theory. Whether this is in fact so is an empirical matter that I will not pursue; my argument will be that even if KNOWLEDGE does come with a folk theory attached, that theory does not do the semantic work in determining the reference of KNOWLEDGE that ID generally requires if talk of ‘conceptual truth’ is going to be legitimate.

To spell out exactly what it means to say that something is a ‘conceptual truth’, I need to elaborate on the Semantic Claim of ID. The Semantic Claim is the claim that the reference of the concept KNOWLEDGE is fixed by folk epistemology. The concept KNOWLEDGE refers to whatever satisfies the core principles of folk epistemology. ID then, offers a *descriptivist* theory of reference for the concept KNOWLEDGE—an account that yields a notion of conceptual truth: if KNOWLEDGE refers to knowledge in virtue of satisfying the core principles of folk epistemology, then whatever knowledge is, it cannot fail to satisfy the core principles of folk epistemology. Each core principle of folk epistemology, therefore, is a conceptual truth about knowledge.

### 3, ARE THERE ANY CONCEPTUAL TRUTHS ?

Williamson (2006) has argued that there are no conceptual truths; if his argument is sound, we can conclude quickly that *a fortiori* there are no conceptual truths about knowledge. Williamson argues that there are no truths that every possessor of the concept VIXEN believes—not even *all vixens are foxes*. If not even this is a conceptual truth, then nothing is, Williamson concludes. He argues that not every possessor of VIXEN need believe that all

vixens are foxes by describing a possessor of VIXEN who, because he holds a deviant logic for 'all', denies that all vixens are foxes. I agree with Williamson's argument that one can possess the concept VIXEN without holding this belief, but I think that this point does not show that all vixens are foxes isn't a conceptual truth about vixens, as I've defined conceptual truth above.

Suppose that  $Vix(x) \Rightarrow Fox(x)$  is a conceptual truth about vixens in the sense outlined above—it is one of the core inferences for the concept VIXEN. It might be that an agent possesses the concept VIXEN, and so is disposed to infer  $Vix(x) \Rightarrow Fox(x)$ , but this disposition does not manifest itself in his believing that all vixens are foxes because it is trumped by his stronger dispositions governing his use of the quantifier 'all'.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, someone might believe (using her concept KNOWLEDGE) that there are instances of false knowledge, even though her possession of KNOWLEDGE disposes her to think that if something is known then it is true (it's not a comfortable feeling, holding a controversial philosophical position, after all).

The key to whether there are any conceptual truths about knowledge does not consist in what it is possible to believe while possessing the concept KNOWLEDGE. It consists in what thoughts (believed or not) involving the concept are true just in virtue of involving the concept. The key to whether there are any conceptual truths about knowledge, then depends upon the details of the content of folk epistemology and the semantics of KNOWLEDGE.

#### **4, THE CONTENT OF FOLK EPISTEMOLOGY**

Finding out whether there are any conceptual truths about knowledge, then requires discovering the nature of the concept knowledge: does it have a theory attached? If so, what are the principles in that theory? If so do they describe knowledge truly? If so do they accidentally truly describe knowledge

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<sup>3</sup> There is room for debate about how such an agent should be described.

or do they describe *knowledge* because they describe truly? Answering these questions is our task.

Uncovering the principles of folk epistemology requires a sophisticated method, because folk epistemology is a *tacit* theory—it is embodied in the dispositions subjects have to draw certain inferences (or in the cognitive or structures that underlie those dispositions). The precursor of a sophisticated method exists for uncovering the principles of folk epistemology: it is a central part of the methodology of analytic epistemology. Analytic epistemologists have a reason to be very interested in folk epistemology: they want to uncover the principles of folk epistemology because they think that these principles, once made explicit, will yield a theory of knowledge. Consequently they have developed the method of *consulting our intuitions* about knowledge. Sadly, the method of consulting our intuitions, at least as it is practiced by analytic epistemologists has yielded at best poor evidence about the nature of folk epistemology, because they have not gathered intuitions in a controlled experimental way. We can borrow and improve on their method.

*Epistemic intuitions* are intuitive judgements about knowledge (using the concept KNOWLEDGE), made in response to a thought-experiment or other eliciting probes. Set against the background hypothesis that the principles of folk epistemology *play a role in guiding* epistemic intuitions, we can use epistemic intuitions as evidence about the content of folk epistemology—we can build a theory of the content of folk epistemology that *best explains* the patterns of epistemic intuitions we find experimentally in subjects.

No one familiar with literature of analytic epistemology will need me to describe the thought experiments designed to elicit epistemic intuitions with which that literature is peppered. I will go into a little detail, however, focusing on one study that has been performed with the aim being a controlled experiment—Nichols, Stich and Weinberg (2003). In their experiments, subjects were presented with vignettes describing a person who comes to have a true belief by some peculiar route; they were asked to say

whether the person described **knew** or **merely believed**. One of the vignettes they called “Gettier case”; here it is:

Bob has a friend, Jill, who has driven a Buick for many years. Bob therefore thinks that Jill drives an American car. He is not aware, however, that her Buick has recently been stolen, and he is also not aware that Jill has replaced it with a Pontiac, which is a different kind of American car. Does Bob really know that Jill drives an American car, or does he only believe it?

REALLY KNOWS      ONLY BELIEVES      (2003, 235)

Suppose that Nichols et al.’s subjects respond to this vignette by saying that Bob ONLY BELIEVES that Jill drives an American car; what would this show about the content of folk epistemology? It would, first of all, be *prima facie* evidence that folk epistemology is universal; it would also be evidence that can also help us say just what the principles of folk epistemology are.

The judgement that Bob only believes that Jill drives an American car is an *intuition of extension* about knowledge; it is a judgement about whether the case at hand falls inside or outside the extension of KNOWLEDGE.<sup>4</sup> Such judgements are the result of an inference from two kinds of premise—particular judgements about the situation described in the story and principles of folk epistemology. For example, perhaps subjects answered *only believes* to Gettier Case because they judged that Bob was lucky to have a true belief, and they employed the principle **if X knows that *p* then X is not lucky to have a true belief that *p***. If this is the best explanation of the subjects’ judgement, then we have shown that the above principle is part of the content of folk epistemology. Of course showing that this is the best explanation will rely on more experiments and more evidence—these are empirical matters. We are, in fact, a good way from having a good theory of the content of folk epistemology—Nichols, Stich and Weinberg experiments do not find that their subjects universally shared the same intuitions about Gettier Case or their other cases. Their findings have interesting implications for ID (in particular for ID’s Universality Claim), but I haven’t room to pursue them

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<sup>4</sup> See Craig (1990, 1) and Spicer (2007)

here; I want to move on to discuss the viability of the Semantic Claim as part of an account of the nature of KNOWLEDGE.

### 5 ARE THE PRINCIPLES OF FOLK EPISTEMOLOGY TRUE?

Even if we had a clear idea of the content of folk epistemology, the task of evaluating the claim that folk epistemology descriptively fixes the reference of KNOWLEDGE involves further difficulties. These difficulties begin with the following difficulty concerning how one can assess the truth of folk epistemology. We cannot address this question without addressing or taking a position on the question 'what is knowledge?', which in turn is enmeshed with the question as to what the concept KNOWLEDGE denotes. The difficulty is dialectical: on the assumption that folk epistemology truly describes knowledge, we can investigate knowledge by consulting folk epistemology; but it seems that we cannot either defend or attack the assumption that the principles of folk epistemology are true without first knowing what knowledge is. (Cummins (1998, 116-8) argues for this point, and builds an argument from it to the conclusion that appeals to intuition for the purposes of analytic epistemology are useless).

There are two ways out of this dialectical impasse. The first way is to find a route to answering the question 'what is knowledge?' that does not lean on folk epistemology as a guide. If one pursued this route, one could build a theory that details the nature of knowledge—a theory that one could then consult to evaluate the accuracy of folk epistemology. Kornblith (2002) can be understood as an example of this strategy.

The second way to escape the impasse exploits the fact that under certain circumstances, examining a folk theory alone can suffice to be able to know that it presents a false picture of its referent—without first having any detailed view about the nature of that referent. If it turns out that the folk theory is *inconsistent*, then of course one can conclude that it does not truly describe anything. This general strategy will not be fruitful very often, as we

rarely have reason to think that a folk theory is inconsistent; in the next section I argue that in the case of folk epistemology, we do have reasons to suspect inconsistency.

## 6 THE INCONSISTENCY OF FOLK EPISTEMOLOGY

Some evidence that folk epistemology is inconsistent can be seen in current state of analytic epistemology. Much of it consists in the attempt to resolve various antinomies and puzzles that are thrown up by the concept of knowledge, and which demand much work from philosophers to resolve. In resolving them, analytic epistemologists sometimes see themselves as reconciling the tensions that reside in our conception of knowledge—such as the tension between sceptical and anti-sceptical tendencies or between internalism and externalism. The existence of these tensions is *prima facie* evidence that that folk epistemology is inconsistent. Analytic epistemology also provides a clue as to how we can look to find more solid evidence for the inconsistency of folk epistemology—by seeking inconsistency in our epistemic intuitions.

The judgements we are prepared to make about what we know can easily be rendered inconsistent; a simple strategy for teasing out inconsistent epistemic judgements is encapsulated in what is called the *sceptical puzzle*. I think know that I have long owned a car, and that as I write it is parked outside in the yard. But ask me to consider whether I know that the car hasn't been stolen in the night without my hearing anything, and I admit that I do not know this. But once reminded that if I did know that the car is outside then I could deduce that it hadn't been stolen, I concede that in fact I don't know that it's parked outside—contradicting my earlier epistemic judgement. If I am asked to further consider whether I know that the Earth hasn't sprung into existence only five minutes ago complete with me and my memories, and I admit both that I don't know this and that therefore I don't even know that I have long owned a car.

Initially, the following statement seemed undeniable to me:

(I) I know that I have long owned a car.

Later I am invited to accept (and do accept) the following:

(II) I do not know that the world didn't spring into existence five minutes ago.

Finally, I am forced to accept the following claim:

(III) If I don't know that the world didn't spring into existence five minutes ago then I don't know that I've long owned a car.

But having conceded this, I deny what at the start I accepted as undeniable:  
(I).

Examples of sceptical puzzles following this pattern abound in the AE literature.<sup>5</sup> The sceptical puzzle is *prima facie* evidence of the inconsistency of folk epistemology; if (I), (II) and (III) are each intuitively correct because they accord with our folk epistemological principles, then the inconsistency of (I), (II) and (III) is evidence of the inconsistency of folk epistemology. Several philosophers have construed the sceptical puzzle as evidence of inconsistency in our underlying conception of knowledge (Weatherson: 2003, 24-5 and Schiffer: 1996, 332); but making good this suggestion requires careful work.

What is actually *revealed* in the puzzle is that we have inconsistent intuitions of extension, what we need to do to conclude from this that folk epistemology is inconsistent is argue that the *best explanation* of these inconsistent intuitions is that they are the product of an inconsistent folk epistemology. Once again the strategy is to take a thought experiment of traditional analytic epistemology (the sceptical puzzle) and employ it as part of a controlled investigation into our epistemic intuitions, to gather data for an inference to the best explanation of the structure of folk epistemology.

To argue that the best explanation of inconsistent intuitions is that they are the product of an inconsistent folk epistemology, one would need to argue that it better explains (than rival hypotheses) the patterns of intuitions we

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<sup>5</sup> See Hawthorne (2003).

find in experimental subjects. One such rival hypothesis will be to argue that the inconsistency found in epistemic intuitions is not the result of any inconsistency within folk epistemology, but rather it results from inconsistencies in *other areas* of the subject's psychology. Remember that an intuition of extension, as a judgement about a particular case, will be based on both particular information about the case and general principles that guide the subject in their judgement about whether the concept KNOWLEDGE applies to a case so described. Given there are two factors at work in this way, one could argue as follows:

What happens in the sceptical puzzle is that one is told various things and is invited along the way to make certain intuitive judgements about the case described. At the start one is invited to judge (I); a little later one is invited to judge (II); at the end of the story one is invited to judge (III), and then deduce not-(I) from (II) and (III). Clearly by the end, one has contradicted oneself (one has judged both (I) and not-(I)) but this need not be because one has an inconsistent picture of knowledge; it might be because one has been told an inconsistent tale: some of the information that one has been told at the end of the tale contradicts what one was told at the start.

This hypothesis not plausible in this case, as the little narrative can be inspected and seen not to contain any contradiction. A more sophisticated version of this reply might try to argue that although the story does not contain a contradiction, it prompts subjects into making contradictory judgements (not involving the concept KNOWLEDGE); the source of the subjects' inconsistent judgements involving KNOWLEDGE about this story (their judging first (I) and later not-(I)) is the result not of an inconsistent folk epistemology but a set of inconsistent judgements made in response to a consistent story. Testing this hypothesis is empirically tractable: we can look to see whether subjects who contradict themselves in their judgements about knowledge are also disposed to contradict themselves in their judgements not about knowledge (I suspect that they do not).

In general the hypothesis that folk epistemology is inconsistent is empirically tractable. It would be interesting to see whether epistemic

intuitions of extension exhibit *framing effects*, where merely circumstantial factors influence the way subjects intuitively respond to cases such as Gettier Case. Once again, the literature of AE (in particular the contextualism literature) suggests that they do, but I would need to see controlled experiments before I would feel confident on this (see Spicer 2006). If epistemic intuitions do exhibit framing effects, then the case for the inconsistency of folk epistemology would be strengthened. If folk epistemology is inconsistent, then there is a danger for the agent that on a particular occasion, reasoning with folk epistemology might generate a contradiction. One way to protect the agent from this happening would be for him to have a mechanism that selects only a few principles of folk epistemology to be active in his reasoning at any time. If this mechanism is cued by circumstantial factors, then it could be experimentally manipulated to generate framing effects. Norman Freeman and I at Bristol have begun to look into this possibility experimentally, but there are no results to report yet.

## **7, SEMANTICS WITHIN AN INCONSISTENT FOLK EPISTEMOLOGY**

In the last section I began to argue that folk epistemology is inconsistent – an argument I must sadly leave incomplete, because it is an empirical matter. What follows for conceptual truth if folk epistemology is inconsistent? There could be no conceptual truths about knowledge if folk epistemology is inconsistent.

The Semantic Claim of ID was that KNOWLEDGE refers to whatever is truly described by the core principles of folk epistemology; it was the Semantic Claim that underwrote the possibility of conceptual truth. If folk epistemology is inconsistent, then one must either give up the Semantic Claim, or conclude that there is necessarily no knowledge (since nothing can be truly described by an inconsistent description, and so nothing can be the referent of KNOWLEDGE). Putting aside the eliminativist option, I suggest we should reject the Semantic Claim and so conclude that there are no conceptual

truths about knowledge (if the empirical evidence bears out my suggestion that folk epistemology is inconsistent).

It is worth pausing now to mention a criticism of this line of argument. This reply criticises the view of concepts that I am targeting, and reminds us of a view of how concepts work I seem to have forgotten. This reply runs as follows:

In claiming that an inconsistent set of epistemological principles cannot fix the referent of KNOWLEDGE, you assumed that each instance of knowledge must satisfy *every* principle of folk epistemology. But we need not insist on this; we can claim instead that each instance of knowledge satisfies *most* but *not all* the principles of folk epistemology. Such a picture casts the concept KNOWLEDGE as a *family resemblance concept*. On this picture, there may be no case of knowledge that satisfies all the principles of folk epistemology (this might or might not be because the principles of folk epistemology are inconsistent), but this does not preclude folk epistemology's playing the role of fixing the reference of the concept KNOWLEDGE.

This reply is fine, but it misses the point. It is fine because it sketches a viable view the concept KNOWLEDGE, but it misses the point because I am interested only in those views of concepts that underwrite a notion of conceptual truth. The family resemblance view cannot underwrite the conceptual truth, because if the principle  $K(p) \Rightarrow T(p)$  plays a role in fixing the referent of knowledge merely by being one on a list of principles that are *mostly* satisfied by any instance of knowledge, then there is no guarantee that an instance of knowledge satisfies  $K(p) \Rightarrow T(p)$ . On the family resemblance view something can be knowledge without satisfying  $K(p) \Rightarrow T(p)$ , provided it satisfies most of the other principles of the list. So  $K(p) \Rightarrow T(p)$  isn't a conceptual truth. Notice that "*ceteris paribus*, knowledge implies truth" isn't a conceptual truth on the family resemblance picture either, nor is "most instances of knowledge are true". The fact that each instance of knowledge has to satisfy most of a list of principles that includes  $K(p) \Rightarrow T(p)$  does not imply that most instances of knowledge satisfy  $K(p) \Rightarrow T(p)$ . The family resemblance view of concepts is not a member of the ID-family.

## 8, DUAL-STATUS DESCRIPTIVISM

An objector might insist that I exaggerated in describing the sceptical puzzle as a case where we make contradictory judgements. Perhaps we do not fall into contradiction when we first judge (I), but later judge not-(I); we rather merely *change our minds*. Consider the following, for analogy:

Imagine a doctor who is making a diagnosis. The patient says that she is feeling generally ill and she has a fever; he concludes that she has the flu. But then the patient adds that these fevers have been a regular recurrence since she returned from central Africa a few months ago; the doctor then changes his mind, and judges that she has malaria.

The doctor has changed his mind on the basis of new information about the case. That he does so does not imply either that he has an inconsistent theory of malaria attached to his concept MALARIA; nor does it imply that the patient has told him an inconsistent story about her symptoms; nor does it imply that he has made inconsistent judgements about the symptoms. Rather all it shows is that the principles about malaria that he deploys in his diagnosis are *defeasible*. The doctor's first diagnosis is defeated by new information. People change their minds all the time, and that they do does not imply that they are guilty of possessing an inconsistent concept.<sup>6</sup>

Can we claim that the sceptical puzzle is nothing more serious than a case of changing one's mind? There are a number of points that need addressing in this line of thought. The first thing to ask is whether the doctor-story and the sceptical puzzle are indeed analogous. It seems there disanalogies: the doctor is not puzzled by his new diagnosis, nor does he continue to find his original diagnosis compelling. In contrast, those analytic epistemologists who have written on the sceptical puzzle agree that we *vacillate* between the undeniable anti-sceptical starting point and the

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<sup>6</sup> Thanks to Ward Jones for pointing out the importance of this kind of analogy.

irresistible sceptical conclusion. (Of course, the fact that analytic epistemologists report being torn and troubled by the sceptical puzzle does not imply that it is a psychologically real effect—epistemologists are not representative in respect of their tendency to regard a problem as deep, fascinating or troubling).

A second point that emerges from this analogy is deeper. The analogy raises the possibility that we have been misrepresenting the way folk epistemology works: the principles of folk epistemology don't provide *logical criteria* for whether KNOWLEDGE applies, they merely work as *defeasible guides* as to whether the concept KNOWLEDGE applies. This point needs careful examination. If one is claiming that *all* the principles of folk epistemology are mere defeasible guides for applying KNOWLEDGE, then one is abandoning the ID theory of concepts. In doing so, one must also abandon the claim that the principles of folk epistemology constitute conceptual truths about knowledge. A principle can serve as a defeasible guide to knowledge without being true of all instances of knowledge.

In order to save ID and conceptual truth, one would have to opt for a dual-status picture of the principles of folk epistemology—claiming that *some* but *not all* the principles of folk epistemology are defeasible guides. On this picture, the principles of folk epistemology fall into two kinds—the core principles and the rest, or the *logical principles* and *empirical principles* we can call them (following Fodor: 1964). The logical principles are satisfied by knowledge as a matter of conceptual truth—since they determine the reference of KNOWLEDGE. The empirical principles do not determine the reference of KNOWLEDGE—rather they are mere reliable rules of thumb for ascribing knowledge (satisfied by most, or perhaps all instances of knowledge, but merely accidentally or nomically, not as a matter of conceptual truth). On this picture (call it *dual-status descriptivism*), folk epistemology may be inconsistent, but this is because as well as the consistent logical principles, folk epistemology also contains a whole bunch of other principles too. It is the presence of these extra, empirical principles that

renders the whole theory inconsistent; but the empirical principles are nevertheless useful, since they serve as handy rules of thumb for ascribing knowledge.

Dual-status descriptivism is an important view to consider, both because it provides a way to save conceptual truth from being undermined by the empirical discovery that folk epistemology is inconsistent, and because I suspect that most holders of ID in fact hold some version of dual-status descriptivism. (For inferential-role theories the dual-status element shows up in the distinction between the *meaning-constituting* inferences from the rest; in Peacocke's epistemic theory it shows up in his talk of *primitively compelling* inferences; in Rey's mental-files theory, it shows up explicitly in his distinction between *M-rules* and other rules within the mental file).

There are various considerations that count against the dual-status account of folk epistemology. The first problem is that all dual-status views face the problem (made notorious by Fodor; see Fodor 1964, Fodor and LePore 1988) about how to draw the line in a principled way between the logical and empirical principles within a folk theory. In the case of KNOWLEDGE, it looks as though we are not going to be able to find any *psychological* mark that distinguishes the logical principles from the empirical principles. For example, dual status theorists would be unwise to hope that the logical principles can be distinguished by the strength of conviction with which they are held – the sceptical puzzle suggests that subjects find both the principles that push them towards knowledge-attribution just as compelling as those that push them towards scepticism. I think that Fodor's problem is not fatal for dual-status descriptivism. Fodor is demanding a criterion for distinguishing (in non-semantic terms) the principles that play a semantic role from those that do not; this demand is too strong. If one's best theory of the concept KNOWLEDGE makes use of a distinction among the principles of folk epistemology then one should believe in the reality of the distinction, even if one has no extra-theoretic way of carving the divide.

I doubt whether there is a knock-down argument against dual-status descriptivism. I also doubt whether it is correct as a theory about KNOWLEDGE. The test for evaluating a theory of reference for concepts asks: Can reference so understood explain why intentional psychology can be true and explanatory? (see Cummins: 1991, 13) I suspect that we will better be able to explain how cognitive psychology can explain agents' abilities to successfully negotiate their environment by attributing to them concepts that refer to items or categories in that environment when we understand reference in causal or teleological terms than when we understand reference in a descriptivist way.

#### 9 CONCEPTUAL TRUTH WITHIN DUAL-STATUS DESCRIPTIVISM

The strategy of adopting dual-status descriptivism would be a case of defending the *goal* of analytic epistemology by abandoning the *method*: conceptual truth is saved, but at the expense of the a priority of conceptual truth. If some but not all the principles of folk epistemology are conceptual truths, then using a priori methods to uncover the principles of folk epistemology will not yield a priori knowledge about the nature of knowledge. This route would rely on the following inference:

1. Principle P is part of my concept KNOWLEDGE (it is one of the principles of my folk epistemology);  
so:
2. P is a conceptual truth about knowledge.

But dual-status descriptivism implies that this inference is invalid (since not everything that is part of the concept KNOWLEDGE is a conceptual truth about knowledge). In order to know that principle P is a conceptual truth, one must know that it is a logical principle, and unless one has an *a priori* answer to Fodor's problem of distinguishing the logical from the empirical principles,

(and I suspect there is none), then whether P is an empirical or logical principle will be an empirical question.<sup>7</sup>

If folk epistemology is shown to be inconsistent, then there are two possibilities, then. Either there are no conceptual truths about knowledge, or there are some conceptual truths, but it cannot be known *a priori* whether some principle about knowledge that seems compelling and undeniable really is a conceptual truth, rather than a mere apparent one. The methodological implications for analytic epistemology are troubling either way.

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<sup>7</sup> Rey (1998) is happy with this abandonment of the a priority of conceptual truths. His view is that such truths are a priori, but that we can only know that we have such a priori knowledge empirically, by discovering empirically the nature of a concept and its referent, and noticing that some of the rules within the concept are cast as reference-determining on our best empirical theory. I take it that taking this line about KNOWLEDGE would amount to an abandonment of the traditional program of analytic epistemology.

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