

KNOWING AND SEEING: RESPONDING TO STROUD'S DILEMMA

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ABSTRACT

Barry Stroud suggests that when we want to explain a certain kind of knowledge philosophically we feel we must explain it on the basis of another, prior kind of knowledge that does not imply or presuppose any of the knowledge we are trying to explain. If we accept this epistemic priority requirement (EPR) we find that we cannot explain our knowledge of the world in a way that satisfies it. If we reject EPR then we will be failing to make all of our knowledge of the world intelligible all at once. I respond to this dilemma by questioning EPR and arguing that it is, in any case, a requirement that is satisfied by explanations of our knowledge in terms of non-epistemic seeing. Since non-epistemic seeing is not a form of knowing, such explanations show how knowledge of the world can come to be out of something that is not knowledge of the world.

1. Understanding Human Knowledge in General

Suppose we begin with the idea that 'the philosophical study of human knowledge seeks to understand what human knowledge is and how it comes to be' (Stroud 2000b: 99). What would it be to explain how human knowledge 'comes to be'? Take my knowledge that the laptop on which I am writing these words is dusty. One might think that to explain how this particular piece of human knowledge comes to be is to explain how I know that the laptop is dusty. That's easy: I know that the laptop is dusty because I can see that it is dusty. Indeed, there are a great many propositions about the world that we human beings know to be true because we can see or otherwise perceive that they are true. What could be more straightforward?

To see that P is to know that P. If seeing or perceiving that P is a form of knowing that P then an explanation of my knowledge that my laptop is dusty by reference to the fact that I can see that it is dusty will be an explanation of my knowledge in terms of a form of perceiving that already amounts to knowing about the world. Is that a problem? Not if we are not looking for a philosophical explanation of the possibility of knowledge. It is quite acceptable, for non-philosophical purposes, to explain a person's knowledge that P by saying that he can see that P. What if we are looking for a philosophical explanation? Barry Stroud suggests that when we want to explain a certain kind of knowledge philosophically 'we feel we must explain it on the basis of another, prior kind of knowledge that does not imply or presuppose any of the knowledge we are trying to explain' (2000b: 104). This is one formulation of what might be called Stroud's epistemic priority requirement (EPR). So, for example, if we want to give a philosophical account of our knowledge of the world, that is, of non-psychological reality, then EPR implies that our aim should be to see how this knowledge 'could come to be out of something that is not knowledge of the world' (2000a: 8). This is just what we are failing to do if we explain our knowledge of the world in terms of a form of seeing or perceiving that already amounts to knowing about the things around us.

Why should we accept the epistemic priority requirement? In particular, why should we accept that 'our knowledge of the world is to be explained as being derived from some knowledge or experience that is not knowledge of the world around us' (2000a:7)? Stroud claims that what we want in philosophy is an account of our knowledge that would 'make all of it intelligible to us all at once' (2000a: 8). We want to understand 'how anything we

currently accept amounts to knowledge' (2000b: 101), and this is the basis of EPR. We take it that knowledge of objects comes to us by means of the senses, but

if we thought of sensory knowledge as itself knowledge of material objects around us we would not get an appropriately general explanation of how any knowledge of any objects at all is possible by means of the senses. We would be explaining knowledge of some material objects only on the basis of knowledge of some others (2000b: 105).

I will refer to this argument for EPR as the argument from generality. Its main claim is that our knowledge of the world needs to be explained on the basis of a prior kind of knowledge because the object of the exercise in epistemology is to understand human knowledge in general, or less ambitiously, how we come to know anything at all in a certain specified domain.

Someone who takes EPR very seriously is the old-fashioned foundationalist. The foundationalist says that the deliverances of perception are limited to the sensory character of our perceptual experiences and that knowledge of the world comes to be out of knowledge of the sensory character of our experiences. The latter is epistemically prior to knowledge of the world in the sense that we don't need to know anything about non-psychological reality in order to have knowledge of the character of our experiences, of how things appear to us. So the philosopher who represents knowledge of how things appear to us as the basis of our knowledge of the world cannot be accused of representing such knowledge as coming to be out of something that implies or presupposes this very knowledge.

Foundationalism solves one problem but creates another. The basic problem with foundationalism is that knowledge of the independent world can only come to be out of knowledge of the sensory character of our experiences if there is an acceptable inference from the latter to the former. There is no such inference because, according to Stroud, the necessary principles of inference lack a satisfactory empirical or a priori justification. This means that ‘it is not just doubtful but impossible’ that inferences from how things appear to us ‘could support our beliefs about the independent world’ (2004: 168). So it turns out that although foundationalism has a perfectly respectable philosophical motivation – namely the desire to explain or understand human knowledge in general - it is a position that has ‘fatal consequences for our understanding of our knowledge’ (2000b: 104).

We now have the makings of a potentially devastating dilemma. On the one hand, the intellectual goal of understanding human knowledge in general, a goal that is in some sense constitutive of the philosophy of knowledge, leads us to accept EPR and so to reject any attempt to explain our knowledge by reference to the possibility of seeing or otherwise perceiving that certain propositions about the world are true. Yet as soon as we try to think of our knowledge as arranged in levels of epistemic priority we find it impossible to explain how the epistemically prior knowledge (of, as it might be, the character of our experiences) ‘could yield any richer knowledge lying beyond it’ (2000b: 120). This is the first horn of Stroud’s dilemma, and it leads to the conclusion that ‘scepticism is the only answer’ (ibid.). The second horn results from the rejection of EPR. Given all the trouble that the old-fashioned foundationalist gets into we might conclude that in order to understand how knowledge of the world is possible ‘we cannot settle for less than our being able sometimes simply to see or otherwise perceive that such-and-such is so in the world we take ourselves

to have knowledge about' (Stroud 2008: 13). However, if this is the line we take then we will find ourselves unable to give an appropriately general explanation of how any knowledge of any objects at all is possible by means of the senses. So the epistemic priority requirement is one that we can neither live with nor live without. This is Stroud's dilemma.

What should we make of this? Suppose that seeing that P is described as a form of what Dretske calls epistemic seeing: it is a kind of seeing that has epistemic implications.¹ Stroud takes it that a philosopher who explains any of our knowledge of the world on the basis of our capacity for epistemic seeing is, in effect, explaining our knowledge of some material objects on the basis of our knowledge of some others and so violating EPR. This seems questionable. For example, it is not obvious that a philosopher who says that I know that my laptop is dusty because I can see that it is dusty is explaining my knowledge of the state of my laptop on the basis of my knowledge of any other material object. Even if there are better reasons for thinking that such an explanation is not in line with EPR this only matters if EPR is well motivated. If not then we needn't be disturbed by the second horn of the supposed dilemma. We can reject EPR and continue to view our knowledge of the world as coming to be out of a form of perceiving that amounts to knowing about the things around us.

As Dretske has observed, not all seeing is epistemic.² For example, it is one thing to see that my laptop is dusty and another to see my dusty laptop. The contrast is between perceiving facts and perceiving objects.³ I can see the dusty laptop without seeing, and so without knowing, that it is dusty. At the same time, object perception might be regarded as more basic than fact perception and epistemically prior to it. This raises a question about the first horn of Stroud's dilemma. Even if we accept EPR doesn't the distinction between

epistemic and non-epistemic perceiving give us a way of satisfying it without endorsing old-fashioned foundationalism? Instead of regarding our knowledge of the world as coming to be out of our knowledge of the sensory character of our experiences we can think of it as having its source in non-epistemic object perception. If this is viable then we won't just be viewing our knowledge of the world as arising out of something that is not knowledge of the world. We will be viewing it as arising out of something that is not (yet) knowledge.

In the light of these possible responses to Stroud's dilemma I'm going to proceed as follows: first, in part 2, I'm going to take a closer look at what EPR does and does not rule out when it comes to explaining our knowledge of the world. I believe that Stroud is right at least to this extent: given EPR, it is unacceptable for an epistemologist to explain our knowledge by appealing to the fact that it is sometimes possible for us to see or otherwise perceive that such-and-such is so in the world we take ourselves to have knowledge about. The question in part 3 is whether we should accept EPR. I will argue that the best way of motivating this requirement is not to emphasize the extreme generality of what we seek in the philosophy of knowledge but to insist that a fully satisfying philosophical account of our knowledge of the world needs to be full-blooded rather than modest.⁴ On this reading, EPR has something going for it but not so much as to make it impossible to satisfy. For this reason, EPR doesn't make scepticism inevitable. This will become clearer in part 4, where I will claim that the idea that knowledge of the world arises out of non-epistemic perceptual encounters with objects enables us to satisfy a properly motivated version of EPR. There are stronger versions of this requirement that we cannot thereby claim to have satisfied but there is no reason to believe that an interest in the philosophy of knowledge commits one to anything so demanding.

2. Seeing and Knowing

What sorts of explanation of human knowledge does EPR rule out? Consider this example:

One way I can know that my neighbour is at home is by seeing her car in front of her house, where she parks it when and only when she is at home. This is a perfectly good explanation of how I know that fact about one of the things around me. It is a different way of knowing where my neighbour is from seeing her through the window or hearing her characteristic fumbings on the piano. But it could not satisfy us as an explanation of how I know anything at all about any objects around me. It explains how I know something about one object around me – my neighbour- by knowing something about another object around me- her car. It could not answer the philosophical question as to how I know anything about any objects around me (Stroud 2000b: 102).

What Stroud says about this example – call it NEIGHBOUR - is surely correct. The point is not that it isn't possible for one to know something about one object by knowing something about another object but that reference to this way of knowing does not explain how it is possible for one to know anything at all about any objects. It is true that my knowledge that my neighbour is at home is inferential whereas my knowledge that her car is parked in front of her house is non-inferential. In this sense my knowledge that my neighbour is at home is being explained on the basis of a kind of knowledge that does not imply or presuppose any of the knowledge we are trying to explain. In another sense, however, EPR has clearly been violated: both my neighbour and her car are material objects, so NEIGHBOUR is a case of knowledge of one material object being explained on the basis of knowledge of another.

Now consider the case – call it LAPTOP- in which I come to know that my laptop is dusty by seeing that it is dusty. In this example I don't know something about one object around me by knowing something about another object. I know (non-inferentially) that my laptop is dusty by seeing that it is dusty, not by seeing some other object. A related point is this: if I see my neighbour's car parked in front of her house this is at most a sign that she is at home, and it is still possible that she is not at home. If I see that my laptop is dusty this is not a sign that it is dusty, and it is not possible that it is not dusty. This kind of seeing is factive. When I see that my laptop is dusty the fact that it is dusty is visually manifest to me, and my knowledge of this fact isn't based on knowledge of anything else. The structure of LAPTOP is, to this extent, quite different from that of NEIGHBOUR.

We can build on this observation as follows: the aim in epistemology is to make all of our knowledge of the world intelligible to us all at once but how are we to do that? A first step is to recognize that 'human beings get their knowledge of the world somehow from sense-perception' (2000c: 129). Some of our knowledge isn't perceptual but Stroud's idea is that in order to understand human knowledge in general we need to identify one basic source of human knowledge or, failing that, a small number of basic sources. The senses are important in this context because they are our most basic source of knowledge. On this account, the challenge of understanding human knowledge in general is really the challenge of finding 'an appropriately general explanation of how any knowledge of any objects at all is possible by means of the senses' (2000b: 105). Such an explanation will at least be one that does not explain knowledge of some material objects only on the basis of knowledge of some others, and LAPTOP provides a clear illustration of what such an explanation might look like. Just as it is possible for me to know that my laptop is dusty by seeing that it is so,

more generally, it is possible for human beings to know that certain propositions about the world are true by perceiving that they are true.

The proposal, then, is that we can explain how any knowledge of any objects at all is possible by means of the senses by drawing attention to our capacity to see or perceive epistemically, and that this explanation respects EPR. Is this proposal defensible? Consider this worry: even if LAPTOP don't breach EPR in the way that NEIGHBOUR breaches this requirement there other reasons for thinking that EPR is a problem for LAPTOP-style explanations of human knowledge in general. For example, I can only see that my laptop is dusty if I have the concept laptop and I couldn't have this concept if I didn't know many other propositions about laptops and other objects in the world around me. So it is false that no knowledge of the kind that we want to explain – knowledge of the world - is implied or presupposed by explanations of our knowledge in terms of epistemic seeing.

This objection points to the need for a distinction between the basis on which one knows something and enabling conditions for knowing something on that basis. For example, suppose that I come to know a given proposition by inferring it from some other propositions that I know. In that case, the basis or source of my knowledge is reasoning. Since it wouldn't be possible for me to come to know things in this way if I could not remember the premises of my inferences memory also has a part to play in my acquisition of inferential knowledge. However, its role is quite different from the role of reasoning. Rather than being the source or basis of my knowledge memory enables me to acquire new knowledge by reasoning. It is, as Burge puts it, 'a background condition for the reasoning's success' (1993: 463). Such background necessary conditions are what I am calling enabling conditions.⁵

Now suppose that P is a proposition about material objects (distinct from the proposition that my laptop is dusty) that one needs to know in order to possess the concept of a laptop. With the distinction between sources and enabling conditions in mind we can concede that in order to know that my laptop is dusty by seeing that it is dusty I need to know that P (because otherwise I would not have the concept of a laptop), while also insisting that knowledge of P is only an enabling condition for knowing that my laptop is dusty by seeing that it is dusty. I don't know that my laptop is dusty on the basis of my knowledge that P or, to put it another way, by knowing that P. I know that my laptop is dusty by seeing that it is dusty; this is the basis on which I know. Even if I need to know that P in order to see that my laptop is dusty this isn't a problem for EPR as long as EPR says only that a person's knowledge of some material objects must not be explained on the basis of his knowledge of some others.

In fact, of course, EPR says more than this. It says that a philosophically satisfying explanation of our knowledge of the world must represent it as coming out of something that neither implies nor presupposes any knowledge of the world. Even if knowing that P is only an enabling condition for seeing that my laptop is dusty the idea that I know that my laptop is dusty by seeing that it is dusty still implies or presupposes that I know something else about the world. It implies that I know that P. It doesn't matter that I don't know that my laptop is dusty on the basis of knowing that P. It remains the case that it wouldn't be possible for me to see that my laptop is dusty if I didn't know that P. So the suggested explanation of my knowledge in terms of epistemic seeing continues to look like one that cannot easily be reconciled with EPR when this requirement is understood in the way that Stroud understands it.

A simpler and more straightforward way of making the same point would be this: seeing that my laptop is dusty might be thought of as a way of knowing that it is dusty, somewhat in the way that being red is a way of being coloured.⁶ More generally, ‘perceiving that P is a form of knowing that P’ (Peacocke 2005: 229), and this can only be the case if ‘S perceives that P’ entails ‘S knows that P’. If this is right then a philosopher who attempts to explain our knowledge of the world by pointing out that it is possible for us to know that certain propositions about the world are true by perceiving that they are true is quite clearly failing to explain ‘how our knowledge of the world could come to be out of something that is not knowledge of the world’ (Stroud 2000a: 8). To say that the basis on which one knows that P is true is that one can see that it is true is, in effect, to say that one knows that P by knowing (by sight) that P. This can’t possibly be an explanation that respects EPR.

Clearly, this only matters if there are good reasons for accepting EPR. Stroud argues that the ‘felt need’ to explain our knowledge in a way that accords with EPR ‘has fatal consequences for our understanding of our knowledge’ (2000b: 104) because it leads to scepticism. One might think that this is a reason for questioning EPR. If scepticism really is the inevitable outcome of trying to understand human knowledge in a certain way, then that should ‘make us look more critically at that way of trying to understand human knowledge in the first place’ (2000b: 100). On the other side of the coin, however, are all the arguments in favour of EPR. Since I have so far said very little about what these are this is a gap that now needs to be filled in. What is clear is that Stroud takes a commitment to EPR to be built into the very idea of a philosophical investigation of human knowledge. The next

question, therefore, is whether he can be right about this given all the trouble that EPR causes.

3. Epistemic Priority

In its most general form EPR says that when we want to explain knowledge of kind K we must do so on the basis of another, prior kind of knowledge that does not presuppose or imply any knowledge of kind K. How widely does this requirement apply? Consider our knowledge of the sensory character of our own experiences, of how things seem to us at the moment. This is a kind of knowledge – call it sensory knowledge - that does not appear to have an epistemically prior basis. Surely knowledge of how things seem to us at the moment doesn't come to be out of something that is not knowledge of how things seem to us at the moment but this doesn't make our sensory knowledge inexplicable. So it looks as though there isn't some entirely general explanatory urge to which EPR is a response: there are kinds of knowledge to which EPR does not apply.⁷

This is only a problem if we view EPR as a constraint on the goal of explaining any kind of knowledge. The alternative is to think of it as a constraint specifically on the goal of explaining our knowledge of the external world, that is to say, our knowledge of non-psychological reality. This allows us to leave it open whether sensory knowledge requires an epistemically prior basis since sensory knowledge is knowledge of an aspect of psychological reality. The crucial question, then, is whether there is any reason to think that a serious philosophical explanation of our knowledge of the wider world needs to go along with EPR, that is, represent this kind of knowledge as coming to be out of something that neither is nor implies knowledge of the world.

One reason might be that explanations of our worldly knowledge that do not respect EPR are no good because they are circular. So, for example, it might be thought that to explain my knowledge that my laptop is dusty by saying that I can see that it is dusty is to explain my knowledge by reference to a form of knowing and that this is circular because it amounts to explaining knowledge in terms of itself. This is not Stroud's view. He points out that 'if we could often see that the table is in the room, a tree in the garden, socks on our feet, and so on.... that would be knowledge by perception of the existence of external things' (2004: 166). He adds that 'there is no suspicious circularity in this way of coming to know that there are external things' since 'circularity can only enter the picture when there is a chain of inference or a course of reasoning by which a conclusion is reached' (2004: 167). However, no chain of inference or course of reasoning need be involved in coming to know that my laptop is dusty by seeing that it is dusty. In other words, 'it is not that one infers that one knows that p from the fact that one sees that p'. Rather, 'whoever sees that p thereby knows that p (2004: 167). So whatever else might be wrong with explanations of our knowledge in terms of epistemic seeing or perceiving the one thing that is not wrong with them, at least by Stroud's lights, is that they are circular.

For Stroud it is generality rather than circularity that is the issue. He argues that:

- (a) A philosophically satisfying explanation of our knowledge of the world must be appropriately general.
- (b) An appropriately general explanation of our knowledge must respect EPR. If we see our knowledge of the world as coming to be out of something that amounts to or implies this kind of knowledge then we

cannot claim to have provided an appropriately general explanation of our knowledge of the world.

Here are three passages in which Stroud spells out his conception of an ‘appropriately general’ explanation of our knowledge:

(I) What we seek in the philosophical theory of knowledge is an account that is completely general in several respects. We want to understand how any knowledge is possible at all – how anything we currently accept amounts to knowledge. Or, less ambitiously, how we come to know anything at all in a certain specified domain (2000b: 101)

(II) We want an account of our knowledge that would make all of it intelligible to us at all once (2000a: 8).

(III) And we don’t just want a heterogeneous list of ways of coming to know. We want to find a single way, or very small number of very general “ways of knowing” (2000a: 4).

On the face of it, (I) is a less demanding and more plausible requirement than (II). If one of the things we currently accept is the proposition P, and we succeed in explaining how we know that P, then it cannot be said that we have not explained how anything we currently accept amounts to knowledge. But explaining our knowledge of P obviously does not amount to making all of our knowledge of the world intelligible to us all at once. Again, it is not obvious that making all of our knowledge intelligible all at once is necessarily a matter of identifying a single way, or small number of very general ways, of knowing. Why not accept we have lots of different ways of knowing about the world around us, and concentrate on doing justice to the multiplicity of pathways to knowledge?⁸ In accepting

the sheer heterogeneity of our ways of knowing what we lose is not generality but a certain kind of simplicity. But the more we insist on finding a small number of ways of knowing the harder we are likely to find it to give a plausible account of the full range of human knowledge. So we might accept (II) without accepting (III).

Turning to (b), suppose that our knowledge that P is explained on the basis that we can see that P. We have seen that this account of our knowledge of P is at odds with EPR. The proposition that a person S sees that P entails that S knows that P and in this sense implies the knowledge that we are trying to explain. Does it follow that the suggested explanation of our knowledge isn't suitably general? The charge that an explanation of knowing in terms of epistemic seeing is not appropriately general can either be understood as the charge that (I)* such an explanation fails to make any of our knowledge intelligible, even our knowledge of those propositions that we can see to be true, or as the charge that (II)* it fails to make all of our knowledge intelligible all at once.

Of these charges, (I)* is much more serious than (II)*. We might be able to live with the suggestion that we cannot make all of our knowledge intelligible all at once but if we cannot understand how anything we currently accept amounts to knowledge then we really are in trouble philosophically speaking. This is the point of scepticism. The sceptic is not primarily interested in whether we can make all of our knowledge intelligible all at once but in whether we can make any of our knowledge intelligible. This suggests a reading of (b) on which its real point is that if we see our knowledge of the world as coming to be out of knowledge of the world or out of something that implies this kind of knowledge then we cannot claim to have provided a genuine explanation of any of our knowledge, let alone an explanation of all our knowledge all at once.

To see why not, imagine that we somehow manage to communicate with beings from a distant planet.⁹ They want to know how we human beings come to know things about the world around us. We say “That’s easy: sometimes we can see or otherwise perceive that such-and-such is the case”. Naturally their next question is: “What is it to see that such-and-such is the case?”. Our answer is: “Seeing that P is a particular form of knowing that P. To see that such-and-such is the case is to know by visual means that it is the case”. It is easy to imagine our interlocutors not being impressed by this answer. What we have told them is that we know about the world by knowing about it in a particular way. Even if this is not down circular it is certainly unhelpful.¹⁰ A helpful answer will be one that starts further back, as it were. Intuitively, there is a transition from not knowing to knowing and what we need to explain is how we humans make this transition. To point out that we have the ability to see or otherwise perceive that such-and-such is the case is not to explain the transition because perceiving that P is too close to knowing that P. Once we get as far as perceiving that P we have already reached our final destination. We were supposed to be explaining how we reach it and we need to do better than to say that we reach it by reaching it in a particular way.

This argument should be qualified in at least one respect. For even if seeing that P is a form or way of knowing that P it does not follow that there is no sense in which it is an explanation of a person’s knowledge that P to say that he can see that P. After all, knowing that P by seeing that P is different from, say, knowing that P by hearing or by being told that P. ‘S can see that P’ is an informative answer to the question ‘How does S know that P?’ at least to the extent that it tells us the specific way in which S knows that P. The point about explanations of knowing in terms of epistemic seeing or other knowledge-entailing

mental states is not that they are not explanations at all but that they are not what might be called full-blooded explanations. Full-blooded explanations are informative in a particular way. They purport to explain the transition from not knowing to knowing by showing how our knowledge of the world could come to be out of something that is not knowledge of the world. This is the kind of explanation that, as epistemologists, we should be looking for, as well as the kind of explanation that ought to satisfy our imaginary alien interlocutors.

We have arrived at a reading of EPR according to which the idea to which it gives expression is that philosophical explanations of our knowledge need to be full-blooded. While full-blooded explanations needn't be fully general in Stroud's sense, fully general explanations must be full-blooded. A full-blooded explanation of knowledge of kind K is one that plausibly represents it as originating in something that is not already knowledge of kind K. On this account, EPR is the demand for a full-blooded explanation of our knowledge, and a full-blooded explanation of our knowledge must at least be one whose explanans and explanandum are logically distinct. That is why, on the assumption that 'S sees that P' logically entails 'S knows that P', it is not a full-blooded explanation of S's knowledge that P to say that S sees that P. To explain S's knowledge in this way is to give an entailing explanation of it whereas full-blooded explanations are non-entailing; unlike entailing explanations they do not logically entail the knowledge that they purport to explain. But now we run into another apparent difficulty. For if 'S Φ s that P' does not entail 'S knows that P' then the observation S Φ s that P leaves it open that S does not know that P. However, if S can Φ that P without knowing that P then how is it an explanation of S's knowledge to point out that he Φ s that P? The implication is that a genuine explanation of

S's knowledge that P ought to settle the question whether S knows that P and that only entailing explanations can do that.

This argument implies that the basic choice in epistemology is between entailing and non-entailing explanations, and that neither kind of explanation is any good. Entailing explanations are no good because they aren't informative in the right way and non-entailing explanations are no good because they aren't really explanations. There are echoes here of Stroud's dilemma but with one important difference: unlike Stroud's dilemma, this latest dilemma is clearly spurious. For a start, the objection to entailing explanations depends on the assumption that explanations of our knowledge are philosophically satisfying only to the extent that they are full-blooded. Why accept this assumption? Perhaps we would have to accept it if we thought that entailing explanations are totally uninformative but we have already seen that this is not the case. Explanations of knowing in terms of knowledge-entailing mental states are modest rather than full-blooded but modesty is a serious option in epistemology as in other areas of philosophy.¹¹ Moreover, once we acknowledge that even philosophical explanations can be modest there is no longer any need to worry about EPR. The particular conception of philosophical explanation to which this requirement gives expression is not one that we have to accept.

The supposed problem with non-entailing explanations is also more apparent than real. It is not plausible in general that good explanations must be entailing explanations. A person's premature death might be satisfactorily explained by citing his unhealthy diet but there is no question of this explanation's explanans entailing its explanandum. There are epistemological examples that make the same point. It can be a perfectly good explanation of my knowledge that Quine was born in Akron to say that I read it in his autobiography

despite the fact that ‘I read in Quine’s autobiography that he was born in Akron’ does not entail ‘I know that Quine was born in Akron’. If I am asked how I know that Quine was born in Akron and my answer is that I read it in his autobiography there is a sense in which this answer settles the question. However, settling the question in this sense has little to do with citing something that entails that I know.¹²

Where does this leave Stroud’s dilemma? By Stroud’s lights epistemology’s basic problem is that it tries to find explanations of our knowledge that satisfy EPR but such explanations are not to be found. In response, I have been suggesting that we can ignore EPR as long as we don’t think that philosophical explanations of our knowledge have to be full-blooded, and that we should not think that explanations of our knowledge that satisfy EPR are bound to fail because they are non-entailing. Yet Stroud isn’t sceptical about full-blooded explanations of our knowledge because they are non-entailing. He argues for the claim that foundationalism’s attempt to explain our knowledge in a way that satisfies EPR leads to epistemological disaster. This leaves it open that there are non-foundationalist full-blooded explanations that do not have fatal consequences for our understanding of our knowledge. In general, there is no better way of proving that a certain kind of explanation of our knowledge is possible than to produce one. This is the next challenge. Specifically, the challenge is to explain in detail how our knowledge of the world could come to be out of something that is not knowledge of the world and to do so without running into any of the problems that old-fashioned foundationalism runs into. If this can be done then we can live with EPR just as happily as we can live without it. Although modesty would remain an option it would not be the only or even the best option. Why settle for modesty when a full-blooded explanation of human knowledge is available? The question is whether such an

explanation really is available, and this is not a something that can be settled by the abstract methodological considerations to which I have just been drawing attention.

4. Seeing Things

How do I know that there is a barn in front of me? I can see it. How do I know that the match has started? I can hear it. 'I can see it' might be, but needn't be, shorthand for 'I can see that there is a barn in front of me', just as 'I can hear it' might be, but needn't be, shorthand for 'I can hear that the match has started'. If I see that there is a barn in front of me then I know that there is a barn in front of me but I can see the barn in front of me without knowing that there is a barn in front of me.¹³ How can this be? Here are three scenarios:

- (a) I see the barn but don't know what a barn is since I don't have the concept of a barn. Not having the concept barn prevents me from knowing that there is a barn in front of me but it needn't prevent me from seeing the barn.¹⁴
- (b) I see the barn and know what a barn is but don't believe that I am seeing a barn or that there is a barn in front of me. I think I am hallucinating or seeing a barn façade rather than a bona fide barn. If I don't think there is a barn in front of me I don't know that there is a barn in front of me but this doesn't alter the fact that I can see the barn.
- (c) I see a barn, I have the concept barn, and I think that there is a barn in front of me but I happen to be in fake barn country. In fake barn country there are lots of fake barns that look just like barns from a distance and only one genuine barn – the one I happen to be looking at. If I don't have

the capacity to distinguish barns from the fake barns then I don't know that there is a barn in front of me but I can still see the barn.

Similar examples can be constructed for the auditory case: I can hear the start of the match without hearing that the match has started.

Seeing the barn in front of me without realizing that it is a barn is an example of what Dretske calls non-epistemic or simple seeing. Seeing the barn non-epistemically is compatible with believing and knowing that it is a barn but also compatible with not knowing or believing that it is a barn.¹⁵ The key differences between epistemic and non-epistemic seeing include:

1. Epistemic seeing is a relation to a fact or proposition. Non-epistemic seeing is a relation to an object or thing rather than to a proposition.¹⁶
2. Epistemic seeing has epistemic implications that non-epistemic seeing lacks. Epistemic seeing is a form of knowing. Non-epistemic seeing is not a form of knowing (which is not to say that it is incompatible with knowing).
3. Epistemic seeing is conceptual in a way that non-epistemic seeing is not. I can't see that there is a barn in front of me if I lack the concept of a barn. I don't need the concept barn to see a barn.

How are epistemic and non-epistemic seeing related? I can see the barn in front of me without seeing that there is a barn in front of me but I can't see that there is a barn in front of me without seeing the barn. I can see my dusty laptop without seeing that it is dusty but I can't see that my laptop is dusty without seeing my laptop. This might lead one to conclude

that non-epistemic seeing is a condition of epistemic seeing but this wouldn't be quite right: I can see that my laptop is missing without seeing my laptop. Still, it would be natural to think that the missing laptop case is somehow derivative or secondary. In what Dretske calls primary epistemic seeing we see that b is P by seeing b itself. Cases in which we see that b is P without seeing b itself are cases of secondary epistemic seeing.¹⁷

The challenge was to provide a full-blooded explanation of our knowledge of the world. How does the distinction between epistemic and simple seeing help us to meet this challenge? It would be a step in the right direction if it can be explained how any of our knowledge arises out of non-epistemic seeing or, more generally, out of non-epistemic perceiving. Such an explanation would be in line with EPR in the following sense: it would show how (some of) our knowledge of the world could come to be out of something that is not knowledge of the world. We can show how our knowledge of the world could come to be out of something that is not knowledge of the world in two quite different ways. One would be to show how our worldly knowledge could come to be out of something that is not knowledge of the world even if it is knowledge of something else (say the character of our experiences). Alternatively, we can aim to show how our knowledge of the world comes to be out of something that is not knowledge at all. It is in the latter sense that our perceptual knowledge of the world comes to be out of something that is not knowledge of the world if it comes to be out of non-epistemic seeing or perceiving.

How is such a thing possible? How can something non-epistemic intelligibly be regarded as the source of something epistemic? To make this question a bit more concrete consider the barn example once again. How does my knowledge that there is a barn in front of me come to be? To explain how this particular piece of human knowledge comes to be is

to explain how I know that there is a barn in front of me. Suppose, then, that my answer to the question ‘How do you know there is a barn in front of you?’ is ‘I can see it’. To see the barn is to perceive an object rather than a fact. On the assumption that this kind of seeing is genuinely non-epistemic, and that my knowledge that there is a barn in front of me can be satisfactorily explained by saying ‘I can see it’, it looks like we now have a straightforward case of something epistemic coming to be out of something non-epistemic.¹⁸

Anyone who argues in this way is going to have to deal with a range of seemingly powerful objections, including the following:

- (i) ‘I can see it’ isn’t a satisfactory answer to ‘How do you know there is a barn in front of you’ because, as already argued, it could be true that I see the barn in front of me without knowing that there is a barn in front of me.
- (ii) Insofar as ‘I can see it’ is taken to be a satisfactory answer to the question it is because it is understood as elliptical for ‘I can see that there is a barn in front of me’. Explanations of our knowledge simply in terms of object perception are incomplete.
- (iii) I can’t see that there is a barn in front of me without seeing the barn. To see the barn is to see an object but there is no reason to regard this kind of object perception as non-epistemic. To the extent that seeing the barn is part and parcel of seeing that there is a barn there, seeing the barn is itself a form of epistemic seeing.

These objections are, of course, closely related. The force of (i) is that ‘I can see it’ is not a satisfactory answer to ‘How do you know?’ unless, as (ii) claims, it is taken as elliptical for

something epistemic. But ‘I can see it’ can’t be elliptical for something epistemic unless, as (iii) claims, it describes an epistemic form of object perception.

The question raised by (i) is this: just because it would be possible for me to see a barn in front of me without knowing that there is a barn in front of me does it follow that ‘I can see it’ is not a satisfactory explanation of my knowledge that there is a barn in front of me? It would follow on the assumption that satisfactory explanations have to be entailing explanations but we already seen that this assumption is questionable. In that case, what is the best way of dealing with scenarios like (a), (b) and (c)? Clearly, if I know that there is a barn in front of me and am trying to explain how I know then it can’t be that I don’t know what a barn is or think I am hallucinating. What is true is this: for me to know that there is a barn in front of me by seeing the barn, there are various background conditions that need to be fulfilled. Some of these background conditions might be described as subjective since they have to do with the capacities of the knower. Other conditions are objective since they have to do with the knower’s environment. It is a subjective condition on my knowing that there is a barn in front of me that I know what a barn is, and an objective condition that I am not in fake barn country.

If I see a barn in front of me and satisfy all the relevant subjective and objective conditions then I know that there is a barn in front of me. To say that I see that there is a barn in front of me is to imply that the subjective and objective conditions on epistemic seeing have been fulfilled. Seeing that there is a barn in front of me is, as it were, the result of seeing a barn in front of me in the right subjective and objective circumstances. Does it follow that, as (ii) claims, ‘I can see it’ is an incomplete answer to ‘How do you know?’, or only complete insofar as it is elliptical for ‘I can see that...’? On the first of these issues a

natural thought is that what counts as a complete explanation of a person's knowledge that P is highly context-dependent. In a context in which there is no question that the relevant subjective and objective conditions are fulfilled 'I can see it' says everything that needs to be said to explain one's knowledge.¹⁹ On the issue of whether 'I can see it' is elliptical for 'I can see that there is a barn in front of me' what can be said is this: while seeing the barn can add up to seeing that there is a barn there when certain further conditions are fulfilled one would be hard pushed to give a non-circular account of what these further conditions are.²⁰ In addition, from the fact that seeing the barn can add up to seeing that there is a barn there it does not follow that the latter is the source of one's knowledge. It is the seeing of the barn that tells one that there is a barn there. It wouldn't tell one that there is a barn there if, say, one lacked the concept of a barn but possession of this concept is just an enabling condition for knowing by seeing that there is a barn there.

Indeed, it is very hard to see how 'I can see that there is a barn there' could be the ultimate explanation of my knowledge that there is a barn there even though it is some kind of explanation. One could not see that there is a barn there if one were not visually aware of the barn but one could be visually aware of the barn without seeing that there is a barn there. One sees that there is a barn there because, among other things, one sees the barn, and this is one clear sense in which, as Mark Johnston puts it, 'the object-directed attitude is more basic than that the propositional attitude of seeing that p' (2006: 274). The fact that one sees that there is a barn there has a deeper explanation, and part of the explanation is that one sees a barn.²¹

None of this puts any pressure on the idea that the seeing that explains the knowing in such cases is non-epistemic. The worry is presumably that insofar as the seeing of the

barn contributes to one's propositional knowledge it is no longer non-epistemic. How can it be non-epistemic given that one recognizes what one sees as a barn? If this is the concern to which (iii) gives expression then there is no need to worry. On this reading (iii) assumes that non-epistemic seeing is incompatible with knowing or recognizing but this assumption is mistaken. The point about simple seeing is not that it is incompatible with knowing but rather that it is compatible with not knowing or not recognizing. Even if one recognizes the barn as a barn and knows that there is a barn there one could have seen the barn without recognizing it as a barn or knowing that there is a barn there. This is what makes simple seeing non-epistemic. Unlike epistemic seeing, it doesn't entail recognizing or knowing.

We are now in a position to give a more helpful answer to our friends from a distant planet. The worry was that it is unhelpful to explain our knowledge of the world by saying that sometimes we can see or otherwise perceive that such-and-such is the case. This kind of perceiving is too close to knowing to be genuinely explanatory. Here is a better answer: we human beings are so constituted as to be able to perceive objects and their properties. This kind of perceiving is not itself a form of knowing. It neither is, nor implies, any knowledge of the world. Yet it can result in knowing when we recognize the objects and properties that we perceive for what they are. There is a genuine transition from not knowing to knowing and we are only able to make this transition because we are a certain way (we can perceive objects and recognize them) and because the world is a certain way (it isn't full of fakes). This looks like a full-blooded explanation of our knowledge, or at least as full-blooded an explanation as it seems reasonable to demand. It represents our knowledge as originating in our non-epistemic perceptual encounters with objects and their properties and so represents our knowledge of the world as coming to be out of something that is not knowledge of the

world. It does not explain our knowledge on the basis of anything that is ‘too close’ to the knowledge that we are trying to explain.

Does this attempt to explain our knowledge of the world in a way that satisfies EPR have fatal consequences for our understanding of our knowledge? Stroud’s objection to old-fashioned foundationalism is that it makes scepticism inevitable. Scepticism is a problem for theories that ‘try to explain knowledge of facts that we do not, strictly speaking, perceive as knowledge arrived at by inference or reasoning from something we do perceive or are aware of in experience’ (Stroud 2004: 168). The theory that our knowledge of the world has non-epistemic foundations is not a theory of this kind even though it might be described as a novel form of foundationalism. The proposal that seeing the barn can amount to knowing that there is a barn there when certain subjective and objective conditions are met is not the proposal that one’s knowledge that there is a barn there is inferential or that one does not, strictly speaking, see that there is a barn there. Seeing a barn in front of me can give me a reason to believe that there is a barn in front of me but this does not mean that this belief is arrived at by reasoning. There is no transition from one set of propositions to another since non-epistemic seeing isn’t propositional.

Clearly, there are many more questions about human knowledge that curious beings from a distant planet might want to ask. For example, they might want to know more about our capacity to perceive objects and their properties or about the origins of the background conceptual and recognitional capacities that make it possible for us to know things about the objects that we perceive. For example, suppose our alien interlocutors come back with the following worry: ‘Okay, so we understand that if you already have the concept of a barn then perhaps you can come to know that there is a barn in front of you by seeing the barn.

However, to have the concept of a barn is to know what a barn is. How, then, did that piece of knowledge come to be? More generally, how did humans come to have any concepts at all? Unless you can explain that you haven't made all your knowledge intelligible all at once'. Answer: we acquire concepts by learning a language. Knowing a language makes it possible for us to know things about the world that it wouldn't otherwise be possible for us to know. Unless we believe, incoherently, that language comes to be out of something that implies or presupposes the knowledge of the world that it makes possible the dependence of perceptual knowledge on conceptual capacities poses threat to EPR.²²

To sum up, the difficulties we face in understanding human knowledge in general have turned out to less intractable than they seemed at the outset, and we have unearthed two responses to Stroud's dilemma that neither lead to scepticism nor amount to the abandonment of the project of seeking a philosophical understanding of our knowledge of the world. One response settles for a kind of explanatory modesty and sees no need to concern itself with EPR. The other response is more ambitious. It meets the challenge of explaining our knowledge of the world in a way that satisfies EPR by focusing on the non-epistemic foundations of our knowledge. Either way, the bark of Stroud's dilemma turns out to be worse than its bite. Far from being something that we can neither live with nor live without, EPR is a requirement that we can live with and live without.²³

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¹ Specifically, ‘S sees that P’ entails ‘S knows that P’. The existence of such an entailment is not uncontroversial but I’m taking it for granted here. The idea that ‘S sees that P’ entails ‘S knows that P’ is seemingly endorsed by Stroud in his 2004. There is a detailed account of epistemic seeing in Dretske 1969: 78-139.

² For more on the contrast between epistemic and non-epistemic or ‘simple’ seeing see Dretske 1969: 4-77, 2000a and 2000b.

³ As Dretske points out, ‘we describe our awareness of facts by using a factive complement, a that-clause, after the verb; we describe our awareness of things by using a (concrete) noun or noun phrase as a direct object of the verb’ (2000b: 115).

⁴ The distinction between a full-blooded and a modest account of our knowledge is intended to echo (though only faintly) the distinction between full-blooded and modest theories of meaning. See McDowell 1998 for a discussion of the latter distinction.

⁵ This is also account of enabling conditions given in Cassam 2007a: 16-22.

⁶ This is Williamson’s conception of a ‘way of knowing’. See Williamson 2000: 34 and Cassam 2007b for further discussion. For Williamson, seeing that P and knowing that P are related as determinate and determinable.

⁷ In recent work Stroud questions whether it is possible to have sensory knowledge without having any perceptual knowledge of the wider world. See Stroud 2008. Kant raises the same question in his Refutation of Idealism, where he argues that perceptual knowledge of spatial objects (‘outer experience’) is necessary for sensory knowledge (‘inner experience’). Doesn’t this cast doubt on the suggestion that sensory knowledge has no epistemically prior basis? Not necessarily. For one thing, the claim that perceptual knowledge is necessary for sensory knowledge is not equivalent to the claim that sensory knowledge is based on

perceptual knowledge. The latter could be no more than an enabling condition for sensory knowledge. In addition, the thesis that outer experience is necessary for inner experience doesn't imply that outer experience is epistemically prior to inner experience unless it is also the case that inner experience is not necessary for outer experience.

⁸ Alvin Goldman is someone who talks about 'pathways to knowledge' and stresses their multiplicity. See the preface to Goldman 2002.

⁹ Stroud also uses this scenario to pin down what we are after in the philosophy of knowledge. See his 2000a: 4-5.

¹⁰ It isn't circular if one accepts Stroud's claim that circularity can only enter the picture when there is a chain of inference or a course of reasoning by which a conclusion is reached. There are broader conceptions of circularity on which attempts to explain knowing in terms of epistemic seeing might come out as circular.

¹¹ Cf. McDowell 1998.

¹² In fact entailment is a double irrelevance. There are cases in which 'S Φ s that P' does entail 'S knows that P' but in which it would be no explanation of S's knowledge to point out that he Φ s that P. 'S regrets that P' is an example of this kind. See Cassam 2007b for further discussion and references.

¹³ More generally, if S is a perceiver and M a material object then, as Snowdon points out, 'it is not a necessary truth that if S sees M then S can gain knowledge of M' (1998: 301).

¹⁴ Not having the concept of a barn prevents me from knowing that there is a barn in front of me because I can't know that there is a barn in front of me without grasping the proposition that there is a barn in front of me and I can't grasp this proposition if I don't know what a barn is. Cf. Williamson 2000: 38.

¹⁵ As Dretske puts it, his claim is that ‘simply seeing X is compatible with no beliefs about X’ (2000a: 100). Contrary to what some commentators have thought, he is not claiming that simply seeing X is incompatible with beliefs about X or that this kind of seeing occurs only if, as a matter of fact, the seer has no beliefs about X.

¹⁶ Following Dretske I take “objects” and “thing” to be ‘dummy terms’ that cover ‘such disparate items as tables, houses, cats, people, games, sunsets, signals, tracks, shadows, movements, flashes, and specks’ (Dretske 2000a: 98).

¹⁷ See Dretske 1969 for a more precise account of the distinction between primary and secondary epistemic seeing.

¹⁸ There is a much more detailed version of the argument of this paragraph in Cassam 2008.

¹⁹ ‘He told me’ might, in the right circumstances, also be a good answer to ‘How do you know?’. However, as Sydney Shoemaker observes ‘seeing is the paradigmatic explanation of knowing’ (1996: 201). This idea is explored in Cassam 2008.

²⁰ This is partly a reflection of the fact that it is hard to come up with non-circular necessary and sufficient conditions for propositional knowledge. See Williamson 2000 for further discussion.

²¹ This is backed up by Johnston’s argument from veridical hallucination. Suppose that Macbeth hallucinates a dagger at a relative distance and orientation at which there happens to be an exactly matching dagger hanging by an invisible thread. Suppose, further, that the hallucination occludes the dagger so that Macbeth doesn’t see the dagger. In this case of veridical hallucination ‘we are not inclined to say that Macbeth sees that there is a dagger there. The case of veridical hallucination shows that this is not because it is false that there is a dagger there. Nor is this because Macbeth lacks the justified belief that there is a dagger

there. (His hallucination may be fully convincing). Macbeth does not see that there is a dagger there because he is not visually aware of the dagger. This last attitude is not a relation to a fact or a proposition. But it must be invoked as part of the explanation of why Macbeth cannot be assigned certain attitudes to propositions' (Johnston 2006: 274).

²² Clearly there is a lot more to be said about all of this but not here.

²³ I gave an earlier version of this paper at the Edinburgh Conference on Scepticism on 31 May 2008. Thanks to Duncan Pritchard for the invitation to speak, to Klemens Kappel for his response, and to members of the audience for searching questions and comments. Thanks, especially, to Barry Stroud. I have benefited from many discussions of the themes of this paper with Ciara Fairley, who also commented on earlier drafts. Finally, I thank the anonymous reviewer for this journal for some very helpful comments and suggestions.