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TITLE: Troubles for Epistemological Disjunctivism: Reflective Access to The World

According to Pritchard's Epistemological Disjunctivism (henceforth, ED):

if S has perceptual knowledge that p, then S's rational support R (namely, S's *seeing that p*) is such that S can have reflective access to R and R is factive (i.e., R entails p).

In a context in which epistemology has been centred on the opposition between internalism and externalism, ED seems to offer (if true) a middle way which would not force us to choose one side over the other. By requiring one's rational support to be both factive and reflectively accessible, ED combines the insights traditionally underpinning both epistemic externalism and epistemic internalism respectively. If true, ED would thus represent, according to Pritchard, the *holy grail* of epistemology. Crucially, things are not as smooth as they look. In this paper, I focus on the so-called Access Problem for Pritchard's ED, and I argue, *contra* Pritchard, that it does represent a real challenge for his ED.

Similarly to the more notorious McKinsey-paradox concerning the incompatibility between semantic externalism and privileged access, the Access Problem shows that, by requiring one's rational support to be both reflectively accessible and factive, ED leads to the absurd conclusion that we can have reflective knowledge of specific empirical propositions. The Access Problem runs – schematically – as follows:

- (1) S can have reflective knowledge that R.
- (2) S can have reflective knowledge that R entails p
- (C) Therefore, S can have reflective knowledge that p.

The first premise (1) is a direct consequence of ED, for, as mentioned above, according to ED, one's rational support R is reflectively accessible. The second premise (2) is a thesis about S's knowledge of the truth-entailing nature of R. This premise is taken to be a very plausible one, for it merely assumes that one can know by reflection that *seeing that p* entails p being true. Crucially, assuming a closure principle for reflective

knowledge, the conclusion (C), which is the result of S's making a competent deduction, looks unacceptable. Fortunately, Pritchard seems to have a solution to this problem. He argues that

“the access problem does not represent a challenge to [ED] because the conclusion [...] fails to follow from the premises, contrary to first appearances”.

But what is Pritchard's motivation for rejecting the entailment from (1) and (2) to the conclusion (C)? In a nutshell, the reason why the conclusion does not follow from the premises is, according to Pritchard, that although one can have reflective knowledge of one's rational support *R*, once we specify that one's rational support is the empirical reason that one *sees that* *p*, then it becomes clear that S's knowledge that *p* (as stated in the conclusion) is not reflective after all, for it *essentially depends* on S's *seeing that* *p*. As Pritchard maintains when reformulating the Access Problem, what follows from (1) and (2) is not (C), but, at most, the following modified conclusion (MC):

(MC) S can know by reflection alone that her reason for believing the specific empirical proposition *p* is the factive reason *R* that entails *p*.

But is MC really the strongest claim we can get from (1) and (2)? I believe it is not.

This paper is divided into three sections. In the first section, after reconstructing Pritchard's response to the Access Problem, I argue that Pritchard fails to provide a satisfactory solution to it. More precisely, I offer a diagnosis of where Pritchard's argument goes wrong. I show that Pritchard's response illegitimately relies on the so-called principle of agglomeration, according to which, if S knows that [*p*], and S knows that [*q*], then S knows that [*p* and *q*]. I argue that, by doing so, Pritchard's response fails to address the real worry underlying the original Access Problem, namely, one which involves the possibility of knowing by reflection alone the conceptual implications that follow from one's previous reflective knowledge, assuming that reflective knowledge is closed under competent deduction. If Pritchard wants to resist the Access Problem, he should consider the original formulation, one involving the closure principle for reflective knowledge, and not the weaker principle of agglomeration. I thus argue that

Pritchard faces a dilemma: either he rejects a very plausible closure principle for reflective knowledge, or he is unable to resist the Access Problem.

In the second section, I consider an alternative strategy Pritchard could embrace in order to resist the foregoing dilemma. That is, I consider a novel restricted closure principle for reflective knowledge:

(RC) If one knows by reflection that p , and one knows by reflection that p entails q , and one competently deduces q from p while retaining her knowledge that p , thereby coming to believe that q *for the first time* (on a reflective basis, or on any other basis), then one comes to know by reflection that q .

The advantage of appealing to RC is straightforward: Pritchard could provide an explanation of why (C) fails to follow from the premises, while anyway retaining a version of closure. By posing an extra condition (i.e., one deductively comes to know that q *for the first time*), the weaker RC is, as I will show, entailed by non-restricted closure, thereby allowing Pritchard to reject the latter without rejecting the former version of closure. Crucially, I argue that there are at least two problems with this strategy: first, there are no independent motivations for RC besides avoiding the foregoing dilemma, thereby making this move *ad hoc*. Second, and more importantly, I argue that RC strikes against our intuition that it is possible to come to know a specific proposition in more than one way.

Finally, I briefly compare my diagnosis of where Pritchard's argument goes wrong with the one offered by Tim Kraft (2015). I argue that Kraft's appeal to the source/content distinction is unmotivated, and it fails to capture the real reason why the Access Problem arises for Pritchard's ED in the first place.

I conclude that, as things stand, the Access Problem represents a real challenge for Pritchard's ED.