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## **In Defence of a Reidian Moderate View of our Hinge Commitments**

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What is the epistemic status of our hinge commitments? Are they endowed with epistemic properties such as truth, justification or rationality? Within the Hinge Epistemology field, different views try to account for the specific status of our hinges – that is, of these general and implicit commitments, such as “there is an external world”, “our intellectual powers are reliable” or “my cognitive situation is unproblematic”. Such views target a category of beliefs<sup>1</sup> that seem to disobey the epistemic rules governing the mass of our particular empirical judgments (such as, “the book I'm reading is blue-covered” or “Vitré is a city in Brittany of 18000 inhabitants”). Their challenge is to account for a seeming paradox: while these hinge commitments are not taken for granted for any specific reasons, it seems that it is plainly legitimate for us to assume them, and that our not accepting these things on the basis of specific reason does not outright entail scepticism.

Some Hinge Epistemology theories take very tenuous conceptual roads, in the sense that what distinguishes them from theories that do not put much stress on the specific epistemic status of our hinges may seem slight. Thus, while Annalisa Coliva (2016, p. 13-14) contends that our hinge commitments play a rule-like role, she continues to take them to be “propositions” in the broader sense of the term, to attribute to them the property of truth within the limits “of a very minimal understanding of truth”, and to regard them as assessible in terms of epistemic (ir)rationality.

Here, I want to consider such a strategy. This view begins with the distinction between particular perceptual judgments that are endowed with epistemic properties and hinges that are not. But, in the course of its development, this view comes close to attributing to hinges the very properties it was supposed to exclude at the beginning. The question then becomes whether it's still worth maintaining the initial distinction. Indeed, to insist that even though our hinges are unjustifiable, they are still epistemically rational, seems to blur the basic distinction on which any self-respecting Hinge Epistemology must be grounded. Though, it is such a bold move that Coliva makes in her book *Extended Rationality*.

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<sup>1</sup> In the Hinge Epistemology literature, to speak equally of “beliefs” and “commitments” may seem strange. Indeed, to speak of “commitments” itself seems to take a stance in the debate, since “commitments” is sometimes used to suggest that our hinges are different from “assumptions”, and even that they are different from “propositions”. However, for now, I speak of “hinge commitments” from a general point of view, without meaning to imply a specific view on them, and so leaving aside the question of whether they are propositional (and if so, whether they are beliefs). The latter question, however, is undeniably intertwined with the issue of whether our hinges are gifted with epistemic properties. For a non-doxastic view of our hinges, see Pritchard (2016). For a non-propositional view, see Moyal-Sharrock (2016).

The core point of her strategy consists in granting epistemic rationality to our hinge assumptions when they are deprived of warrant. To support this thesis, Coliva develops a Moderate account of perceptual justification, that is supplemented by a theory about epistemic rationality. In what follows, I will take the path of the Moderate view, while developing another species of it, so as to escape (hopefully) some of the difficulties Coliva's view faces.

I think we find in Thomas Reid's texts the ingredients to develop such a view. Of course, this eighteenth-century Scottish philosopher did not write so as to take a stance on the Hinge Epistemology spectrum. But he was already concerned with the distinction between propositions whose evidence needs to be underlined “by reasons or arguments”, and propositions of which we're entirely certain, even though “there is no searching for evidence, no weighing of arguments” for them<sup>2</sup>. As I will show, Reid combines this distinction with the idea that the latter propositions, called “principles of common sense” or “first principles of truth”, *are* originally warranted (more precisely, that we are entitled to take them for granted and to take their warrantedness for granted). He also takes these principles as the *root* of reason, even though they are not taken for granted owing to reasons<sup>3</sup>. In other words, he does not *extend* epistemic rationality to them, as part of what looks like an epistemic rescue operation, since they are warranted and rational right from the start.

To grasp the specifics of such a stance, I will start by expounding the background of Coliva's Moderate view – that is to say, the dilemma between Conservatism and Liberalism concerning the question of the ingredients of the justification of our particular perceptual judgments. I will then present Coliva's view, and explain why her Moderate account needs to be supplemented by the extended rationality theory. Given the difficulties to which this view gives rise, in a last moment, I will develop a Reidian Moderatism, and explain why it is better suited to account for the peculiar epistemic status of our hinge commitments.

## I. The Dilemma between Conservatism and Liberalism

If asked to display the justifications for one's empirical beliefs, one might think that they are so interconnected with other beliefs that displaying their epistemic credentials leads to unsurmountable difficulties. For instance, one may think that to be justified in believing that “I am in a room with other people”, I must be justified in taking for granted some general facts about the world and my cognitive relation to it – that is to say, some hinges. For, if the latter were not justifiably assumed, relying on my mere perceptual experience, I would be unable to discern the situation in which I justifiedly believe that “I am in a room with other people” from the possibility,

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<sup>2</sup> In the *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (hereafter EIP), VI, 4, p. 452.

<sup>3</sup> In *An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense* (hereafter IHM), 1, IV, p. 19; 5, VII, p. 68-69.

say, that I am an envatted brain that believes “he is in a room with other people”. In Coliva's words, I could not overcome my “cognitive locality” (p. 18<sup>4</sup>). That's why it seems that one must warrantably assume that one is endowed with a normal human body, which interacts with three-dimensional objects, and that one's perceptual powers are trustworthy. The focus on such necessary conditions of the justification of our empirical beliefs is the gist of the conservative view. Here is Coliva's presentation of it:

**“Conservative account of perceptual justification:** a belief about specific material objects that P is perceptually justified iff, absent defeaters, one has the appropriate course of experience (typically an experience with content that P) and it is warrantably assumed that there is an external world (and possibly other general propositions, such as “My sense organs work mostly reliably”, “I am not the victim of massive cognitive deception”, etc.).” (p. 29-30)

So far, so good. But are we sure that our particular empirical judgments are completely safe<sup>5</sup>? To be so, we should be able to show that the general assumptions in which they are embedded are themselves epistemically safe. That's where the shoe pinches: for, to show that they have such a positive epistemic status, we cannot but appeal to the very empirical judgments they sustain. As is well-known, this triggers Crispin Wright's diagnosis of Moore's proof of an external world<sup>6</sup>. According to his conservative position, this proof is epistemically circular because to know that “Here is a hand”, Moore needs precisely the “ancillary information” that “there is an external world” (2004). In other words, for the premise to be justified, the conclusion must already stand fast for us and be warranted. As a consequence, the proof is ineffective: it cannot transmit warrant from the premise to the conclusion. Moreover, if one cannot spell out the justification of our assumptions, it will have an impact on the epistemic status of our empirical judgments. Deprived of epistemic credentials, these judgments are in danger of falling into the sceptical abyss.

In the face of this problem, one might suppose that, to be warranted, our empirical judgments do not need to be caught by the safety net of warranted assumptions. This is the core idea of the liberal view<sup>7</sup>. Here is Coliva's definition:

**“Liberal account of perceptual justification:** a belief about specific material objects that P is perceptually justified iff, absent defeaters, one has the appropriate course of

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<sup>4</sup> Hereafter, unless otherwise indicated, all quotations of Coliva are from *Extended Rationality*.

<sup>5</sup> “Safe” is meant here in the technical sense of the “safety” views of knowledge or justification.

<sup>6</sup> “Proof of an External World” (1939), in Moore (1959). It goes like this: (I) Here is my hand, (II) If there is a hand here, there is an external world, (III) There is an external world.

<sup>7</sup> See Pryor (2004).

experience (typically an experience with representational content that P).” (p. 21)

To be justified, our particular empirical judgments do not need to be backed by warranted presuppositions, for our perceptual experience does all the epistemic work. And insofar as we have no reason to think that we are the victims of a sceptical trick, we are justified in believing that “here is a hand”.

Of course, this line of thought faces a difficulty too. Briefly, Liberals are accused of being too permissive. We may fear that such an account counts as among our justified-true-beliefs some beliefs that do not deserve this status. For instance, though my belief that “Here is a hand” derives from an appropriate perceptual experience, that experience is subjectively indiscernible from the experience I would have if I were the victim of sceptical deception. Can I really know that “Here is a hand”, if I am unable to exclude the possibility that I am an envatted brain? If this is the case, my empirical knowledge would be mere low-cost knowledge.

Now that the stalemate between Liberals and Conservatives has been set out, we understand why Coliva's analysis is so stimulating. The reason is that it strives to pave the way to an account of the justification of our perceptual warrants which is “located between the Scylla of the liberal architecture of empirical warrants and the Charybdis of the conservative structure of empirical warrants” (p. 33). In the next section, I will present the main lines of her arguments, so as to pinpoint some of their shortcomings later on.

## **II. Coliva's Moderatism**

Coliva's main motivation is to develop an account of the justification of our perceptual warrants which avoids the objection of easy knowledge without falling prey to scepticism. Doing so is a real challenge when one intends to stay within the framework of Hinge Epistemology, which is ruled by this Wittgensteinian motto: “some propositions are exempt from doubt, are as it were like hinges on which those turn” (*On Certainty*, § 341). Indeed, the exemption from doubt seems to drag along with it the exemption from *any* epistemic property and attitude (truth and knowledge included). It remains to be seen how this exemption is not merely a discreet invitation to scepticism.

### **1. Unwarranted and Unwarrantable Assumptions**

Let's start with Coliva's view that our hinge assumptions are neither warranted nor warrantable (p. 38). Coliva's take on the issue consists in granting to Conservatism that one must assume some general beliefs for one's empirical judgements be justified, while denying that these

assumptions must be justified. As it is a *via media* between Conservatives and Liberals, it is natural that this position should be termed “Moderatism”. Here is how Coliva introduces it:

“**Moderate account of perceptual justification:** a belief about specific material objects that P is perceptually justified iff, absent defeaters, one has the appropriate course of experience (typically an experience with content that P) and it is assumed that there is an external world (and possibly other general propositions, such as “My sense organs work mostly reliably”, “I am not the victim of massive cognitive deception”).” (p. 34)

According to Coliva, we don't have to honour the Conservative request to justify our general assumptions, since it is “too demanding” (p. 19). Indeed, Conservatives specify that these assumptions should be “*independently warranted*” (p. 29, emphasis added). To be appropriately warranted, they should have an *antecedent* warrant (p. 89). Surprisingly enough, Coliva does not specify in her definition of the Conservative theory that general assumptions must be warranted *in this way*<sup>8</sup>. However, that is how the relevant requirement must be understood. To take Moore's proof as an example, according to Conservatives, one should find a warrant for the conclusion that “there is an external world” which does not stem from “outer observation” (p. 31). But it is impossible to carry out such a request<sup>9</sup>. This hinge proposition is warranted by the very empirical judgments which it warrants. Moore's proof is therefore unable to provide an *independent* and *first* warrant for this assumption. That's why it is not deemed satisfying. And that's why Coliva considers that it is the *entire* request of warrant for our most deep-seated commitments that should be dismissed.

## 2. The Appeal to Extended Rationality

Of course, as such, Moderatism is not sufficient to stifle sceptical doubts. It must be supplemented by an argument that explains why the lack of warrant for our hinge commitments does not sap the warrant of our perceptual judgments. Indeed, if one accepts the principle of closure under known entailments for warrant, one cannot maintain that our hinge assumptions are not warranted while at the same time holding that we have warrants for our perceptual judgments.

Coliva's solution consists in distinguishing between the principle of closure for warrants and

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<sup>8</sup> Moreover, such a warrant must be available “in the abstract space of reasons” and “accessible, at least in principle, by us (perhaps only by epistemologists)” (p. 30).

<sup>9</sup> This is what distinguishes Moore's proof from the proof dubbed ZEBRA, which goes on like this (p. 29): 1. Here is a zebra, 2. If there is a zebra here, then it is not a cleverly disguised mule, 3. This is not a cleverly disguised mule. Coliva notes that, in contrast to Moore's proof, there are indeed “independent ways of warranting” ZEBRA's conclusion (p. 31, p. 96-97). Whereas one cannot imagine an argument for MOORE's conclusion that does not appeal to outer observation, one can do so for ZEBRA's less general conclusion (indeed, one can prove that “the animal in the pen is not a cleverly disguised mule”, without relying on the information gotten by outer observation that “it is a zebra” – using a DNA test, for instance, p. 30).

the principle of closure for rational mandates. If the principle of closure for warrants does not hold unconditionally, its application to rational mandates is subject to no restrictions. More precisely, as these basic assumptions are the very conditions of possibility of epistemic rationality (that is to say, of our ability to produce, assess and withdraw from ordinary empirical beliefs), they are included within it. As Coliva puts it, “their being constitutive of [epistemic rationality] suggests (...) that they are *part of it*” (p. 129). In this way, epistemic rationality spills over into its conditions of possibility. Hence, Coliva claims:

“**Epistemic rationality**<sub>ER</sub>: it is epistemically rational to believe evidentially warranted propositions and to accept those unwarrantable assumptions that make the acquisition of perceptual warrants possible in the first place and are therefore constitutive of ordinary evidential warrants.” (p. 129)<sup>10</sup>

With such an element in place, the Moderate conception of our perceptual warrants does justice to the Hinge Epistemology program while escaping the terrible consequences the sceptic predicts. Although our hinge assumptions are not warranted, they are not illegitimate; it's still epistemically rational to accept them.

### 3. Too Much or Not Enough Extended?

However, it seems that Coliva's Moderatism does not do all the work she wants it to do. As a result of its trying to satisfy both parties, it ends up with a conception of epistemic rationality that is both too extended and too restricted.

*Too extended:* The first accusation may come from the Hinge Epistemology field. For one may feel that once one has insisted that our hinge commitments are neither warranted nor warrantable, it is a strange move to concede that, nevertheless, they are still under the thumb of the principle of closure for rational mandates. To encompass our hinge commitments within the scope of epistemic rationality seems to break with the key idea of the Hinge Epistemology program: namely, that our hinge commitments are devoid of any epistemic properties. When Coliva says that the moderate “has another [epistemic] good in stock” (p. 137), one cannot but be under the impression that she pulls epistemic rationality out of her hat. One may fear that it puts Moderatism on a slippery slope, at the bottom of which is the view according to which our hinge commitments are not outside the scope of familiar epistemic properties after all (and among these epistemic

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<sup>10</sup> “epistemic rationality *extends* beyond evidentially justified beliefs to those assumptions which, while unjustifiable, make the acquisition of epistemic justifications possible in the first place” (2018, f. 13, emphasis added).

properties, there are at the very least truth and falsity)<sup>11</sup>.

*Too constrained:* Of course, Coliva has an answer to this worry. She notes that to include our hinge commitments in the domain of epistemic rationality does not speak to their truth: “it remains that a rational mandate is not anything that can speak to the likely truth of what it, in fact, mandates” (p. 134, p. 11, p. 160-161). She insists that a rational mandate for our hinge assumptions “is by no means an epistemic warrant”, that it “is no proof or evidence of their truth” (p. 135). If so, the key idea of the Hinge Epistemology program is saved. However, what's the use of stretching epistemic rationality to include our hinge commitments, if this inclusion does not speak to their likely truth? If one is concerned with a rationality which is *epistemic*, then the propositions it governs should have some “truth-relevant merits”. However we understand this “vague catch-all property”<sup>12</sup>, it must refer to a property that is more or less directly related to the *truth* of the propositions it is attributed to. If not, what's the use of calling it *epistemic* rationality?

As a matter of fact, Coliva wants to close the epistemic gap that's created if we reject an unrestricted principle of closure for warrants. Such a gap is indeed a big price to pay. But what about retaining closure for rational mandates: doesn't it come to robbing Peter to pay Paul? Coliva is right to hold that the “insularity-of-reasons thesis”<sup>13</sup> reeks of scepticism, and that we must find a way of doing justice to the role of our hinge commitments without leaving them outside the realm of rationality. But I think that her strategy of injecting rationality into our hinge commitments is still too timid. In her criticism of Wright's entitlement strategy, she argues that since non-evidential warrants are not “guides to the truth” of our hinge assumptions (p. 6, p. 32), epistemic entitlements are simply not “in the skeptic's ballpark” (p. 33). But can't we reciprocate and point out that the very same point holds for the epistemic rationality strategy? Insofar as it does not provide a reason that supports the truth of our hinges, I am not sure that the sceptic will feel relieved by such an extension procedure. Our hinge assumptions seem to enjoy a kind of rationality *in extremis*, as if they were granted a bottom-of-the-range epistemic property as a last resort.

To be sure, Coliva spares no effort to trying to explain in which sense our hinge assumptions may still be considered as *true*. She admits that “we can combine a certain view of rationality (...) with the idea that *after all* it tracks the truth, *at least in some sense*” (p. 147, emphasis added). She

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<sup>11</sup> As a consequence, hinges could be the objects of epistemic attitudes (like belief or knowledge). Coliva sometimes seems to incline towards this view: she notes that “we can actually consider [the principle of uniformity of nature] justified, true, in an evidentially constrained way, and even known.” (p. 156); “I think we can grant, in a somewhat externalist spirit, that we know that *modus ponens* is valid. Yet, we cannot *claim* that knowledge, for we cannot prove that we have it to someone who does not already reason in accord with *modus ponens*, and would thereby be willing (implicitly) to admit its validity” (p. 178). But one may wonder whether this ban on knowledge claims is useful, for one may doubt that there are sceptics who do not already reason in accord with *modus ponens*. Likewise, one may doubt whether there are sceptics who do not already use their sense perception and memory, or sceptics who do not already rely on testimony or on the principle of uniformity of nature.

<sup>12</sup> I take this expression from Pust (p. 209).

<sup>13</sup> Pritchard (2016, p. 55).



treads very carefully when she speaks of the *truth* of our hinge assumptions. If they may be said to be true, it is only “in a minimal way” (p. 149, p. 37). According to this deflationary, anti-realist conception of truth, our hinge assumptions are not true because they track a mind-independent reality or because there is evidence that speaks in their favour. To say they are true merely comes to hold that “what they state is how things are, *given our overall Weltbild*” (p. 149).

Coliva admits that this non-realist conception of truth may seem unfit to meet the sceptical challenge. After all, this challenge is originally grounded on the idea that there may be a gap between mind-independent objects and the way they are portrayed in our worldview. But an anti-realist theory of truth evades such an issue because, according to it, truth is always indexed to a worldview. It seems to me that to grant such a truth to our hinge assumptions is really just to offer stone instead of bread. The sceptic does not urge us to show that our hinge assumptions are minimally true. When he questions our ability to know that “there is an external world”, he means that we may not be able to know that there really are mind-independent objects and facts. When he questions our ability to know that “our intellectual powers are reliable”, he means that we may not be able to know that our intellectual powers are correctly attuned to the world. In other words, our hinge assumptions are right from the start realistically-framed. That's why it is not trivial to predicate their truth: to do so is to say something about a mind-independent world. And it implies that such assumptions could equally be false<sup>14</sup>. Therefore, as far as I understand it, the sceptical challenge goes hand in hand with a realistically-loaded conception of truth.

That being said, even if Coliva strives to explain why “someone with anti-realist proclivities can confront the skeptical challenge” (p. 37), one has the feeling that the challenge she tackles has shifted and has been drawn away from its initial formulation. Coliva is well aware of this, qualifying her theory as a “partial re-orientation of the debate about skepticism” (p. 150). In the same vein, she distinguishes between direct and indirect responses to scepticism, and admits that her view belongs to the latter category, since it accepts “the basic skeptical point that fundamental assumptions (...) cannot be warranted” and argues “that the devastating consequences skeptics draw from such a conclusion can in fact be blocked” (p. 127).

However, I think that we can make room for a direct response to scepticism within Moderatism. To do so, let's have a look at Reid's texts. Indeed, Reid anticipates the tenets of the Moderate position, without evading the sceptical issue. Not surprisingly, he develops his view

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<sup>14</sup> Coliva seems to oscillate between the view according to which, with such a minimalist conception of truth, one cannot think that our hinge assumptions might be false (p. 150), and the view that makes room for such a possibility (thus, she admits that our hinge assumptions “have a semantic content, which can be meaningfully negated” (p. 149); she distances herself from the strict normative conception of our general assumptions, considering that they have a descriptive content, that they say something about the world). Facing the difficulty, she campaigns for retaining “a more nuanced” view, according to which “it is one thing to consider the content of a sentence and another to determine what role it plays in context” (p. 125-126).

within a realist metaphysical frame, deeming as perfectly relevant and rational the attempt to settle the question whether our hinge commitments are true in a substantial sense. Of course, as he puts it, “in controversies of this kind, [truth] labours under a peculiar disadvantage” (EIP, VI, 4, p. 461). But it's worth trying to take up the challenge. After all, its intelligibility does not commit us to its success. As Reid notices, “if we are deceived in it, we are deceived by Him that made us, and there is no remedy” (IHM, 5, VII, p. 72). In other words, the possibility of a complete mismatch of our intellectual powers and the world is not ruled out. Our hinge assumptions may really be false. As Coliva remarks, such a view “is the strongest ally of skepticism” (p. 152, p. 37). But whereas she regards this as a drawback, I take it as speaking in favour of Reid's view. Indeed, it takes the sceptical threat very seriously<sup>15</sup>. Here lies one of the main differences between a Reidian Moderatism and Coliva's Moderatism. Now, let's present its other characteristics.

### **III. Another Species of Moderatism: a Reidian View**

As should be clear, I think that Moderatism is actually the best option in accounting for the architecture of our perceptual warrants. But to my mind, it must be reframed so as to escape the problems faced by the view that supplements it with the extended rationality theory. Coliva admits that “Moderates are legion” (p. 39) and that her view is only one species among others that belong to the same Moderate family. She mentions the naturalistic Humean brand, as well as the pragmatist and the externalist ones (p. 9, p. 20, p. 39-42). As a matter of fact, what I call “Reidian Moderatism” has a contemporary counterpart in Sosa's qualified externalism. To grasp its import, let's go back to the issue concerning the structure of our perceptual warrants.

#### **1. General Assumptions and Particular Judgments: which Epistemic Dependence?**

Reid's view to the question of how our empirical judgments are related to our hinge assumptions is quite complex<sup>16</sup>. For sure, he insists on the fact that our natural perceptual judgments are examples of immediate knowledge, as they are not inferred from more certain beliefs. But he also points out that they could not constitute any knowledge if we did not take for granted some principles about the reliability of our intellectual powers and other general facts about the world. For instance, to know that “I'm writing on a table covered with a green napkin”, I must take for

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<sup>15</sup> So, contrary to what is traditionally advanced, Reid does not merely turn the sceptic's demand down flat. The accusation of dogmatism dates back to Kant in his *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics* (Preface, Ak. IV: 259). For a contemporary view according to which common sense reeks of dogmatism, see Lynch (2012). For a discussion of the idea that a common sense philosophy holds back the possibility of a rational discussion about fundamental epistemic principles, see Thébert (2020).

<sup>16</sup> See Thébert (2015).

granted that “the natural faculties, by which [I] distinguish truth from error, are not fallacious” (EIP, VI, 5, p. 480)<sup>17</sup>. For Reid, however, such general assumptions are *as immediately known as* natural perceptual judgments. They constitute a kind of natural endowment, without which we could not have any knowledge. At the same time, they do not compromise the immediacy of our judgments. The latter are precisely the occasions to exert them.

This Reidian approach can help us to apprehend the kind of epistemic dependence that exists between particular empirical judgments and hinges. If the latter must be taken for granted for our particular empirical judgments to be knowledge, this committal attitude does not downgrade the epistemic status of our particular empirical judgments. And if it is only in the course of our making the latter judgments that we express our hinge commitments, the position under consideration does not imply that these commitments are epistemically derived from the particular judgments we form. As a matter of fact, Reid's treatment of our natural committal attitude goes beyond Liberals and Conservatives, because he treats it more like a competence than a belief. If one considers it as a doxastic attitude, similar to the one implied in our particular empirical judgments, one tends to analyse its relationship with these judgments in terms of precedence. Wondering which one is epistemically prior to the other, this reading results in chicken and egg problems. But if one considers hinge commitments as competences, then particular empirical judgments depend on them as particular exercises of an ability depend on powers of the mind. Moreover, these powers are not exercised independently of experience. They gradually develop according to our experiences<sup>18</sup>. As Reid puts it, they are in this respect similar to moral feelings:

“The passion of love, with all its concomitant sentiments and desires, is naturally suggested by the perception of beauty in the other sex. Yet the same perception does not suggest the tender passion, till a certain period of life. A blow given to an infant, raises grief and lamentation; but when he grows up, it as naturally stirs resentment, and prompts him to resistance. Perhaps a child in the womb, or for some short period of its existence, is merely a sentient being: the faculties, by which it perceives an external world, by which it reflects on his own thoughts, and existence, and relation to other things, as well as its reasoning and moral faculties, unfold themselves by degrees; so that it is inspired with the various principles of common sense, as with the passions of love and resentment, when it has occasion for them.” (IHM, 5, VII, p. 72)

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<sup>17</sup> This seventh first principle of contingent truths has a contemporary counterpart in Pritchard's *über-hinge proposition*: “one is not radically and fundamentally mistaken in one's beliefs” (2016, p. 95).

<sup>18</sup> We can draw a parallel between Reid's remark and Wittgenstein's note: “When we first begin to *believe* anything, what we believe is not a single proposition, it is a whole system of propositions. (Light dawns gradually over the whole.)” (*On Certainty*, § 141)

Thus, our hinge commitments are like belief-forming competences that gradually develop “when we have occasion for them” – that is to say, when our understanding grows mature and we are placed in the appropriate empirical circumstances<sup>19</sup>. Our particular empirical judgments are precisely the occasions to develop these commitments, they are their instantiations, the form taken by these commitments when we effectively interact with the world. That's why, in some respects, general basic assumptions depend on particular empirical judgments. They are not in our mind far before our empirical judgments, as if they were waiting for them. They do not precede the latter as a premise precedes a consequence. For instance, an infant does not believe right from the start that “there is an external world”. This commitment is progressively set up as he grows up and has more and more experiences. But in other respects, particular empirical judgments depend on general basic assumptions:

“we are merely animal before we are rational creatures; and it is necessary for our preservation, that we should believe many things before we can reason. How then is our belief to be regulated before we have reason to regulate it? Has Nature left it to be regulated by chance? By no means. It is regulated by certain principles, which are parts of our constitution; whether they ought to be called animal principles or instinctive principles, or what name we give to them, is of small moment” (EIP, II, 21, p. 238-239)

The principles Reid refers to operate like a framework for our particular beliefs, one that puts them on a good epistemic track. They are referred to as “animal” or “instinctive” because they are irresistible “principles of belief in human nature”. Reid speaks of them as “the voice of Nature” (EIP, VI, 6, p. 497)<sup>20</sup>. To take Sosa's words, they are a kind of “information encapsulated in our fully functioning perceptual faculties triggered through normal childhood development” (2013, f. 7, p. 201). So, contrary to what is implied by the Conservative view, and with which Coliva's Moderatism seems to concur, our hinge assumptions are not “collateral” or “extra” information,

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<sup>19</sup> For a similar view, see Sosa (2013, p. 194): “When one first believes that *here is something red and round*, that belief derives from the exercise of competence to discern colors and shapes, and this competence is tantamount to implicit beliefs (commitments) of the form: *if it looks red (round) then it is red (round)*. And these must themselves have proper standing if they are to play their justifying role. And this standing cannot have derived merely through blatantly bootstrapping induction from corresponding particular beliefs. A human developmental competence is thus plausibly involved in the acquisition of such perceptual abilities that come paired with implicit corresponding general beliefs (or commitments).”

<sup>20</sup> In the *Essays on the Active powers of the Human Mind* (hereafter EAP), Reid shows the same indifference relatively to the way we name this specific attitude. Be it “an animal principle” or “a belief”, this is not what matters. Our contemporary problem of nomenclature (Are hinges propositions? Beliefs? Assumptions? Animal commitments?) is not his. “Whether brutes have any thing that can properly be *called* belief, I cannot say; but their actions show something that looks very like it. If there be any instinctive belief in man, it is probably of the same kind with that which we ascribe to brutes, and may be specifically different from that rational belief which is grounded on evidence; but that there is something in man which we *call* belief, which is not grounded on evidence, I think, must be granted.” (EAP, III, I, II, p. 110-111, my emphasis)

totally disconnected from our perceptual judgments (p. 92). They are not a kind of accompanying information, which is additional to the information delivered by our perceptual judgments. They are rather a kind of background information, within which our judgments take place.

Now, let's see how this co-supportive relation of our judgments with our hinges paves the way to a distinctive brand of Moderatism.

## 2. Another Kind of Warrant for our Hinge Assumptions

In order to grasp what is distinctive about it, I will allow myself to rework some of Coliva's definitions. To my mind, the main difference between Conservatism and Moderatism does not lie between one party requiring a warrant for our hinge assumptions and the other party contenting itself with unwarranted assumptions. In my view, both parties require that our hinge assumptions be warranted if our particular perceptual beliefs are to be warranted. The difference lies in the *kind* of warrant that is requested. Consider a more fine-grained sort of Conservatism than the one defined by Coliva. According to it, to have warranted perceptual beliefs, we must have an *independent and antecedent* warrant for our hinge assumptions.

**Revised Conservative account of perceptual justification:** a belief about specific material objects that P is perceptually justified iff, absent defeaters, one has the appropriate course of experience (typically an experience with content that P), it is assumed that there is an external world (and possibly other general propositions, such as “My sense organs work mostly reliably”, “I am not the victim of massive cognitive deception”, etc.), *and these assumptions are independently and antecedently warranted.*

Now, for Coliva's Moderatism, to have warranted perceptual beliefs, we are not required to have *any* warrant *at all* for our hinge assumptions. I think that truth lies somewhere in the middle. Indeed, even if our perceptual beliefs must be embedded in warranted commitments, we are not required to have an *independent* and *antecedent* warrant for them. This is the gist of the Reidian Moderate account of perceptual justification.

**Reidian Moderate account of perceptual justification:** a belief about specific material objects that P is perceptually justified iff, absent defeaters, one has the appropriate course of experience (typically an experience with content that P) and it is warrantably assumed that there is an external world (and possibly other general propositions, such as “My sense organs work mostly reliably”, “I am not the victim of massive cognitive deception”, etc.). However, *these assumptions need not be independently and*

*antecedently warranted.*

In a normal setting, the warrant for our hinge assumptions is not gained, and not acquired through a specific procedure. In accordance with proper functionalism, it is a *natural* warrant, which is hard-wired in our constitution (to be distinguished from the warrant that is obtained through a Moorean proof); and, in accordance with a strand of epistemic permissivism, it is an epistemic default property, which may be subsequently defeated. As I will show later, it is only in sceptical contexts that one needs a warrant for our hinge assumptions. Further, in such a context one looks for a warrant that is actually not a first warrant and that does not need to take the same form as the original one.

At the end of the day, Coliva's Moderatism tends towards the radical view according to which we *cannot* provide any warrants for our hinge assumptions<sup>21</sup>, for it is based on a constrained conception of what a good warrant should be. It is the requirement to look for such an unattainable warrant that makes the outlook for Conservatism success gloomy and favours Coliva's Moderate view<sup>22</sup>.

But if we do not rely on such a demanding conception of warrant, we can take our hinge assumptions to be warranted<sup>23</sup>. After all, something can be warranted, even if we are not in a position to show how it is the case. This is the case with our hinge commitments: we are confident of their positive epistemic status, even if we are unable to spell out the reasons that support our confidence. Our certainty needs no evidence (understood as *discerned* and *clearly articulated* evidence). Here is how Reid makes the point:

“We need to be informed of many things before we are capable of discerning the evidence on which they rest. Were our belief to be withheld till we are capable, in degree, of weighing evidence, we should lose all the benefit of that instruction and information, without which we could never attain the use of our rational faculties.”

(EAP, III, I, II, p. 111)<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> “one may then think that moderatism is, after all, compatible with the view that there could be such independent warrants for [our hinge assumptions], though they are not needed to have a perceptual warrant for [our particular perceptual judgments]. Yet, I think that if there were independent (...) warrants for [our hinge assumptions], then it would be unclear, at least to me, why we should favor the moderate architecture of empirical warrant rather than the conservative.” (f. 24, p. 191)

<sup>22</sup> At the end of the day, one could think that the Reidian view belongs to the conservative camp more than to the moderate one. But if we are more stringent in how we define Conservatism, it is plainly legitimate to classify Reid's position as among (this slightly different kind of) Moderatism.

<sup>23</sup> Therefore, Reidian Moderatism needs not to be supplemented by the Extended Rationality view. With Coliva's Moderatism, one wondered why epistemic rationality should extend to its conditions of possibility, while one's hinge assumptions were unwarranted. Was it not a double standard? One understands now that this strategy was made possible because Coliva sustained a very demanding conception of warrant.

<sup>24</sup> See also: “We cannot give a reason why we believe even our sensations to be real and not fallacious; why we believe

So, our faith is in inverse proportion to our stock of evidence. As Reid says about children:

“when their faith must be greatest, the evidence is least. They believe a thousand things before they ever spend a thought upon evidence. Nature supplies the want of evidence, and gives them an instinctive kind of faith without evidence.” (EAP, III, I, II, p. 111-112)

We must be careful not to be misled by these words. What Reid deems impossible, is to fulfil the internalist condition of starting with weighing the evidence (understood as articulable reasons) that speaks in favour of our hinge commitments. As he readily admits: “I seem to want that evidence (...) which gives perfect satisfaction to an inquisitive mind.” (EIP, II, 20, p. 233). However, we do not have to feel sorry for not being able to fulfil such a contract, since we are not committed to our hinge assumptions in virtue of the consideration of such a specific evidence. Even so, they are not evidence-free. If we lack a certain type of evidence, we do not lack evidence altogether. Their evidence is inbuilt, so to speak, as a natural gift<sup>25</sup>. This is what an externalist conception of justification<sup>26</sup> brings to Moderatism. Drawing on Sosa's distinction between animal knowledge and reflective knowledge, we can see ourselves as having animal knowledge of our hinge commitments, insofar as we are not required to have an epistemic perspective on them, a perspective from which we could see that the source of these commitments is reliably truth conducive. Nevertheless, since our hinge commitments enable us to gain perceptual knowledge, we are *prima facie* entitled to take them as knowledge too<sup>27</sup>, a knowledge which takes the form of an

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what we are conscious of; why we trust any of our natural faculties. We say, it must be so, it cannot be otherwise. This expresses only a strong belief, which is indeed the voice of Nature, and which we therefore in vain attempt to resist. But if, in spite of Nature, we resolve to go deeper, and not to trust our faculties, without a reason to shew that they cannot be fallacious, I am afraid, that seeking to become wise, and to be as gods, we shall become foolish, and being unsatisfied with the lot of humanity, we shall throw off common sense.” (EIP, VI, 6, p. 497).

<sup>25</sup> “that all mankind have a fixed belief of an external material world, a belief which is neither got by reasoning nor education, and a belief which we cannot shake off, even when we seem to have strong arguments against it, and no shadow of argument for it, is (...) a fact for which we have *all the evidence that the nature of the thing admits*” (IHM, 5, VIII, p. 76, my emphasis); “it is no less a part of the human constitution, to believe the present existence of our sensations, and to believe the past existence of what we remember, than it is to believe that twice two make four. *The evidence of sense, the evidence of memory, and the evidence of the necessary relations of things, are all distinct and original kinds of evidence, equally grounded on our constitution.* None of them depends upon, or can be resolved into another. To reason against any of these kinds of evidence is absurd; nay, to reason for them is absurd. *They are first principles*; and such fall not within the Province of Reason, but of Common Sense” (IHM, 2, V, p. 32, my emphasis). Here Reid criticises the Modern philosophers who strive to reduce all evidence to the evidence of axioms and reasoning, of which we are plainly conscious. On the contrary, for him, there are different kinds of evidence, and some of them do not subscribe to the internalist policy. Therefore, if warrant is evidentially construed, the principle of closure holds for warrant too. If Wright's epistemic entitlement strategy has strong similarities with Reid's view, it is on this core that he parts with him: for Reid, in some respects, original warrant is an “unearned warrant”, a warrant “for free”, but it is certainly not a “non-evidential warrant”.

<sup>26</sup> For the view according to which there are externalist elements in Reid's take on justification, see Thébert (2017).

<sup>27</sup> For Sosa, our presuppositions are not simply true, they must be warranted: “one cannot simply install [a] presupposition at will, arbitrarily, and expect thereby to acquire epistemically justified beliefs. One's presuppositions must have appropriate epistemic status; they must themselves be justified” (2009, p. 219). That's why our “presupposing correctly and justifiedly” is a form of knowing.

epistemic competence rather than an explicit belief<sup>28</sup>.

Now, we can gain reflective knowledge of our hinge commitments. This is precisely the role of Moore's proof and similar arguments.

### 3. A New Role for Moore's Proof

Coliva's reluctance to give due attention to the externalist version of Moderatism has to do with the fact that it would reduce Moore's proof to a mere bootstrapping argument (p. 126, f. 31, p. 186). I think, on the contrary, that it enables us to consider Moore's proof afresh.

Indeed, one has seen that, for our particular perceptual beliefs to be justified, we need to be committed to general facts about the world and our intellectual endowment, but that these assumptions do not need to be antecedently and independently warranted (because they are naturally warranted). Now, I add that our hinge assumptions are still warrantable later on (in a partially circular way).

Even if it is partially circular, Moore's proof does not suffer from a dire shortcoming. Granted, that proof cannot give us a justification, where we had none before, for our assumption that "there is an external world". Nevertheless, it provides us with a warrant that is worth considering, for Moore's proof serves to make the relevant commitment explicit, to illustrate its truth and to confirm its positive epistemic status. From this perspective, Moore's proof gains an epistemic dignity in sceptical contexts, when our capacity to have reflective knowledge of our hinge commitments is questioned. In such contexts, our particular empirical judgments provide a *subsequent* warrant to believe the conclusion. As Sosa puts it, they provide a "boost of meta-sophistication", that is surely not required for animal knowledge (2013, p. 200). But thanks to it we gain an enhanced perspective on the status of our hinge commitment, from which it appears as truth conducive. Reid makes room for a reflective knowledge of our hinges:

"A person who has lived so long in the world, as to observe that nature is governed by fixed laws, may have some rational ground to expect similar events in similar circumstances; but this cannot be the case of the child. His belief therefore is not

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The objection of dogmatism may come up here. But can't we reciprocate and accuse the sceptic of being dogmatic when he requires that we have a justification for our hinges prior to our being committed to them? Moreover, according to this Reidian reading, knowledge is not necessarily a specific achievement, an acquired epistemic state. Animal knowledge may be our epistemic condition by default, in which case the onus of the proof is on the sceptic's side.

<sup>28</sup> Coliva expresses doubts about "the anti-skeptical effectiveness of such a strategy" (p. 83). According to her, it is incumbent to Sosa "to say something more about the nature of this competence, in order to guarantee that it keeps track of the truth". If taking them as competences poses a problem, let's take our hinge commitments as beliefs. Whatever their form, hinge commitments are states of the subject that are not deprived of normative features (they are epistemically assessable as proper or not, justified or not).



grounded on evidence<sup>29</sup>. It is the result of his constitution.” (EAP, III, I, II, p. 113)

The experience of the uniformity of the laws of nature may be a good reason to believe that, in the phenomena of nature, “what has constantly happened in the past will keep repeating itself in the future” (Coliva, 2015, p. 157). But this reason comes *after* our commitment, and is marked by the very hinge assumption we try to justify<sup>30</sup>. However, since such reasons do not constitute the first warrant for the relevant commitments, this is not a crippling flaw. Moreover, the epistemic circularity such arguments involve is only partial, since the epistemic status of our hinge commitments has changed through the proof: when it is an assumption of the premise, it operates as a natural faculty, the good epistemic standing of which does not need to be underlined by an extra support; and when it occurs at the end of the proof, as its conclusion, it takes the form of an explicit belief, which is now consciously integrated in our doxastic system<sup>31</sup>. Therefore, through the proof, the epistemic value of the hinge commitment has been improved. That's why, although our hinge commitments are originally warranted, we are not barred from subsequently discovering and articulating rational grounds for them.

## Conclusion

Taking inspiration from Reid, I have developed an externalist version of the Moderate account of perceptual justification. My aim was not to make a straightforward criticism of Coliva's view, since it appears that in the discussion about the ingredients of our perceptual justification, she is the one who makes room for the type of good option that I have described. The Moderate view I defend is clearly a sub-species of the genus she has highlighted. But I have also slightly distanced myself from her view. Briefly, while she defends a species of Moderatism which is built on an anti-

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<sup>29</sup> Here again, the fact that the belief is not grounded on a specific kind of evidence does not mean that it has *none*.

<sup>30</sup> Reid regularly notices that our instinctive beliefs may be subsequently supported by reasons, of which we have been ignorant for a long time. “I gave implicit belief to the informations of Nature by my senses, for a considerable part of my life (...) I consider this instinctive belief as one of the best gifts of Nature. I thank the Author of my being who bestowed it upon me, before the eyes of my reason were opened, and still bestows it upon me to be my guide, where reason leaves me in the dark. And now I yield to the direction of my senses, not from instinct only, but *from confidence and trust in a faithful and beneficent Monitor, grounded upon the experience of his paternal care and goodness.*” (IHM, VI, 20, p. 170, my emphasis); “a man would believe his senses though he had no notion of a Deity. He who is persuaded that he is the workmanship of God, and that it is a part of his constitution to believe his senses, may think that a good reason to confirm his belief. But *he had the belief before he could give this or any reason for it*” (EIP, II, 20, p. 231-232, my emphasis); “Perhaps it may be said, that the experience we have had of the fidelity of memory is a good reason for relying upon its testimony. I deny not this may be a reason to those who have had this experience, and who reflect upon it. But I believe there are few who ever thought of this reason, or who found any need of it. It must be some very rare occasion that leads a man to have recourse to it; and in those who have done so, *the testimony of memory was believed before the experience of its fidelity*, and that belief could not be caused by the experience which came after it.” (EIP, III, 2, p. 256, my emphasis). The experience of God's goodness, the conviction that our constitution is the work of the Almighty and the experience of the fidelity of memory are subsequent warrants for our hinges, but they are not the reasons for which we originally took them for granted.

<sup>31</sup> See Sosa (2009, f. 9, p. 78; f. 14, p. 223); Thébert (2013).

realist theory of truth and an internalist conception of warrant, I have developed a conception of Moderatism that appeals to a realist theory of truth and an externalist conception of warrant<sup>32</sup>. So defined, each of these specific forms of Moderatism is perfectly coherent. And as she notices, the choice between them is all a matter of how we conceive “the relationship between epistemology and metaphysics” (p. 150).

I have also shown that the way we take a stance within the Hinge Epistemology field is all a matter of finding the right balance, the challenge being to do justice to the specificity of our hinge assumptions without falling prey to scepticism. It seems to me that the good stance consists in avoiding the most radical versions of Hinge Epistemology. That's why I have argued in favour of a Reidian Moderate view of our hinge commitments, according to which we are *prima facie* entitled to take some general epistemic principles as granted. This implies that we do not need to bring out an antecedent and independent warrant to be legitimately committed to them. Ultimately, I think that Reid's texts give us food for thought in developing such a stance. One of their merits is to show us that, far from being high-wire walking, such a view remains on solid ground – that is to say, on plain common sense<sup>33</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup> Coliva notices that an externalist view goes hand in hand with a realist metaphysics (f. 44, p. 37; p. 187; f. 15, p. 199).

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