



## Replies to Chudnoff, Lemos, and McCain

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### Abstract

These replies to critical comments by Elijah Chudnoff, Noah Lemos, and Kevin McCain on my book *Radical Skepticism and Epistemic Intuition* begin (after the Introduction) with Section 2, where I address a cluster of complaints from Chudnoff and McCain in connection with skepticism-supporting *underdetermination principles*. (These principles play a significant role in my portrayal of radical skepticism and in my Reidian response to it.) In Section 3, I reply to some objections from Lemos concerning a claim (from *Radical Skepticism and Epistemic Intuition*) that I call ‘*the Paradigm-case Thesis*’. In Section 4, I respond to some concerns that McCain and Lemos raise in connection with my discussion of the *rationality of seemings*. Lastly, Section 5 covers a few remaining objections from McCain and Lemos having to do with Chisholm’s “Problem of the Criterion,” the comparative strength of seemings, and the challenge of identifying which seemings count as epistemic intuitions.

### Keywords

evidentialism – intuition – particularism – seemings – skepticism – underdetermination

### 1 Introduction

I’m deeply grateful to Eli Chudnoff, Noah Lemos, and Kevin McCain for contributing to this symposium on my book, *Radical Skepticism and Epistemic Intuition* (hereafter *RS&EI*). I’m honored to have such excellent and penetrating comments from philosophers whose work I admire so much. Their careful and critical remarks give me the opportunity in these replies to clarify and expand on what I said in the book in what I hope will be helpful ways.

The next three sections of these replies will be topically focused. In Section 2, the longest section, I will address a cluster of complaints from Chudnoff and McCain in connection with the *underdetermination principles* that play a significant role in my portrayal of radical skepticism and in my Reidian response to it. In Section 3, I will reply to some objections from Lemos in connection with a claim of mine that (in *RS&EI*) I call ‘*the Paradigm-case Thesis*’. And in Section 4, I will respond to some concerns that McCain and Lemos raise in connection with my discussion of the *rationality of seemings*. Section 5 covers a few remaining objections from McCain and Lemos in connection with Chisholm’s “Problem of the Criterion,” the comparative strength of seemings, and the challenge of identifying which seemings count as epistemic intuitions.

## 2 Concerns about My Underdetermination Principles

### 2.1 *How Underdetermination Principles Feature in RS&EI*

Early on in *RS&EI* (16–17), I insist that in responding to radical skepticism, one should not overestimate or underestimate its appeal.<sup>1</sup> My effort to avoid these errors leads me to focus on underdetermination arguments for radical skepticism.<sup>2</sup> What is distinctive about underdetermination arguments for radical skepticism is their emphasis on the claim that our evidence for certain important classes of our beliefs is compatible not only with the truth of those beliefs but also with their falsity. For example, our sensory experience is compatible with our perceptual beliefs being radically mistaken; and our memory impressions are compatible with our memory beliefs being wildly false. In short, the evidence for these beliefs *underdetermines* their truth.

Underdetermination arguments for radical skepticism rely on underdetermination principles as premises. Here’s the underdetermination principle on which I initially focus:

UP: If the existence or occurrence of the evidence E on which S’s belief B is noninferentially based does not entail B’s truth, then S’s belief B is justified in a way that is dependent on E only if S is able to infer B via good reasoning from the existence or occurrence of E. (28–29)

1 Unless otherwise noted, page numbers in parentheses refer to Bergmann (2021)—i.e., to *RS&EI*.

2 On pp. 17–20, I emphasize that such underdetermination arguments avoid *overestimating* the appeal of radical skepticism. On pp. 30–34, I emphasize that they avoid *underestimating* its appeal.

Here's a restatement of UP that is equivalent to UP as given above but clearer about the fact that it is requiring for justification that at least one of two conditions is satisfied (without making a claim about what is sufficient for justification):

UP-equiv: S's belief B is justified in a way that is dependent on E only if either:

*Entailment*: the existence or occurrence of the evidence E on which S's belief B is noninferentially based entails B's truth

or

*Access to Good Reasoning*: S is able to infer B via good reasoning from the existence or occurrence of E.<sup>3</sup>

Skeptical arguments relying on UP as a premise go as follows: they begin by spelling out what UP says about a particular class of our beliefs (e.g., our perceptual beliefs); then they insist that *Entailment* and *Access to Good Reasoning* are not satisfied for that class of beliefs; from this they conclude that beliefs in that class are not justified.<sup>4</sup>

The first two parts of *RS&EI* are structured around two main kinds of response to underdetermination arguments for radical skepticism. Each response accepts as plausible that the *Entailment* condition is not satisfied by the beliefs under discussion.<sup>5</sup> But one of these responses—the one I call 'inferential anti-skepticism'—says that, contrary to this skeptical argument, the *Access to Good Reasoning* condition is satisfied for the class of beliefs in question. That is, it says that we *are* able to infer beliefs from this class via good (deductive or nondeductive) reasoning from the existence or occurrence of the evidence on which we noninferentially base such beliefs. The other response, which I call 'noninferential anti-skepticism', grants that neither the *Entailment* condition nor the *Access to Good Reasoning* condition is satisfied for the class of beliefs in question. Nevertheless, it resists conceding that our beliefs are not justified

3 Since UP and UP-equiv are equivalent, I will sometimes speak of UP as requiring for justification that either *Entailment* or *Access to Good Reasoning* is satisfied, even though this isn't as explicitly obvious in UP as it is in UP-equiv.

4 There's a little more to these underdetermination arguments for radical skepticism than this, but that's the main gist of them. For a full statement of the argument, see McCain (2023: 122–123), included in this symposium, where he quotes from *RS&EI* (29).

5 In *RS&EI* (22–26) I raise objections to the claim, by epistemological disjunctivists and knowledge-first epistemologists, that our perceptual beliefs satisfy the *Entailment* condition; I argue that this claim involves underestimating the appeal of skepticism.

by insisting that UP itself is mistaken. Part I of *RS&EI* argues that inferential anti-skepticism, which grants UP, fails as a response to underdetermination arguments for radical skepticism. Part II of *RS&EI* defends the view that my own version of UP-denying noninferential anti-skepticism is a satisfying and successful response to such skeptical arguments. Thus, UP plays an important role in the book, both as a contributor to its organization and as a target of my objections.

The most important concerns raised by Chudnoff (2023) and McCain (2023) about *RS&EI* have to do with underdetermination principles like UP. They claim that UP is not the *intuitively appealing* skeptical contender for our allegiance that I set it up to be (even though I ultimately reject it), which suggests that I'm guilty of overestimating the appeal of radical skepticism, something I've said I'm keen to avoid. In Sections 2.2–2.5, I will address some of the objections raised by Chudnoff and McCain to the claim that UP is intuitively appealing. But then, in Sections 2.6 and 2.7, I will highlight ways in which Chudnoff and McCain are misguidedly supportive of UP-like principles.

## 2.2 *Chudnoff on UP vs. UP\**

I'll begin by responding to some worries raised by Chudnoff about the relation between UP, another principle that I call 'UP\*', and what I say is the key idea behind both. Early in *RS&EI* (28–29), I focus on UP as a premise in an underdetermination argument for perceptual skepticism and memory skepticism. Later in the book, I bring up a different principle, UP\*, for use in an underdetermination argument for skepticism about the *a priori*:

UP\*: If S cannot see independently (of justified believing that B's content is necessarily true) that the existence or occurrence of the evidence E on which S's belief B is noninferentially based entails B's truth, then S's belief B is justified in a way that is dependent on E only if S is able to infer B via good reasoning from the existence or occurrence of E. (90–91)

Here's a restatement of UP\* that is equivalent to UP\* as given above but, again, clearer about the fact that it is requiring for justification that at least one of two conditions is satisfied:

UP\*-equiv: S's belief B is justified in a way that is dependent on E only if either:  
*Access to Entailment*: S can see independently (of justified believing that B's content is necessarily true) that the existence

or occurrence of the evidence E on which S's belief B is non-inferentially based entails B's truth<sup>6</sup>

OR

*Access to Good Reasoning*: S is able to infer B via good reasoning from the existence or occurrence of E.<sup>7</sup>

UP\* differs from UP by requiring for justification (if *Access to Good Reasoning* is not satisfied) *Access to Entailment* rather than *Entailment*.

As Chudnoff notes (2023: 98), despite this difference, I say that “the key idea behind both is the same” (91). The key idea I have in mind is this:

**Key Idea:** if you can't independently see that the evidence entails the belief's truth (perhaps because you can see that it doesn't entail it), you need to be able to infer the belief's likely truth from that evidence if that belief is to be justified. To put it another way, the key idea is that justification requires that we are able to see how it is that a belief's evidence implies the belief's truth (or likely truth). (91)

The following first-person skeptical reflection supports this Key Idea:

**Skeptical Reflection:**

- *Evidential Support*: when I think about some of my beliefs (e.g., my perceptual beliefs) and what they are based on (i.e., the evidence for them, consisting of some of my conscious mental states—such as my sensory

6 Why not shorten *Access to Entailment* so that it drops the “independence” qualification and says:

*Access to Entailment (short form)*: S can see that the existence or occurrence of the evidence E on which S's belief B is noninferentially based entails B's truth?

I explain why in *RS&EI* (86–91). Very briefly: what we're looking for in UP\* is the ability to see an entailment connection between one's evidence and one's belief that doesn't depend on first seeing that the belief is necessarily true. For example, my experience of having a headache entails Fermat's Last Theorem (because necessary truths are entailed by all facts); but my seeing this entailment depends on my first justifiedly believing that Fermat's Last Theorem is necessarily true. *Seeing the entailment* in this way isn't what UP\* is looking for (for example, in a bizarre case where the “evidence” on the basis of which I believe Fermat's Last Theorem is my experience of having a headache).

7 Since UP\* and UP\*-equiv are equivalent, I will sometimes speak of UP\* as requiring for justification that either *Access to Entailment* or *Access to Good Reasoning* is satisfied, even though this isn't as explicitly obvious in UP\* as it is in UP\*-equiv.

experiences), I start to wonder whether it makes good sense for me to take that evidence (as I do) to be supportive of those beliefs.

- *Entailment or Good Reasoning*: it's natural to think that this evidence would give me such support if I could see that it entailed those beliefs. Failing that, it's natural to think that, in order for that evidence to provide me with support for those beliefs, there must be some good (deductive or nondeductive) reasoning—reasoning that I have access to—that connects this evidence to those beliefs.
- *Implications for Justification*: if I can see that this evidence doesn't entail those beliefs (or if I can't see, independently of seeing that those beliefs are necessarily true, that it does entail those beliefs)—i.e., if my beliefs are in this sense *underdetermined* by my evidence—and I can't think of any good reasoning connecting that evidence to those beliefs, then it's hard to see how the evidence counts (for me) as adequately supportive of those beliefs. In that case, it's doubtful that those beliefs of mine are justified in virtue of being based on that evidence.

The Key Idea is a quotation from *RS&EI*; this Skeptical Reflection supporting it has been added here for clarification. As I see it, the line of thinking in Skeptical Reflection is what has motivated philosophers ever since Descartes to try to come up with anti-skeptical arguments showing that our sensory-experience evidence supports the perceptual beliefs based on it.

Chudnoff (2023: 99) objects to my claim that the Key Idea mentioned above is behind *both* UP and UP\*. He notes that a UP-backed skeptical argument pointing out that certain beliefs fail to satisfy *Entailment* “starts from the *fact* that [the evidence for those beliefs] can be misleading,” whereas a UP\*-backed skeptical argument pointing out that certain beliefs fail to satisfy *Access to Entailment* “starts from the *subjective possibility* that” your evidence for those beliefs is misleading. I would put the point as follows:

- A UP-backed skeptical argument starts from the fact that *it's false that* your evidence entails the truth of your beliefs;
- a UP\*-backed skeptical argument starts from the fact that *you can't see (independently of justifiedly seeing that the beliefs in question are necessarily true) that* your evidence entails the truth of your beliefs;
- the italicized words capture the difference between the two skeptical arguments.

If Chudnoff (with his talk of subjective possibility) is making this same point, then we're on the same page. On the basis of this difference, he concludes that although the Key Idea might be what's behind  $UP^*$ , it is not what's behind  $UP$ , which doesn't focus on this subjective possibility. Moreover, according to Chudnoff, the Key Idea seems unrelated to underdetermination: "I find it odd to think of this as a kind of underdetermination argument at all. It concerns epistemic defeat or psychological destabilization" (2023: 99). So, there are two complaints: (i) given the difference between  $UP$  and  $UP^*$ , the Key Idea is (at best) what's behind  $UP^*$  but not  $UP$  and (ii) the Key Idea and  $UP^*$  seem unrelated to underdetermination.

In response to the first complaint, notice that a premise in a  $UP$ -backed skeptical argument will insist that *Entailment* isn't satisfied by the beliefs in question. This fits perfectly with the Key Idea, which speaks of a situation where "you can't independently see that the evidence entails the belief's truth (perhaps because you can see that it doesn't entail it)." This quotation from the Key Idea mentions (parenthetically) a scenario where you can see that the evidence doesn't entail the belief's truth, which is exactly what a  $UP$ -backed skeptical argument requires you to see in order to find compelling its premise that *Entailment* isn't satisfied by the beliefs under discussion. So, I don't see a good rationale for thinking (nor do I find it plausible) that the Key Idea is not what's behind  $UP$ . Of course, I also agree (and Chudnoff doesn't deny) that the Key Idea is what's behind  $UP^*$  as well. After all, the Key Idea speaks of a situation where "you can't independently see that the evidence entails the belief's truth" and this is exactly what a  $UP^*$ -backed argument insists upon with its premise that *Access to Entailment* isn't satisfied.

As for the second complaint, it seems to take for granted that if a  $UP^*$ -backed skeptical argument focuses in some way on epistemic defeat or psychological destabilization, it won't count as an underdetermination principle. I won't try to make a case that  $UP^*$ -backed skeptical argument doesn't focus in any way on epistemic defeat or psychological destabilization. Instead, I'll just emphasize that whether it does or not, it clearly does focus on underdetermination given that, by insisting that *Access to Entailment* isn't satisfied, it is insisting that the subject can't see (independently) that her evidence entails—i.e., doesn't underdetermine—the truth of the beliefs based on it. Another way to put the point is that by insisting that *Access to Entailment* isn't satisfied by the relevant beliefs, the  $UP^*$ -backed argument is saying that for all the subject knows or reasonably believes, her beliefs are *underdetermined* by her evidence.

So, I agree that  $UP$  and  $UP^*$  differ. But this difference doesn't undermine either my claim that the Key Idea is behind both or my view that they are both aptly called 'underdetermination' principles.



### 2.3 *Chudnoff and McCain on the Intuitive Appeal of UP*

Both Chudnoff and McCain agree with me that UP is false. But they also seem to think that UP has no intuitive appeal. According to McCain, “Bergmann’s formulation of the skeptical argument is problematic because UP is implausible” (2023: 128). And Chudnoff says that UP “does not seem true” to him and that my “motivations for UP are faulty” (2023: 100). If McCain and Chudnoff are right, that makes UP ill-suited to play the role I give it in *RS&EI*, where it is supposed to be (i) an appealing principle that helps to motivate the inferential anti-skepticism I critique in Part I of the book and (ii) a worthy target of my objections in Part II of the book.

What do I have to say in reply? When I explained (in *RS&EI*) why UP is appealing, I cited the work of Richard Fumerton as my inspiration.<sup>8</sup> Instead of merely repeating my initial defense of the plausibility of UP given in *RS&EI* (27–28), let me quote a passage from Fumerton (1995: 31), which inspired it:

If one examines classic arguments for strong local skepticism,<sup>9</sup> one can discover, I think, a recurring pattern. First, the skeptic indicates the class of propositions under skeptical attack. Then the skeptic attempts to exhaustively characterize the most plausible candidate for something that could conceivably justify, or make rational, belief in this kind of proposition. Next the skeptic attempts to drive a logical wedge between the available justification and the proposition it is supposed to justify. The wedge is logical. The claim at this point is only that the justification available for that belief does not logically guarantee the truth of the proposition believed. It is conceivable that someone has precisely that sort of justification [or evidence] even though the belief in question is false. At this point, the Cartesian skeptic might end the argument with the weak skeptical conclusion that it is not possible to know *with certainty* the proposition believed. But this conclusion does not get one strong skepticism. The strong skeptic goes on to argue that the logical gap cannot be bridged using any legitimate nondeductive reasoning.<sup>10</sup>

8 See p. 27, n. 27, where I cite Fumerton (1995: 31–36, 2006: 120–128).

9 Fumerton (1995: 29–31) contrasts global skepticism (which targets all our beliefs) with local skepticism (which targets a particular class of beliefs, such as our perceptual beliefs). And he contrasts weak skepticism (which denies we have knowledge) with strong skepticism (which says the beliefs in question aren’t justified or rational). So, strong local skepticism says we lack justification for a particular class of beliefs, such as our perceptual beliefs.

10 Fumerton (1995: 29) mentions that his discussion is indebted to chapter two of Ayer (1956). A comparison of the two books confirms this. The passage from Fumerton quoted in the main text (along with some subsequent paragraphs) mirrors very closely the material found in Ayer (1956: 81–85).



As Fumerton (1995: 33) goes on to mention, this seems to be how Hume was thinking about perceptual skepticism. We can see that our sensory-experience evidence doesn't entail the truth of our perceptual beliefs. The next question is whether we have access to any good non-deductive reasoning enabling us to infer our perceptual beliefs from the sensory-experience evidence. If we don't, then it seems that our perceptual beliefs aren't justified. Or so the skeptic thinks. Clearly, the principle implicit in the Fumerton quotation above is UP. And the question behind UP—i.e., the question of whether (as the Key Idea puts it) we can see how our evidence for our perceptual beliefs implies their likely truth—has haunted philosophers from Descartes through Kant and into the 20th century as well, for example, in the works of people like Russell (1912), Ayer (1956), BonJour (1985, 2003), Vogel (1990, 2008), and Alston (1993). Determining how best to address this question is not just one minor issue in addition to many others in the history of philosophical writing on radical skepticism; instead, it's one of the central preoccupations of that literature. Fumerton is right to take the line of thought sketched in the quotation from him above to be “a recurring pattern” in “classic arguments” for radical skepticism; he's right in thinking, in effect, that UP is widely viewed as intuitively appealing, even if it's often ultimately rejected.

In opposition to my appeal to Fumerton, McCain (2023: 124–125) says that Fumerton's work doesn't adequately support UP. But McCain misidentifies the part of Fumerton's work I was citing, which clearly does support UP. I cite Fumerton (1995: 31–36), which matches the pagination for a single brief section in Fumerton's book. McCain focuses on a principle from the *subsequent* section of Fumerton (1995: 36–37) and notes that the principle in question is irrelevant to UP. But I never claimed that *that* principle is relevant to UP. And UP is clearly implicit in (and relevant to) the passage from Fumerton quoted above, which is from the section in Fumerton (1995) that I cited in *RS&EI*.

In order to defend further the plausibility of UP (even though I ultimately reject it), I compare UP-based skeptical reflections to the “Bill and Phil” case (31). In that case, I'm a witness to a murder and I claim to have seen Bill commit it. But when I'm reminded that Bill has an identical twin brother Phil, I acknowledge that my visual evidence when I witnessed the murder, from the distance in question, is compatible with it being Phil rather than Bill who committed the murder. (This is to agree that *Entailment*, as applied to this belief about Bill being the murderer, isn't satisfied.) Moreover, I agree under cross-examination that I have no good evidence distinct from my visual evidence for thinking that Bill rather than Phil is the murderer—and therefore no good reasoning from that visual evidence to the conclusion that Bill rather than Phil is the murderer. (This is to agree that *Access to Good Reasoning*, as applied to

the belief that Bill is the murderer, is also not satisfied.) The natural conclusion to draw from this is that if I continue to believe that Bill is the murderer, that belief is not justified.<sup>11</sup> The comparison with a case of reflecting on the UP-based argument for perceptual skepticism runs as follows. Suppose I believe that my immediate environment is approximately as it perceptually appears to me to be. But suppose I then agree that my sensory-experience evidence (on which I base my perceptual beliefs) is compatible with some radical skeptical hypothesis being true instead (e.g., Descartes's evil demon hypothesis). This is to agree that *Entailment*, as applied to my perceptual beliefs, isn't satisfied. And suppose I also agree that I have no good evidence (aside from my sensory-experience evidence) for thinking that things are as they perceptually seem rather than as some skeptical hypothesis says they are—and therefore no good reasoning from that sensory experience to the truth of those perceptual beliefs. This is to agree that *Access to Good Reasoning*, as applied to perceptual beliefs, is also not satisfied. Then, just as I'm not justified in believing that Bill rather than Phil is the murderer, so also (says the skeptic) I'm not justified in believing that things are as they perceptually seem rather than as some skeptical hypothesis says they are. In this way, the Bill and Phil case helpfully highlights the appeal of UP.

But according to Chudnoff: “This [“Bill and Phil”] case provides no support for UP. One simple and general reason is that the possibility of error is not the same as the probability of error” (2023: 100). That's all Chudnoff says about the “Bill and Phil” case in support of his claim that it's a faulty motivation for UP. Given how little Chudnoff says on this topic, it's difficult to know exactly what he has in mind. As I understand it, his thought is that although it's *possible* both that I'm mistaken about Bill being the murderer and that we're mistaken in our standard sensory-experience-based beliefs about our immediate environment, the *probability* of being wrong in the former case is much greater than the probability of being wrong in the latter case. But that's just to say that we *do* have good (probabilistic) evidence or reason *aside from our sensory-experience evidence* for thinking that things are as they perceptually seem rather than as some skeptical hypothesis says they are. In other words, it's to say that something like *Access to Good Reasoning* as applied to perception is satisfied. But this doesn't count against UP, which says that if *Entailment* and *Access to Good Reasoning* are not satisfied, then the beliefs in question aren't justified. By saying that *Access to Good Reasoning* is satisfied, Chudnoff fails to

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11 Cases where such a belief does seem justified are ones where I do have some other evidence aside from that visual evidence for thinking that Bill is the murderer, such as good reasoning from that visual evidence to the conclusion that Bill is the murderer.

focus on the skeptical reflections I was considering at the end of the previous paragraph, which were intended to be *parallel* to what occurs in the Bill and Phil case—parallel in the sense that in each case *Access to Good Reasoning* is not satisfied. Moreover, if Chudnoff's point is that *Access to Good Reasoning* as applied to perception is satisfied, he should have taken issue with my extended argument against this claim in Chapter Three of *RS&EI*.

Thus, although I ultimately reject UP, it still strikes me as intuitively appealing in light of: (i) Skeptical Reflection from Section 2.2, (ii) Fumerton's discussion, quoted in part above, and (iii) the Bill and Phil case. So Chudnoff and McCain are mistaken insofar as they think that UP is *not* an intuitively appealing principle (even if they're right to think, as I do, that it's false).

#### 2.4 *Chudnoff on the Zeno-Skepticism Comparison*

In *RS&EI* (116 and 127), I recommend commonsense responses to radical skepticism that are like unsophisticated commonsense responses to Zeno's arguments against motion (i.e., commonsense responses to Zeno offered in ignorance of sophisticated theories of the continuum). The way these responses work is by brute force: our commonsense seemings that motion occurs and that we have knowledge via perception of many things are much stronger than and overcome any seemings we have in support of the key premises of arguments by Zeno or the radical skeptic. So even if we can't see what's wrong with the key premises of these arguments, we can rely on our commonsense seemings about motion and about our knowledge via perception to reject the conclusions of these arguments and at least one of their key premises (at least this is so if we limit our focus to versions of these arguments that we agree are logically valid). This is the approach I take in objecting to UP: I acknowledge its intuitive appeal, but I reject it because it's the weakest premise in what seems to be a logically valid argument for a conclusion that conflicts with our much stronger commonsense intuition that we have perceptual knowledge.

Chudnoff thinks this is a bad move given that we have at our disposal a *better way* to respond to the skeptic. What we have (says Chudnoff), in responding to UP-based arguments for radical skepticism, is akin to what we *now* have (given our sophisticated understanding of the continuum) in responding to Zeno's arguments against motion. According to Chudnoff (2023:101), our sophisticated understanding of the continuum enables us to see the flaw in Zeno's claim that "an infinite series of positive terms cannot add up to a finite sum," with the result that this claim no longer seems intuitively attractive. Likewise, Chudnoff thinks, we have *improved* intuitions about epistemic principles, enabling us to see the flaws in UP so that it no longer seems attractive. And if this preferred way to beat the skeptic is available (as Chudnoff thinks it is—in the case of

responding to the radical skeptic as well as the case of responding to Zeno), then “it would be backwards to hang onto the first [worse] way ... or to avoid relying on the better way” (Chudnoff 2023: 102).

By way of reply, let me begin by noting that my main claim was that both the unsophisticated response to Zeno’s arguments and my recommended response to radical skepticism are good enough and successful. Chudnoff doesn’t seem to object to that claim.<sup>12</sup> Rather, Chudnoff thinks that winning a “contest of strength” against the skeptic in the way I recommend would be disappointing and “unattractive in the way that any resolution of a conflict by means of force is unattractive” (2023: 100). I agree with Chudnoff that it is natural to prefer to do better than this. If we can, we’d prefer to beat the skeptic in the way we can now beat Zeno: with improved insight rather than with commonsense intuitions that are stronger than our skeptical opponents’ contrary intuitions (which are at least somewhat attractive even after we reject them).<sup>13</sup> I also agree with Chudnoff (2023: 101) that it’s a mistake to think “that reasoning cannot improve intuitions but can only provide grounds for resisting them” (the Zeno case is a helpful counterexample to this thought). But does our careful thinking and reasoning result in our seeing that UP is mistaken, with the result that it loses its intuitive attractiveness (in the way we can see that naïve views of the continuum are mistaken, with the result that they lose their intuitive attractiveness)? Or does at least some of UP’s intuitive attractiveness remain, despite being outweighed by the stronger intuitive appeal of our commonsense epistemic intuitions that we have perceptual knowledge?

As noted in Section 2.2, one way of stating the Key Idea behind UP is that “justification requires that we are able to see how it is that a belief’s evidence implies the belief’s truth (or likely truth).” I conclude that the Key Idea must be a mistake given our stronger epistemic intuitions in support of the justification of our perceptual beliefs that don’t satisfy that requirement. But I don’t think the Key Idea ceases to be intuitively attractive; whatever insight we gain into the error involved in the Key Idea, it isn’t illuminating enough to make *that* happen. Instead, we just recognize that the Key Idea behind UP is mistaken insofar as it conflicts with views we think we are rational to hold more strongly than UP. And as far as I can tell, Chudnoff is in the same boat. He mentions (2023: 100–101) four epistemic principles that seem intuitively attractive

12 What he says is: “Maybe this [i.e., Bergmann’s recommended response to radical skepticism] describes a position some possible, and actual, thinkers rationally occupy with respect to skepticism” (2023: 100).

13 But it should be noted that a virtue of my “brute force” approach is that it’s more widely available—in fact, it’s available to just about anyone, including those without more sophisticated views on the continuum or epistemology.

to him, even if (as he puts it) they are only approximately correct; and he notes that together they imply that UP (applied to perception) is mistaken in requiring what it does for justification. But this is just another case of (i) noting a conflict in intuitively attractive positions (in this case, a conflict between UP, on the one hand, and the four epistemic principles Chudnoff mentions, on the other) and (ii) siding with the stronger epistemic intuitions against the weaker ones (in this case, the stronger epistemic intuitions in support of the four epistemic principles Chudnoff mentions against the weaker epistemic intuitions in support of UP). Chudnoff never claims that we are able to see what's wrong with the intuitively attractive thought that "justification requires that we are able to see how it is that a belief's evidence implies the belief's truth (or likely truth)" in the way we are able to see what's wrong with the thought that "an infinite series of positive terms cannot add up to a finite sum." For this reason, Chudnoff is mistaken when he says that "[o]ur position with respect to skeptical arguments is like our *current* position with respect to Zeno's paradoxes" (2023: 96).

Chudnoff goes on to say that "Mathematics shows where Zeno's reasoning goes wrong and provisions explanations of the ability to move. Epistemology [i.e., Chudnoff's epistemology] shows where the skeptic's reasoning goes wrong and provisions explanations of the ability to form justified beliefs" (2023: 96). But my response to skepticism also shows where the skeptic's reasoning goes wrong—i.e., in standing by the intuitively attractive but false idea behind UP. In addition, I too offer an explanation of our ability to form justified perceptual beliefs—an explanation developed at some length in *RS&EI* (151–159) but summarized succinctly as follows:

if our perceptual beliefs are not justified *inferentially* via good reasoning from our sensory experience or by our being *able to infer* them via such reasoning, how are they justified? The main alternative is that our perceptual beliefs are justified *noninferentially* in virtue of the fact that they are formed in response to sensory experience in an epistemically appropriate way. (152)<sup>14</sup>

Thus, I don't see how my recommended response to radical skepticism differs any more than Chudnoff's does from a sophisticated response to Zeno. Both Chudnoff and I identify what we view as the skeptic's error. We both explain

14 I also make it clear that, in my view, what makes *the formation of a belief in response to sensory experience* epistemically appropriate is that it is in accord with proper function (127–128). See also Bergmann (2006: chap. 5).

how we are able to form justified perceptual beliefs. And we both push back against the skeptic's principle without removing its intuitive attractiveness in the way that sophisticated views of the continuum remove the intuitive attractiveness of the thought that "an infinite series of positive terms cannot add up to a finite sum."

## 2.5 *Chudnoff and McCain on UP† and the Novice-Expert Case*

McCain (2023: 125–127) and Chudnoff (2023: 100) claim that I try and fail to support UP by appeal to Feldman's case of Novice and Expert (with respect to tree identification).<sup>15</sup> But they misunderstand the way in which I'm using that case. In order to explain the problem, I'll need to discuss what McCain says about a principle that in *RS&EI* (32) I call 'UP†':

UP†: If (a) the existence or occurrence of evidence E on which S's belief B is noninferentially based does not entail B's truth, then (b) S's belief B is justified in a way that is dependent on E only if (c) E provides better reason for B than for B's falsity.

Here's a restatement of UP† that is equivalent to UP† as given above but, once again, clearer about the fact that it is requiring for justification that at least one of two conditions is satisfied:

UP†-equiv: S's belief B is justified in a way that is dependent on E only if either:  
*Entailment*: the existence or occurrence of the evidence E on which S's belief B is noninferentially based entails B's truth  
 or  
*Good Reasoning*: E provides better reason for B than for B's falsity.<sup>16</sup>

UP† differs from UP by requiring for justification (if *Entailment* is not satisfied) *Good Reasoning* rather than *Access to Good Reasoning*.<sup>17</sup> In other words, if

15 For the purposes of this discussion, the details of the Novice-Expert will not be important. The case is discussed in Feldman (2003: 147–151) and in *RS&EI* (32).

16 Since UP† and UP†-equiv are equivalent, I will sometimes speak of UP† as requiring for justification that either *Entailment* or *Good Reasoning* is satisfied, even though this isn't as explicitly obvious in UP† as it is in UP†-equiv.

17 The condition I call 'Good Reasoning' speaks of there being "better reason for B than for B's falsity." This suggests that, at least in the abstract, there exists good reasoning for B; this is why I'm calling this condition 'Good Reasoning'.



*Entailment* is not satisfied,  $UP\uparrow$  requires there to *be* good reasoning to B from the existence or occurrence of E whereas  $UP$  requires, in addition, that S is *able to access* this good reasoning.

McCain (2023: 123–124) begins his  $UP\uparrow$ -related discussion by making two points against  $UP$ . First, he says that  $UP$  is implausible insofar as it is more demanding than  $UP\uparrow$ , in the way just noted at the end of the previous paragraph. McCain apparently thinks this extra demand makes  $UP$  significantly less plausible than  $UP\uparrow$ . Second, all of the multiple other “underdetermination” principles McCain has found in the contemporary literature on radical skepticism are weaker than  $UP$  in the same way that  $UP\uparrow$  is weaker than  $UP$ .<sup>18</sup> That makes my underdetermination principle (i.e.,  $UP$ ) the odd man out. And that, says McCain, “should give us pause. Consensus isn’t a guarantee of truth, but it is surely strong evidence in many cases including this one” (2003: 125). Thus, according to McCain,  $UP$ ’s alleged unpopularity is a strike against its truth.

McCain (2023: 125–127) then makes a third point against  $UP$ , this time in connection with the Novice-Expert case. I defend a preference for  $UP$  over  $UP\uparrow$  by appealing to Feldman’s discussion of Novice and Expert (with respect to tree identification), which Feldman uses in support of including an *Access to Good Reasoning* condition over merely a *Good Reasoning* condition in an underdetermination principle. McCain replies by arguing that we can account for the case of Novice and Expert in ways that don’t involve any appeal to an *Access to Good Reasoning* condition rather than a *Good Reasoning* condition. Chudnoff (2023: 100) makes basically this same point.<sup>19</sup>

What do I have to say for myself? Consider again Skeptical Reflection from Section 2.2. Imagine that a philosopher, Philomena, overhears Richard reflecting aloud to himself in exactly the way Skeptical Reflection reports. And suppose Philomena later comments on Richard’s endorsement of Skeptical Reflection (not to Richard but to others) as follows:

#### *Philomena’s Speech*

Richard’s endorsement of Skeptical Reflection is implausible. What matters isn’t whether Richard *sees* the entailment between his evidence and his beliefs or whether he *can think of* any good reasoning from his evidence to the truth of his beliefs. All that matters, in order for Richard to

18 In *RS&EI* (32, n. 36), I too point out that others in the contemporary literature on radical skepticism (apart from Fumerton) focus on principles closer to the weaker  $UP\uparrow$  than to  $UP$  (or  $UP^*$ ), though I don’t survey the literature as extensively as McCain does.

19 Chudnoff talks about the Novice-Expert case but not about  $UP\uparrow$ .



be rational in believing as he does on the basis of that evidence, is that *there is* such an entailment or that *there is* good reasoning of that sort, even if Richard is completely oblivious to it. To suggest otherwise has no intuitive appeal.

As noted above, I think that Skeptical Reflection captures a plausible-seeming and intuitively appealing line of thinking (albeit one that is, in my view, ultimately mistaken). Philomena's Speech suggests a kind of obtuseness in failing to recognize the intuitive appeal of this line of thinking. As I understand Feldman (2003: 150–151), he was making this very same point—i.e., he was highlighting the way in which the line of thinking expressed in Skeptical Reflection (which supports the inclusion of an *Access to Good Reasoning* condition in UP and UP\*) seems more plausible than Philomena's Speech. To favor UP† as preferable to UP is to side with Philomena's Speech against Skeptical Reflection. To understand the intuitive appeal of UP over UP†, one need only feel the intuitive pull of Skeptical Reflection over Philomena's Speech.<sup>20</sup>

With this in mind, we can return to McCain's three points, which I laid out at the beginning of the present section. For McCain to suggest, as he does in the first of these three points, that UP is implausible because it demands more than UP† is unconvincing—it's as unconvincing as saying that Skeptical Reflection is implausible because it demands more than is demanded by Philomena's Speech.<sup>21</sup> It's true that UP† is weaker and, in at least that sense, more intrinsically probable than UP. But (i) UP is still very plausible, (ii) it's not plausible to say that there's no intuitive motivation for requiring for justification the extra that UP demands over what UP† demands, and (iii) the premise needed by a UP-backed skeptical argument (i.e., that *Access to Good Reasoning* isn't satisfied by the beliefs in question) is more plausible than the

20 It should be noted that endorsement of the weaker UP† needn't be in conflict with endorsement of the stronger UP and UP\*. The only conflict comes from saying *in addition* that nothing stronger than satisfying UP†'s *Good Reasoning* condition is required for justification (in cases where the *Access to Entailment* condition isn't satisfied). This corrects what I say in *RS&EI* (32) where, in place of "that fact [about the Novice-Expert case] suggests that UP† is mistaken and needs to be replaced with something like UP," I should have said "that fact suggests that UP† needs to be supplemented with something like UP in order to capture more of what is required for justification."

21 Remember: to say Skeptical Reflection is plausible is not to endorse Skeptical Reflection. I *don't* endorse it, just as I don't endorse UP or UP\*, both of which are motivated by Skeptical Reflection.

premise needed by a UP†-backed skeptical argument (i.e., that *Good Reasoning* isn't satisfied by the beliefs in question).

McCain's second point claims that UP is unpopular and, therefore, less likely to be true than other underdetermination principles in the literature. But the fact is, both Fumerton and I are focused on the line of thought captured in *Skeptical Reflection*—a line of thought that has been prominent (not unpopular) in the history of philosophical reflection on skepticism and that supports UP. So, what are the contributors to the contemporary literature on radical skepticism—the ones identified by McCain as also interested in underdetermination principles—doing when they formulate their own weaker underdetermination principles? Are they trying to capture the line of thought captured in *Skeptical Reflection*? I don't think so. It seems instead that they're trying to capture a less demanding requirement on justification and they're labeling it an 'underdetermination principle'. Are they trying to take the side of Philomena's Speech against *Skeptical Reflection*, insisting that any more demanding underdetermination principle than the one they've identified is mistaken or implausible? I see no reason to think so. Has McCain given us any reason to think that they're taking a stand against UP or trying to formulate a better principle that captures the line of thought UP was trying to capture? Again, no. In short, McCain has given us no reason for thinking that UP is (a) an unpopular way of trying to capture what these other authors are trying to capture with their underdetermination principles rather than (b) a way of trying to capture with an underdetermination principle a popular thought (in the history of philosophical reflection on skepticism) that others who propose underdetermination principles weren't trying to capture. Is there anything problematic about calling *Skeptical-Reflection*-motivated principles like UP and UP\* 'underdetermination principles'? Not at all, given their focus on whether there's an entailment gap between our evidence and our beliefs.<sup>22</sup> The upshot is that McCain hasn't given us a good reason to think that UP is odd or unpopular in the sense of opposing what others think is true. Thus, if it is unusual, it's not unusual in a way suggesting that it's false.

McCain's third point—also made independently by Chudnoff—claims that Feldman and I misinterpret the Novice-Expert case and wrongly use it in support of UP over UP†. But I focused on Novice and Expert only because

22 This isn't to say there is anything problematic about also calling the UP†-like principles (identified by the others McCain mentions) 'underdetermination principles'.

Feldman did. Feldman stipulated a way of understanding Novice and Expert and used that to argue that something like UP was preferable to something like UP†.<sup>23</sup> But neither Feldman nor I need to appeal to the case of Novice and Expert to highlight the virtues of UP over UP†. Skeptical Reflection and Philomena's Speech will do just as well for that purpose, as I explained above. Even if the points McCain and Chudnoff make about how best to think about actual cases like Novice and Expert are right (even if Feldman's stipulative understanding of his Novice-Expert case is implausible as an account of real-life similar cases), that's ultimately irrelevant to the point Feldman and I were using that case to make.

## 2.6 *Chudnoff's Agreement with UP\**

In this section and the next, I will play offense instead of defense. In Section 2.3, I noted that both Chudnoff and McCain object to my claim that UP is intuitively appealing. But as I will explain in Sections 2.6 and 2.7, both Chudnoff and McCain reveal a deep agreement with the attractive but mistaken underdetermination principles I highlight. This further confirms my conviction that my emphasis in *RS&EI* on these tempting but misguided underdetermination principles (i.e., UP, UP†, and UP\*) is both needed and important. I'll begin by arguing, in this section, that Chudnoff endorses UP\* and that he is mistaken both in that endorsement and in saying that the *Access to Entailment* condition is satisfied by our *a priori* beliefs.

Chudnoff (2023: 103) quotes, and says there's no need to back off from, the following internalist sounding thought (IST), which I highlight and reject in *RS&EI* (166):

IST: If we aren't *aware* that our evidence entails our beliefs or of how it is that our evidence implies our beliefs via good reasoning, then our beliefs aren't justified.

IST requires for justification that either the *Access to Entailment* condition or the *Access to Good Reasoning* condition is satisfied. It is, therefore, just a slightly different way of expressing commitment to UP\*. Thus, Chudnoff seems to endorse UP\*, which is why he asks: "If it isn't UP\*, then what goes wrong with

23 McCain (2023: 126, n. 6) says that it's doubtful whether, *in the end*, Feldman ultimately favored something like UP over something like UP†, given that he later endorsed what McCain (2023: 123) calls 'III'. I agree, which is why in *RS&EI* (32, n. 36) I also point to the passage McCain calls 'III' as an example where Feldman endorses something like UP†. But despite that, Feldman (2003: 150–151) *does try* to defend something like UP over something like UP† in just the way I say he does.

the specific skeptical challenge to intuitive belief that Bergmann considers?" (2023: 103).

Of course, given that Chudnoff endorses UP\* and thinks that our *a priori* beliefs are justified, he must also think that our *a priori* beliefs satisfy either the *Access to Entailment* condition or the *Access to Good Reasoning* condition. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that he argues as follows that our *a priori* beliefs satisfy the *Access to Entailment* condition:

Whenever you are aware of something, you are aware of it as being some way. It follows that when you are aware of your own [*a priori*] intuition experience as of *p* you are aware of it as being some way. I've suggested you are aware of it as showing you that *p*. There are different ways of spelling this out, but the details will not matter here. If you are aware of your experience as showing you that *p*, then you thereby see how it entails that *p*. Something cannot show you that *p* unless *p*. Further, being aware of your [*a priori*] intuition experience as showing you that *p* demands nothing more than what one would expect from the sort of self-awareness that might be included in having an experience. It just requires being aware of the experience's content and the way in which that content is presented. (2023: 103)

According to Chudnoff in this passage, when you have an *a priori* intuition experience, you are aware of that experience's content and you are aware of the way in which that content is presented. And the way in which it is presented is *as showing you that p*. Since showing is factive, nothing can show you that *p* unless *p* is true. This is his defense of the claim that you can see that your *a priori* intuition experience as of *p* entails the truth of a belief that *p* based on that intuition experience.

This defense is not convincing. I agree that (a) your *a priori* intuition experience as of *p* tells you that *p* (i.e., it presents *p* to you as true) and that (b) the way in which that content is presented to you is *as if* it is showing you that *p*. But that fails to guarantee that your *a priori* intuition experience *in fact* shows you that *p*. Chudnoff wants to go beyond (a) and (b) by saying that you're aware of your *a priori* intuition experience *in fact showing you* that its content is true. But on the face of it, that isn't plausible and Chudnoff's remarks don't help to make it so. So, Chudnoff's attempt to argue that the *Access to Entailment* condition is satisfied, in the case of our *a priori* beliefs, fails. This is so even if our focus is only on our most impressive *a priori* beliefs—the ones that seem most obviously to be true. As I point out in *RS&EI* (87–90), to see this, we need only consider the fact that a sufficiently competent deceiver can get us to have

*a priori* intuition experiences in support of falsehoods, where those deceptive *a priori* intuition experiences match the most impressive *a priori* intuition experiences we have in terms of how seemingly obvious it is (to those who have these intuitions) that their contents are true.

Given that (i) for the reasons mentioned in the previous paragraph, our *a priori* beliefs don't satisfy the *Access to Entailment* condition, (ii) our *a priori* beliefs are justified, and (iii) there is no other good way to resist the UP\*-based argument for skepticism about our *a priori* beliefs, our best move is to reject UP\* as well.<sup>24</sup>

### 2.7 *McCain's Agreement with UP†*

Let's turn next to McCain's demonstration of agreement with intuitively appealing but mistaken underdetermination principles. Here I will show how McCain seems to make the errors of endorsing both (a) UP† and the claim that (b) the *Good Reasoning* condition is satisfied by our perceptual beliefs and that, in doing so, he ignores my arguments in *RS&EI* against (b) and, implicitly, against (a).<sup>25</sup>

UP mentions the *Access to Good Reasoning* condition, saying that a belief is justified only if it satisfies either that condition or the *Entailment* condition. McCain agrees that our perceptual beliefs do not satisfy the *Entailment* condition. As I noted above in Section 2.5, he also thinks UP is implausible insofar as it requires *Access to Good Reasoning* (in cases where we can see that *Entailment* isn't satisfied). But he raises no concerns about UP†'s *Good Reasoning* requirement on justification (in cases where we can see that *Entailment* isn't satisfied). In fact, as I show below, McCain insists that the *Good Reasoning* condition must be satisfied by our perceptual beliefs if they are to

24 I make this case in greater detail in *RS&EI* (84–95 and 156–159). I'll mention here a brief response to a complaint by Chudnoff in connection with the discussion from *RS&EI* just cited in this note. Chudnoff suggests that I'm mistaken when I say that it's *obvious*, "in light of the response to the UP backed skeptical challenge to perceptual belief," how noninferential anti-skepticism "can be recruited in responding to the UP\* backed skeptical challenge to intuitive belief" (2023: 102). But what I *actually* say (158) is something uncontroversial, namely, that it is *obvious* how one could alter three sentences in *RS&EI* summarizing how noninferential anti-skepticism responds to skepticism about perception so that they summarize a similar response to skepticism about the *a priori*.

25 I argue explicitly and at length in Chapter Three of *RS&EI* that we have no good reason to accept (b). This, together with what I say in *RS&EI* in support of the justification of our perceptual beliefs (see Chapters Six through Eight) and against *Entailment* as applied to our perceptual beliefs (see 22–29), gives us good reason to resist endorsement of (a)—i.e., of UP†.

be justified. This (along with the fact that he often says that UP† is plausible<sup>26</sup>), suggests that McCain endorses UP†.

Why think that McCain believes that the *Good Reasoning* condition must be satisfied by our perceptual beliefs if they are to be justified? McCain (2023: 128–129) considers his own revised version of my underdetermination argument against perception—a revision that relies on UP† rather than UP. And McCain (2023: 130) makes it clear that the premise of this revised argument that he will reject is:

5†. The existence or occurrence of our sensory-experience evidence does not provide better reason for our perceptual beliefs than their falsity.

5† says that the relevant evidence does not provide good reason for the relevant beliefs. This is another way of saying there is no good reasoning from the existence or occurrence of that evidence to the truth of those beliefs. Thus, in saying that 5† is false, McCain is saying:

GR: there *is* some good reasoning from the existence or occurrence of our sensory-experience evidence to the truth of our perceptual beliefs.

In other words, he is saying that the *Good Reasoning* condition is satisfied by our perceptual beliefs. So, McCain thinks our perceptual beliefs *are* justified and he emphasizes that the UP†-based argument for perceptual skepticism (relying on 5†) fails due to the falsity of 5†. Moreover, he doesn't push back against UP†, which requires for the justification of our perceptual beliefs that 5† is false (if *Entailment* is false when applied to perceptual beliefs, as McCain thinks it is). All of this suggests that McCain thinks that UP† is correct in saying that the *Good Reasoning* condition must be satisfied by our perceptual beliefs if they are to be justified (as McCain thinks they are).

Why does McCain think GR is true? Why think the *Good Reasoning* condition is satisfied? In Chapter Three of *RS&EI*, I argue at length that we have no good reason to think that GR is true because none of the reasoning that has been proposed (to take us from the existence or occurrence of our sensory-experience evidence to the truth of our perceptual beliefs) is sufficiently good.<sup>27</sup> This reasoning that I say is *not sufficiently good* includes the best reasoning of this sort that has been proposed—namely, inference to

26 See McCain (2023: 125, 127 and 129) for three places where he says that UP† is intuitively plausible.

27 As I note in various places in *RS&EI* (33–53), Alston (1993) argues for this same conclusion at great length.

the best explanation (IBE) arguments of the sort developed by Bonjour (2003), Vogel (1990, 2008), and McCain (2012, 2014). The main worry with all these IBE arguments is that it just isn't convincing to say that non-skeptical explanations of our data are clearly better than skeptical explanations of it involving highly competent deceivers. Yet, strangely, McCain (2023) offers no complaints or objections to my criticisms of those IBE arguments.

Perhaps McCain is silent about my objections to those IBE arguments because (as noted in Section 2.5) he thinks that UP, with its *Access to Good Reasoning* condition, is mistaken in suggesting that justification requires access to such IBE arguments. If McCain thinks that access to these IBE arguments is not required for justification, he might think my objections to those arguments are irrelevant, since the failure of those arguments doesn't matter if access to them isn't needed. But, as I've noted in the preceding two paragraphs, McCain also thinks that the *Good Reasoning* condition is both satisfied by and required for the justification of our perceptual beliefs. And in order to *defend* his endorsement of this questionable claim, McCain will need to have good reasons (that are convincing for him and for his readers) to believe that the *Good Reasoning* condition is satisfied by our perceptual beliefs. The problem is that my arguments in Chapter Three of *RS&EI*, for the conclusion that we have no good reason to accept GR, shows not only that the *Access to Good Reasoning* condition isn't satisfied by our perceptual beliefs but also that we (McCain included) have no good reason to think that the *Good Reasoning* condition is satisfied by our perceptual beliefs. McCain (2023) says nothing of substance to push back against those Chapter Three arguments.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, despite his protestations to the contrary, McCain, like Chudnoff, reveals a deep agreement with the tempting but mistaken underdetermination principles that I focus on and object to in *RS&EI*. Indeed, both McCain and Chudnoff seem to be drawn to some degree to the Key Idea behind UP, which says that justification requires seeing how our evidence either entails or provides good reason for our beliefs based on them. But neither of them is a skeptic. So, Chudnoff insists (mistakenly) that *we can see* how our *a priori* intuition evidence entails our beliefs based on that evidence. And McCain insists (mistakenly) that *he can see* that there is good reasoning (in the form of IBE arguments) from our sensory experience evidence to the likely truth of our perceptual beliefs.

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28 McCain (2023: 130, n. 11) very briefly refers to my Chapter Three arguments and cites McCain (2012) as a place where he argues for a contrary view. But in Chapter Three of *RS&EI* (47–54), I address McCain's arguments, including what he says in McCain (2012), and explain why they fail.



### 3 Lemos on the Paradigm-Case Thesis

Lemos and I are largely on the same page in thinking about commonsense and radical skepticism. Largely, but not entirely. His main objections to *RS&EI* are focused on the thesis called the 'Paradigm Case Thesis'. In Section 3.1, I explain what the Paradigm-case Thesis is and say a little about how it's related to evidentialism and externalism about justification. In Section 3.2, I respond to Lemos's reasons for thinking that the Paradigm-case Thesis is not true. And in Section 3.3, I address Lemos's reasons for thinking that the Paradigm-case Thesis is not important.

#### 3.1 *The Paradigm-Case Thesis, Evidentialism, and Externalism about Justification*

As Lemos (2023: 108) notes, I say in *RS&EI* (120) that our beliefs (including our anti-skeptical beliefs) are justified only if *they are formed or held in the right way* (Lemos agrees with this claim). I then mention three ways in which one could endorse this requirement on justification:

*Evidentialist Thesis:* justification requires being formed in the right way and in order for anti-skeptical beliefs to be formed in the right way, they must be based on evidence (good evidence).

*Anti-evidentialist Thesis:* justification requires being formed in the right way and anti-skeptical beliefs can be justified even if they are based on no evidence at all.

*Paradigm-case Thesis:* justification requires being formed in the right way and all paradigm cases of justified *human* beliefs in anti-skeptical propositions are based on evidence (good evidence).

I endorse (somewhat tentatively) the Paradigm-case Thesis. Lemos has strong reservations about it and seems to prefer the Anti-evidentialist Thesis.<sup>29</sup>

I tout as a virtue of the Paradigm-case Thesis the fact that both evidentialists and externalists about justification can endorse it (something that isn't true of the other two theses mentioned above).<sup>30</sup> It's obvious how evidentialists can endorse the Paradigm-case Thesis because it's entailed by the Evidentialist

29 For reasons that will become clear in the next paragraph, even though I didn't emphasize this in *RS&EI*, I too endorse the Anti-evidentialist Thesis, which is compatible with the Paradigm-case Thesis.

30 The reason I say that this is a virtue of the Paradigm-case Thesis is that it gives it greater ecumenical appeal insofar as it's not committed to either internalism or externalism in epistemology.

Thesis as stated above. But it's important to be clear about how my own externalist (non-evidentialist) view is also compatible with the Paradigm-case Thesis. We can see how this is true by considering the following three claims, which are components of my view:

- *Claim 1*: although being based on stronger seemings is often correlated with being more justified, a belief's justification supervenes *not* on the seemings on which they're based or their strength<sup>31</sup> but on the belief's being formed in accord with proper function and without any believed defeaters.<sup>32</sup>
- *Claim 2*: evidentialism is false, in part because it is not *necessary* for a belief's justification that the belief is based on the subject's mental states (which include the subject's evidence).<sup>33</sup>
- *Claim 3*: all paradigm cases of justified *human* belief are based on mental states. Thus, just as all paradigm cases of justified human perceptual belief are based on the subject's mental states (in the form of sensory experience), so also all paradigm cases of justified human anti-skeptical beliefs (e.g., that our beliefs are not radically mistaken) are based on the subject's mental states (typically in the form of epistemic intuitions, which are seemings about the epistemic goodness of our beliefs).<sup>34</sup>

I say that I endorse the Paradigm-case Thesis somewhat tentatively. The idea is that I'm committed to (a) my *externalist* proper functionalist account of justification, discussed in Claim 1 above, and to (b) a rejection of evidentialism,

31 See *RS&EI* (127–128) and the discussion below in Section 5.2.

32 More precisely, as I say in Bergmann (2013: 181, n. 38), I endorse:

$J_{PF}^*$ : S's belief B is justified iff (i) S does not take B to be defeated and (ii) the cognitive faculties producing B are (a) functioning properly *in response to all of S's mental states*, (b) truth-aimed, and (c) reliable in the environments for which they were "designed."

This replaces my earlier  $J_{PF}$  from Bergmann (2006: 133), which differs only by not including the words above in italics.

33 The point here is, in part, that it's possible for there to be cognizers (for example, alien nonhuman cognizers) of whom it's true that proper function (for them) does not dictate that their beliefs should be based on mental states. Instead, proper function for them might dictate that their beliefs, when formed as they should be, are immediately caused (at least in some cases) by the facts in their environment that their beliefs are about (and which make them true), without any mental states functioning as causal intermediaries between these facts and the subject's beliefs about them. For more discussion, including my objections to evidentialism, see Bergmann (2006: chap. 3). I don't clearly emphasize in *RS&EI* that I endorse Claim 2, but I do mention my agreement with it (120, n. 24 and 163, n. 26).

34 For further discussion of these three claims, see *RS&EI* (119–122, 127–129, and 160–164) as well as Bergmann (2013, 2018).

mentioned in Claim 2 above; but although I endorse the Paradigm-case Thesis (as I suggest in Claim 3 above), if it turned out to be false, that too would be compatible with my commitment to (a) and (b).<sup>35</sup>

### 3.2 *Lemos on the Truth of the Paradigm-Case Thesis*

Now that we have before our minds what the Paradigm-case Thesis is and what its relationship is to evidentialism and to my externalist account of justification, let's consider Lemos's reasons for thinking both that (i) it's not true and that (ii) it's not important for my commonsense response to radical skepticism in *RS&EI*.

I'll start with Lemos's reason for thinking the Paradigm-case Thesis is false. His main complaint is this:

Bergmann seems open to the possibility that a belief can be justified without being based on another mental state, and thus without being based on a seeming. That seems right to me, but unlike Bergmann, I think there are *many* actual justified human beliefs that are not based on seemings. (2023: 112)

Lemos doesn't add that he thinks there are many actual justified beliefs that are not based on mental states but that is his view.<sup>36</sup> So we agree that it's *possible* for a belief to be justified without being based on another mental state. But Lemos insists that it's also *actual* for many paradigm cases of justified *human* beliefs, whereas I deny that (tentatively at least). As examples of paradigm cases of actual justified human beliefs that are not based on mental states, Lemos mentions (2023: 110–111) these beliefs of his (some stated first-personally, from his perspective):

- Hobbes was born in 1588.
- My dog's name is 'Gator'.
- I live in Virginia.
- All squares are squares.

35 For indications of the tentativeness of my endorsement of the Paradigm-case Thesis, see *RS&EI* (161–162) and Bergmann (2018: 121–122).

36 Lemos has confirmed via email correspondence that he thinks there are many actual justified human beliefs that are not based on evidence (in the form of conscious mental states). That's a good thing (given his aim to raise objections to my view) because my claim is that all paradigm cases of justified human belief are based on conscious mental states; I don't insist that they're all based on seemings.

I will call this the ‘Actual Groundless Justification Objection’ because it says that many *actual* human beliefs are justified despite being *groundless*—i.e., despite not being based on any mental states. Lemos acknowledges that these four beliefs all seem true to him as well, but in saying this, he insists that he is not reporting any seemings that are the bases of his beliefs in these claims. Instead, saying that these claims seem true to him is just another way of saying that he believes them or is inclined to believe them.

I have two things to say in reply. First, in each of these four examples, if I were to press Lemos on whether these claims are accurate and he were to take a moment to ask himself (seriously) if he was sure that these claims were true, I expect that not only would he say he is sure that they’re true, but he would also experience a noticeable seeming that they’re true—a memory seeming in the first three cases and a logical seeming in the last case (or, possibly, a memory seeming in the final case too).<sup>37</sup> Moreover, these seemings would be the basis (at least partially) of his continuing to believe these claims. This is what happens to me when I ask myself such questions about claims (of the sort Lemos lists) that I firmly believe. In light of this, it’s plausible that (i) before reflecting on whether he’s sure about these four claims, Lemos has fainter instances of these seemings (which is why they aren’t as easily noticed by him) that are the bases of these beliefs and that (ii) these beliefs become more justified when he reflects on whether he’s sure that they’re true and, relatedly, the seemings that are their bases become more intense and noticeable.<sup>38</sup>

37 As Lemos (2023: 113) mentions, in *RS&EI* (161 and 124, n. 33), I point out that sometimes beliefs that were once based on logical intuitions are later based on memory seemings.

38 Bengson (2015: 709–710) discusses a case where someone, whom I’ll call ‘S’, may be accurately described as *in some sense* having the Gettier intuition even when asleep—because when S is awake and considering whether Gettier’s take on the cases presented in Gettier (1963) is accurate, it strikes S forcefully that Gettier’s take *is* accurate. Perhaps we could also say that because (ii) is (I suspect) true of Lemos, it’s also true *in some sense* that Lemos has the seemings mentioned in (ii) when he quickly and non-reflectively affirms the truth of the four beliefs he mentions (about Hobbes, Gator, Virginia, and squares), even before he reflects on whether he’s sure they’re true. That is, just as S in some sense has Gettier intuitions when sleeping (because S has them noticeably when awake and reflecting on the Gettier cases), so also Lemos in some sense has seemings in support of the contents of those four beliefs when not critically reflecting on those contents (because Lemos has them noticeably when critically reflecting on whether he’s sure that they’re true). It’s a further question whether the seemings one has, when one has seemings in this attenuated sense, can count as the evidential basis for beliefs like Lemos’s beliefs about Hobbes, Gator, Virginia, and squares. Although I think this line of thought is promising, I won’t pursue it any more here, nor do I wish to rest my response to Lemos on it. For that, I’ll stick with the two replies to Lemos given in the main text.

My second reply is that the Actual Groundless Justification Objection is a standard complaint made against both evidentialism and phenomenal conservatism (both of which insist that beliefs are justified only if based on mental states); and evidentialists and phenomenal conservatives have offered numerous replies to such objections.<sup>39</sup> In my view, even though I understand the attraction (for Lemos and others) of this objection, I'm not convinced (as a bystander, observing this exchange) that the objectors have the upper hand or that the evidentialists and phenomenal conservatives have no good responses to the Actual Groundless Justification Objection. On the contrary, I'm inclined to grant that the replies offered to this objection are successful enough, in the sense that it's not obvious that beliefs like the four that Lemos mentions are both justified and not based on any mental states. I'm open to discovering paradigm cases of justified human beliefs that are clearly not based on any mental states. If that happens, I will reject the Paradigm-case Thesis and endorse the Actual Groundless Justification Objection. Until then, I'm inclined to endorse the Paradigm-case Thesis.<sup>40</sup>

### 3.3 *Lemos on the Importance of the Paradigm-Case Thesis*

In addition to arguing that the Paradigm-case Thesis is not *true*, Lemos also argues that it's not *important* for my commonsense response to radical skepticism in *RS&EI*. As he puts it (2023: 116–117):

I think we are justified in believing and know various anti-skeptical propositions without knowing any of the three general philosophical theses Bergmann describes [i.e., the Evidentialist Thesis, the Anti-Evidentialist Thesis, and the Paradigm-case Thesis]. Moreover, some of our

39 For example, see McCain (2015) and McCain and Moretti (2022: chap. 5) on the Problem of Stored Beliefs and the Problem of Forgotten Evidence. Chudnoff (2013: 52–57) and Bengson (2015: 732–733) push back against what Chudnoff calls “the absent intuition challenge” (which is relevant to Lemos's example of his allegedly groundless belief that all squares are squares). In a forthcoming book, McAllister (2024: 217–224) argues that all of our justified beliefs are based on seemings. See also Huemer (2007) in defense of phenomenal conservatism and Conee and Feldman (2008) in defense of evidentialism.

40 To be clear, although I don't endorse the Actual Groundless Justification Objection (because I don't think there are clear cases of *actual* justified *human* belief that aren't based on any mental states), I do endorse other objections to evidentialism and phenomenal conservatism. In particular, I endorse the objection behind Claim 2 from the second paragraph of Section 3.1 above—the objection that says it's *possible* for there to be justified beliefs that aren't based on any mental states (call this ‘the *Possible* Groundless Justification Objection’). See Bergmann (2006: 63–64) for discussion of this latter objection.

commonsense epistemic beliefs are far more reasonable to believe than any of these three theses. It is, for example, more reasonable for me to believe that I know I have hands than that *The Paradigm-case Thesis* is true. Consequently, while I think the three theses are interesting philosophical theses, I don't think they play a central role in responding to skepticism. Again, I suspect Bergmann would agree with this.

I *do* agree that their role isn't central in responding to skepticism. But, as Lemos goes on to mention (2023: 117), I'm inclined to think both that the Paradigm-case Thesis is true and that highlighting the fact that my response to skepticism is compatible with it will make that response seem more plausible to the skeptic. That is why the Paradigm-case Thesis is *important* for my anti-skeptical aims in *RS&EI*.

Lemos (2023: 117–118) responds by saying that this reason for thinking the Paradigm-case Thesis is important conflicts with my overall approach to skepticism. My approach explicitly refrains from aiming at a “proselytizing” response to skepticism—i.e., a response that rationally forces those tempted by skepticism to give it up—and instead aims at an “autodidactic” response, which, as Lemos notes, involves “considering by one’s own lights the objections raised by the skeptics, and determining what rationality requires” (2023: 118). However, I also emphasize (149–150) that I hope that skeptics can benefit from “listening in” on my autodidactic reflections; that would make my already good response to skepticism even better, in a certain respect. The idea is this: although my goal isn't to *prove, to the skeptic's satisfaction, that skepticism is false*, I still think it's valuable to be persuasive to the skeptically inclined to the extent that we can. So, I don't see any conflict between, on the one hand, endorsing the Paradigm-case Thesis and, on the other hand, rejecting the proselytizing approach to skepticism and endorsing the autodidactic approach instead.

#### 4 McCain and Lemos on the Rationality of Seemings

Both McCain and Lemos notice that, in *RS&EI*, I speak as if seemings can be rational (or irrational). This strikes them as being in tension with other things I say. In Section 4.2, I identify and discuss an alleged tension that McCain points out and, in Section 4.3, I identify and discuss an alleged tension Lemos points out. But first, in Section 4.1, I explain briefly how I'm thinking of the rationality of seemings.

#### 4.1 *How to Think About the Rationality of Seemings*

Late in *RS&EI* (233), I distinguish between internal and external rationality for beliefs as follows:

A belief is *internally rational* if the belief-formation process is going as it epistemically should downstream from (i.e. in response to) one's conscious mental states (whether these are beliefs or experiences). A belief is *externally rational* if the belief-formation process is going as it epistemically should both upstream and downstream from one's conscious mental states.<sup>41</sup>

And I say that justification, as I've been thinking of it throughout the book, is equivalent to internal rationality. I then give (234) the following example to illustrate the difference between internal and external rationality:

if I believed in the validity of an inference (where that inference was not only invalid but also *obviously* invalid to all sane adults) and I believed this because, due to brain damage, it seemed very strongly to me that it was a compelling and valid inference, then my belief in the validity of this inference could be internally rational but it would not be externally rational.

In this example, the strong seeming that the inference in question is valid is an *a priori* intuition. But it's defective. It arises or occurs when it epistemically shouldn't.<sup>42</sup> In that sense, this *a priori* intuition—i.e., this *seeming* about the validity of an inference—is irrational. That captures the sense in which seemings are irrational—i.e., when they arise or occur when they epistemically shouldn't. If, instead, they arise or occur when they epistemically should, then the seemings are rational.<sup>43</sup>

This is obviously not a very detailed account of what it is for a seeming to be rational. When considering what's involved in a *belief* being rational, I and other epistemologists have a lot to say, including things about how beliefs

41 Footnotes from this quotation have been omitted.

42 My preferred way of thinking of a seeming arising or occurring when it "epistemically should" is to say that the cognitive faculties involved in its arising or occurring are (a) functioning properly, (b) truth-aimed, and (c) reliable in the environments for which they were "designed." See Bergmann (2006: 132–136) for discussion of (a) through (c).

43 Note that the definitions of internal rationality and external rationality apply to *beliefs*. One shouldn't infer that this internal-external rationality distinction applies in the same way (or at all) to seemings.



should be formed in order to be rational (e.g., about whether they are or need to be based on other mental states). But I and other epistemologists don't have as many firm or worked out views on what's required for a *seeming* to be rational. There are, I think, at least two reasons why I and others have fewer firm views about what's required for the rationality of seemings than about what's required for the rationality of beliefs. First, seemings are less noticeable and attention-grabbing than beliefs. Everyone thinks we have beliefs or (in the case of eliminativists) at least acknowledges the temptation to think we have beliefs. Not so with seemings, which (unlike beliefs) are not a part of folk psychology. Many don't knowingly attend to seemings, especially if no one draws them to their attention. This makes the task of theorizing about seemings more difficult and less pressing. Second, beliefs involve endorsement (as true) whereas seemings don't (see Bengson 2015: 717–718). Seemings involve a presentational feel—i.e., they feel as if they are presenting their content to you as true—but this feel can persist even when you reject their content. Experiences of seemings with their presentational feel are things that happen to us and there's no temptation to think of them as things we do. Believing, insofar as it's an endorsement of its contents as true in a way that experiencing a seeming is not, is at least *closer* to being something we do. Even those who, like me, are inclined to deny doxastic voluntarism (viewing believing as more often like something that happens to us rather than as something we do) can appreciate the temptation to think of believing as something we do.<sup>44</sup> This difference between seemings and believing makes us less *motivated* to theorize about the rationality standards for seemings because it's more natural to focus on standards for what we should *do* than on standards for how things that *happen* to us (such as experiencing a seeming) should occur.

The fact that we're inclined to view believing as something we do and experiencing a seeming as something that happens to us is part of what's behind my inclination to think of seemings as being rational or irrational rather than as being justified or unjustified. It's more natural to think of believing as justified or unjustified, because those evaluations apply most naturally to *things that we do*. But with seemings, it's more natural to think of them as rational or irrational (i.e., as things that occur as they epistemically should or shouldn't), because those evaluations can naturally apply to *things that happen to us*.<sup>45</sup>

44 See Vitz (2023) for a discussion of doxastic voluntarism, including a presentation of some arguments in defense of the view that believing is something we do.

45 To be clear: with respect to rationality, the point is that things that happen to us can be rational or irrational in the sense that our cognitive faculties are operating as they should

What I say above explains a little of what I mean when I say that seemings are rational or irrational. But McCain and Lemos can certainly be forgiven for being puzzled about my views on this topic. For just before introducing the distinction between internal and external rationality, I say (233) that *up to that point in the book*, when I've been speaking of rationality, I've (for the most part) had in mind internal rationality or justification (which are features of *belief*). What I don't mention is that, prior to that point in the book, there is at least one occasion where I apply the term 'rationality' to *seemings*.<sup>46</sup> And when I do, it has the meaning explained in the previous paragraphs in this section. So, I'm grateful to both McCain and Lemos for raising their questions about the rationality of seemings, which have given me a chance to clarify my views on this topic a little further. Let's turn now to the ways in which they think my claim that seemings can be rational or irrational is in tension with other things I say.

#### 4.2 McCain on Rational Seemings and Foundationalism

What concerns McCain (2023: 132–133, n. 17) is that seemings are a kind of experience and that those, like me, who endorse foundationalism “are typically keen to point out that experiences are not the sort of thing that can be justified/unjustified or rational/irrational. After all, it is this very feature that allows experiences to be foundations, i.e., the sort of thing that stops a justification regress.” McCain is right that some foundationalists explain the justification-regress-stopping capacity of experiences by noting that experiences aren't the

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(which is often something that happens to us, not something we do). The point is *not* to deny that we also think of things we do as being rational or irrational, although in that case we have in mind a different kind of rationality. Plantinga (1993: 132–137) distinguishes a variety of kinds of rationality. The kind that I say has to do with our faculties operating as they should is what Plantinga (1993: 136–137) calls “rationality as sanity and proper function” (where rationality is “absence of dysfunction, disorder, pathology with respect to rational faculties”). But as Plantinga (1993: 132) notes, there is also the kind that of rationality that applies to things that we do—what Plantinga calls “means-ends rationality.” With respect to justification, my point is that we more naturally think of justification as having to do with *what we do* than with *what happens to us* (whereas, for the reasons just noted, this isn't true of rationality).

46 Both Lemos (2023: 115) and McCain (2023: 132–133, n. 17) focus on the same example in *RS&EI* (128) where I say “it is rational for *us* to *have* anti-skeptical epistemic intuitions.” This is the only example I could find from earlier in the book where I speak of seemings as being rational or irrational, but there are other examples from later in the chapter in which I introduce the distinction between internal rationality and external rationality (e.g., 235, 246–248, 252 n. 39).

sorts of things that can be justified or unjustified. But that isn't a point that I rely on in my explanation and defense of foundationalism (see Bergmann 2014, 2017). I think of foundationalism mainly as the view that there can be noninferentially justified belief.<sup>47</sup> This is to say that a belief can be justified without being inferred from another belief. It may instead be justified while being based on (not inferred from) an experience; some foundationalists will add that it may be justified without being based on anything—either a belief or an experience. None of this requires the claim that experiences can't be rational or irrational.

Moreover, it's compatible with foundationalism to say that in cases where the belief is based on an experience (such as a seeming) that *can* be rational or irrational, the belief can be justified (or internally rational) even if the seeming on which it is based is not rational. Consider the example above in Section 4.1 of the belief based on the defective seeming that an inference is valid. That belief is internally rational (or justified) and yet the seeming on which it is based is irrational (i.e., it's a seeming that arises or occurs when it epistemically shouldn't). So, there is no requirement that a belief based on an experience is justified only if that experience on which it is based is rational (in cases where it can be rational or irrational).<sup>48</sup>

In short, the foundationalism I endorse says that the justification regress stops with justified noninferential beliefs because (i) the regress of inference (i.e., reason-giving) stops with those beliefs and (ii) even if the experiences on which those justified noninferential beliefs are based can be rational or irrational, it is not required that those experiences are rational (as if that is what enables them to pass on some epistemic goodness to the noninferential beliefs based on them).

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47 Foundationalism also makes the following claims, each of which denies a standard alternative to foundationalism:

- Beliefs can't be justified via circular chains of reasoning (contrary to linear coherentists).
- Beliefs can't be justified via infinite (non-repeating) chains of reasoning (contrary to infinitists).
- Beliefs can't be justified via inference from unjustified beliefs (contrary to “unjustified foundations” theorists).
- It's possible for there to be justified beliefs (contrary to extreme skeptics).

See Bergmann (2014, 2017) for more discussion.

48 Thus, although a belief cannot be justified by being *inferred from* an unjustified *belief* (contrary to the view of “unjustified foundations” theorists mentioned in the previous footnote), a belief can be justified by being *based on* an irrational *seeming*.

### 4.3 *Lemos on Rational Seemings and Groundless Justification for Beliefs*

What concerns Lemos (2023: 115) is that I say that both seemings and acts of trusting our cognitive faculties can be and are rational without being based on evidence and yet I don't grant that some of our beliefs can be and are rational without being based on evidence. This harkens back to the Paradigm-case Thesis and Claims 1–3 discussed in the first two paragraphs of Section 3.1, where I made it clear that I think that all paradigm cases of justified human belief are based on evidence in the form of other mental states (whether beliefs or experiences). Again, it's important to be clear that my claim is not that beliefs *can't* be justified unless they are based on other mental states. I explicitly reject that evidentialist claim. Rather, my claim is concerned with whether *human* beliefs *are* justified when not based on other mental states. And Lemos is here asking: why think paradigm cases of justified human beliefs include no examples of beliefs not based on evidence (in the form of other mental states), given that seemings and acts of trusting can be rational without being so based?

The short answer is this: I can think of actual instances of trusting our cognitive faculties where those acts of trusting seem clearly to be both rational and not based on evidence. And I can think of actual instances of seemings that seem clearly to be both rational and not based on evidence. But I can't think of actual paradigm cases of human belief that seem clearly to be both justified (or internally rational) and not based on evidence. Remember, the Paradigm-case Thesis is a universal generalization about justified human belief, not an insight into what's true of necessity about belief justification. It's not that I can see that beliefs *can't* be justified apart from being based on evidence (in fact, I think I can see that they *can* be so justified). It's rather that I can't think of any examples of human beliefs that *are* clearly both justified and not based on evidence. What accounts for that difference between justified human beliefs, on the one hand, and rational seemings (and acts of trusting), on the other? I don't have any worked out answer to that question, although it does seem like a topic worth exploring.

## 5 A Few Remaining Objections

In this closing section, I address one additional objection from Lemos and two from McCain. In section 5.1, I discuss Lemos's questions about which seemings count as epistemic intuitions. In Section 5.2, I respond to an objection raised by McCain in connection with comparative strength of seemings. And in Section

5.3, I reply to an objection from McCain having to do with the Problem of the Criterion.

### 5.1 *Lemos on Which Seemings Count as Epistemic Intuitions*

In *RS&EI* (123), I say that: “Epistemic intuitions are like moral intuitions (which are seemings about moral matters) in that both are *normative* seemings, the difference being that epistemic intuitions are seemings about epistemic matters.” In light of that and other things I say in the book, Lemos (2023: 112–114) asks several questions about which seemings count as epistemic intuitions. I’ll respond very briefly to his queries.

Are all seemings about epistemic matters epistemic intuitions? As Lemos (2023: 113) notes, my answer (161 and 124, n. 33) is ‘no’. I can have a memory seeming about an epistemic matter (perhaps one about which I previously had an epistemic intuition) and memory seemings aren’t intuitions. Paradigm cases of beliefs produced via memory, testimony, perception, or introspection are not intuition-based, so they aren’t based on epistemic intuitions even if the contents of the seemings on which they’re based are about epistemic matters. So, how exactly should we differentiate between seemings that are intuitions and seemings that aren’t? A good place to begin thinking about what is distinctive of intuitions is with the illuminating and plausible accounts given by Chudnoff (2013) and Bengson (2015) of the nature of intuitions understood on a perceptualist model. But more needs to be said about the difference between presentational states that are intuitions (e.g., logical and mathematical seemings)<sup>49</sup> and presentational states that aren’t (e.g., memory seemings and introspective seemings). I won’t take the time here to try and say more on that topic except to note that Lemos’s remark (2023: 113)—that in order for a seeming on an epistemic matter to count as an intuition, “it has to arise in a certain way or have a certain sort of causal history”—is plausible.<sup>50</sup>

Another question Lemos (2023: 113, n. 1) asks is: what counts as an epistemic matter? For example, is the introspective belief that I’m not dreaming a belief about an epistemic matter? This is a good question and I don’t say much about it in *RS&EI*. Instead, I focus on what seem to be clear cases of epistemic matters—e.g., claims about what’s *required* for knowledge or justification and claims about whether a particular belief *is* justified or an instance of knowledge. It’s not an easy matter to say exactly which matters are epistemic and which

49 Logical and mathematical seemings that count as intuitions aren’t just seemings about logical or mathematical matters, since memory seemings (which aren’t intuitions) can be about logical or mathematical matters.

50 For further discussion, see *RS&EI* (134–136, including n. 11).

aren't and I'm doubtful that it's worth taking a firm stand on what to say about hard-to-classify cases. In *RS&EI* (123, n. 31), I do consider whether intuitions about the reliability of one's beliefs count as epistemic intuitions and claim that in at least some cases they are. Perhaps for some beliefs that count as "beliefs that I'm not dreaming," it's plausible to say something similar—i.e., that they are about epistemic matters—even if other beliefs of that sort aren't.

A third question Lemos (2023: 114) asks is: are seemings whose contents are viewed as necessary truths about epistemic matters *a priori* intuitions or epistemic intuitions? In my view, they're both. Epistemic intuitions, moral intuitions, mathematical intuitions, and logical intuitions with contents that are viewed as necessary truths are different species of *a priori* intuition (what I sometimes call 'intellectual seemings'). I'm even open to classifying epistemic intuitions with contingent contents as *a priori* intuitions, though I explicitly refrain from taking a firm stand on that, in part because this seems to be a terminological matter on which not much hangs.<sup>51</sup>

Do these answers I've given raise any substantive concerns about claims I defend in *RS&EI*? The closest Lemos comes to saying they do is when he suggests (2023: 114) that the skeptic might say that her intuitions are to be preferred to the commonsensist's intuitions on the grounds that the skeptic's intuitions are *a priori* intuitions whereas the commonsensist's intuitions are *epistemic* intuitions. This move relies on several questionable and (in my view) doubtful assumptions: that *a priori* intuitions have greater evidential worth than epistemic intuitions, that the skeptic's relevant *a priori* intuitions aren't also epistemic intuitions, and that the commonsensist's relevant epistemic intuitions aren't also *a priori* intuitions. For this reason, this supposed concern doesn't strike me as a worrisome problem for the views defended in *RS&EI*.

## 5.2 *McCain on the Comparative Strength of Seemings*

McCain (2023: 135) says there are problems with my account of what to do when we have conflicting epistemic intuitions. In describing my account, he says:

When it comes to our epistemic intuitions, then, we have only epistemic intuitions themselves to appeal to when conflicts arise. How are we to adjudicate among conflicting epistemic intuitions, though? Bergmann answers that it is simply a matter of strength. When two epistemic intuitions conflict we are justified in going with the stronger of the two by believing its content and revising or denying the content of the weaker.

<sup>51</sup> For discussion of these matters, see *RS&EI* (133–136, especially n. 11).

Bergmann explains that different intuitionist particularists will have different reasons for favoring the stronger of competing epistemic intuitions. Some ... may appeal to some external conditions (reliability, proper function, etc.) in accounting for why we should go with the stronger epistemic intuitions rather than the weaker.

The problem with my account, according to McCain, is that it mishandles cases of undercutting defeaters.<sup>52</sup> As McCain (2023: 135–136) points out, one might have stronger seemings in support of a belief that *p* and weaker seemings in support of a belief (functioning as an undercutting defeater) that one's belief that *p* is unreliably formed, and yet that belief that *p* will still be defeated in such a case. This shows that we can't always go with the stronger seeming, in the way my view (as described in the quotation by McCain above) suggests.

I have long agreed with the main point of this objection, namely, that stronger seemings can be defeated by weaker seemings in support of an undercutting worry. That said, I confess that not only is it easy to interpret some of what I said in *RS&EI* in the way McCain does in the quoted passage above, it is also the case that I was never (as far as I could tell on a quick review of *RS&EI*) as clear as McCain was in making the main point of this objection.

But I can mention a few places in the book where I at least hint at my sympathy with McCain's objection. At one point (127, n. 46), I explain why a simple strategy of going with the strongest seeming might not always be appropriate. In another place (235, n. 7), I present a case where there is a pair of conflicting seemings that differ in strength, but the subject has a further seeming undermining the stronger of the first pair of seemings. In still another place (241, n. 20), I consider a case of three seemings of equal strength: a seeming that *p*, a seeming that one is reliable to a certain degree in forming beliefs like one's belief that *p*, and a seeming that one's opponent is reliable to that same degree in forming beliefs like their belief that *p* is false. I point out that even though one has *two* seemings (of equal strength) that are supportive of *p* and only *one* seeming (of that same strength) that is supportive of not-*p*, one has a defeater for one's belief that *p*. Lastly, I say the following: "you don't need to *believe* or be convinced that a belief of yours was unreliably formed in order for you to become skeptical of its content. Even if you have significant questions or doubts about the reliability of that belief, it will be rational for you to give it up" (258). The thought here is that weaker confidence in the

52 Undercutting defeaters for a belief B are reasons for thinking that B was not formed in a trustworthy way.



unreliability of a belief that *p* can defeat stronger belief-level confidence that *p*, which is what I take to be the main point of McCain's objection.

In addition, even though I agree with the main point of McCain's objection, it's still the case that the strength of a seeming is relevant both in the case of a direct conflict of seemings (where each is a rebutting defeater of the other) and in the case of an indirect conflict of seemings (as when one is an undercutting defeater of the other).<sup>53</sup> It's just that in the case of undercutting defeat, weaker seemings can defeat stronger ones.<sup>54</sup> But even in that sort of case, if the weaker seemings (in support of the unreliability of the stronger seemings) are too weak and the stronger seemings are too strong, the potential for this sort of undercutting defeat of the stronger by the weaker won't be actualized (258–260).

### 5.3 *McCain on the Problem of the Criterion*

Chisholm (1982: 65) formulated the Problem of the Criterion in terms of these two sets of questions:

- (A) What do we know? What is the extent of our knowledge?
- (B) How are we to decide whether we know? What are the criteria of knowledge?

According to Chisholm: the particularist says we start by answering the (A) questions and use those answers in addressing the (B) questions; the methodist says we start by answering the (B) questions and use those answers in addressing the (A) questions; and the skeptic (what we might call the 'methodological skeptic') says we can't appropriately answer either set of questions without first answering the other set of questions, which means we can't appropriately answer either set of questions.

McCain (2023: 133) says that each of these three positions—the particularist, the methodist, and the methodological skeptic—begs the question against the others. But he notes that there's a fourth position that I mention, which I

53 As I mentioned in the previous footnote, undercutting defeaters for a belief *B* are reasons for thinking that *B* was not formed in a trustworthy way. Rebutting defeaters for a belief that *p* are reasons for thinking that *p* is false (i.e., reasons for thinking not-*p* is true).

54 In fact, even in cases that don't involve undercutting defeat, if our anti-skeptical intuitions are *only slightly* stronger than our skeptical intuitions with which they directly conflict, we might still be forced into a kind of skepticism. However, in the book, I was always focusing on cases where our anti-skeptical intuitions are *much stronger* than the skeptical intuitions with which they conflict, either directly or indirectly.

call—following Rawls (1972)—‘the method of reflective equilibrium’. McCain endorses this fourth position and describes it by saying that it

doesn’t involve assuming an answer to either [A] or [B], nor does it assume, with the skeptic, that one must answer one of the questions before the other. Instead, [it] responds to the Problem of the Criterion by giving weight to both epistemic intuitions about particular beliefs and about epistemic principles without assuming from the outset that one sort of intuition is to be preferred over the other. The intuitions are then embraced, modified, or dismissed until reflective equilibrium has been attained. (2023: 133)

According to McCain, because this fourth position has the features just mentioned in this quotation, it avoids question-begging, making it superior to the other approaches, including my particularist approach, which are engaged in question-begging.

One problem here is that there is some confusion about terminology. As I point out (128), more distinctions are required:

there are various grades of methodism and particularism. Hyper-methodism gives no weight at all to judgments about particular cases; more moderate methodism gives some weight to such judgments, but still tends to favor judgments about general principles. Hyper-particularism gives no weight at all to judgments about general principles; more moderate particularism gives some weight to such judgments, but still tends to favor judgments about particular cases.

I then point out that I’m a moderate particularist and that, as such, I can consistently give more weight (on occasion) to judgments about principles than to judgments about particular cases.<sup>55</sup> For even if a moderate particularist does that, she might still “tend to favor judgments about particular cases,” which is what makes her a particularist. Moreover, as I’m thinking of moderate particularism, this tendency to favor judgments about particular cases needn’t involve (as McCain says in the quote above) “assuming from the outset that one sort of intuition is to be preferred over the other.” Instead, the moderate particularist might just find herself with a large number of epistemic intuitions—some about particular beliefs and some about epistemic

55 I give an example of such a case in *RS&EI* (128–129).

principles—and discover, *after relying on them over time* that (because they're typically stronger), she has a tendency to favor intuitions about particular cases over intuitions about principles, when the two come into conflict. What distinguishes moderate particularists (and moderate methodists) from McCain's preferred fourth position, the method of reflective equilibrium? As I define that fourth position, what makes it unique is that it involves *no tendency* to give priority either to judgments about particular cases or to judgments about principles.

With this clarification of terminology in mind, we can see that the fourth method (i.e., the method of reflective equilibrium), which McCain prefers, doesn't have the advantage over particularism he claims. The advantage—according to the passage quoted above from McCain (2023: 133)—was supposed to be that the method of reflective equilibrium has the following features:

- (1) it "doesn't involve assuming an answer to either [A] or [B]";
- (2) it doesn't "assume, with the skeptic, that one must answer one of the questions before the other";
- (3) it "responds to the Problem of the Criterion by giving weight to both epistemic intuitions about particular beliefs and about epistemic principles without assuming from the outset that one sort of intuition is to be preferred over the other. The intuitions are then embraced, modified, or dismissed until reflective equilibrium has been attained."

But moderate particularism, as I've described it in the previous paragraph, has all those same features. So, the method of reflective equilibrium, which McCain prefers, does not have the advantage over my (moderate) intuitionist particularism that he claims.

As noted above, McCain (2023: 133) claims that his method of reflective equilibrium avoids question-begging in a way that particularism, methodism, and methodological skepticism don't. I take it that the alleged question-begging occurs when the *assumptions* mentioned in (1) and (2) above are made. But as I've already noted, the *moderate* particularist needn't make those assumptions. The fact that she leans in the particularist direction is something she might discover after relying on her epistemic intuitions (and noticing which are stronger in cases of conflict between particularist and methodist intuitions), not a policy she question-beggingly assumes from the start to be true. So, particularism (of the sort I endorse) has the same virtues that, according to

McCain, make it possible for his method of reflective equilibrium to avoid question-begging.<sup>56</sup>

## 6 Conclusion

I will close by expressing once again my immense gratitude to Eli Chudnoff, Noah Lemos, and Kevin McCain for their provocative and fruitful engagement with *RS&EI*. The effort of responding to their perceptive comments has been extremely helpful for me in seeing how to defend, clarify, and expand upon the views presented in the book.

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56 One other related point: McCain (2023: 133–134) equates the method of reflective equilibrium he endorses with explanationism. I confess that I don't see why making IBE reasons fundamental to justification (which I think of as definitive of explanationism) needs to be connected with the method of reflective equilibrium. Why couldn't one just find oneself with various epistemic intuitions—some about particular beliefs, some about epistemic principles—and (after processing all the cases of intuition conflict one notices) come to a state of equilibrium about them in a way that (i) shows no tendency to favor intuitions about particular cases over intuitions about principles and (ii) refrains from relying ultimately on IBE reasons?.

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