Replies to: Commentators

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I would like to thank all contributors to this symposium for their terrific comments. I have learnt a lot from their criticisms and I am grateful for having the opportunity to respond. Despite several points of disagreement, I think consensus emerges that pluralism about self-knowledge, which is the key take-home message of *The Varieties of Self-Knowledge*, commends itself as the most promising outlook on the mental and on our own knowledge of it.

1 Borgoni on Authority

Cristina Borgoni raises an extremely interesting counterexample to authority, as I characterize it in the book. Cases of epistemic injustice can impair our status as knowers and also as self-knowers. For instance, we can be challenged with respect to our knowledge of our own beliefs and other mental states by people who, based on prejudice, raise doubts about our psychological self-ascriptions. The conclusion Borgoni draws is as follows:

In this sense, Coliva's view on authority as a central feature of self-knowledge is found wanting. It is not the case that the lack of first-person authority implies lack of rationality or lack of concepts. Cases of epistemic injustice are cases where one's rationality, mastering of concepts, and self-knowledge are maintained while one's authority is undermined.

I bag to disagree. That is, it seems a key feature of epistemic injustice that the members of the targeted group are not considered to fulfill at least one of these conditions. The example presented by Borgoni seems to call into doubt the subject's ability correctly to apply the concept of belief, at least in her own case. Fricker's (2007) example drawn from *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, where Marge is silenced with the comment "Marge, there's female intuition, and then there are facts" seems to be based on the denial of

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Marge's (and women's) rationality. For, according to Herbert Greenleaf, she cannot distinguish between facts and fantasies typical of "female intuition" (whatever that might be).

I don't know well enough the typical put-downs used against black people or other groups, but it seems likely that they would hinge on their alleged lack of rationality and/or conceptual competence, which are characteristic traits of humanity. In fact, these put-downs usually depend on seeing members of the relevant groups somewhat less than human, at least in context or on specific issues.

Yet, another way one could interpret Borgoni's favorite example is to take it as accruing to a charge of self-deception. The female professor thinks she believes that p , but she is wrong. She does not have that belief at all. All she wants to do is to mess around with her male colleagues' decisions. Now, in the book, I deal with self-deception as a case in which one would have a given belief as a commitment and yet lack the relevant dispositions or have contrary ones which can be made sense of by attributing to her a different mental state as a disposition. One usual way in which self-deception comes to the surface is through interpersonal exchanges where, typically, the subject's psychological self-ascription is challenged by the interlocutor. For example, I say "I am healthy", while my spouse sees the number of pills I am taking and the disproportionate number of medical tests I undertake, and tells me "you don't believe you are healthy, really. Look at the amount of pills you take and the numerous tests you undergo". I reply, "I strongly believe I am healthy no matter what you say" (and the conversation might go on). Yet, there are cases in which the challenge raised by the interlocutor is mistaken because it is actually based on their biases. That is, there is actually nothing in our own behavior that justifies their raising a doubt concerning the legitimacy of our psychological self-ascription. Their doubt about the latter is mistaken, because it is biased, and is in fact unmotivated. Yet, unmotivated doubt does not represent a challenge to authority. In contrast, motivated doubts, like my husband's in the fictional example I gave, raise a serious challenge to authority, at least *prima facie*. That challenge is defused once we realize the possibility that self-deception may consist in having certain beliefs as commitments, with respect to which we remain authoritative, while also having opposite beliefs as dispositions, with respect to which we are not authoritative and whose self-knowledge is typically obtained through third-personal methods.

There is another aspect of Borgoni's comments I think is very important. She claims that it is partly because others grant us authority over our own mental states that we are recognized in our capacity as self-knowers. Conversely, if others don't grant us the authority we deserve, then they wrong us in our capacity as self-knowers. I think that much is right. Yet, I would locate the source of the wrong not so much in the linguistic practice of raising doubts about members-of-a-given-group's psychological self-ascriptions, but in its causes. Authority holds only when certain C-conditions obtain, according to constitutivism. Part of the work then consists in characterizing those conditions and that is where differences among constitutivists usually arise. Borgoni's view would pair very well with Crispin Wright's, who sees authority as a fall-out of the linguistic practice of taking others' psychological self-ascriptions at face value. This is correct, by my lights, but still partial. For the linguistic practice is itself a symptom of something deeper, in my view. Namely, of recognizing or granting others with rationality and conceptual mastery. Thus, when others do not grant us with authority, they

are of course wronging us in our capacity as self-knowers, but, more importantly, they are wronging us in our identity as rational subjects who possess the relevant concepts. As I mentioned, I think many biases, which typically result in epistemic injustice, are rooted in denying rationality and/or concepts' possession to members of the relevant groups. Arguably, these are partly constitutive properties of being fully human. Thus, the wrong they would suffer would depend on partially negating their humanity. That is why epistemic injustice is not just an epistemic, but also a moral wrong, and constitutivism, of the kind proposed in *The Varieties of Self-Knowledge*, seems to have all the resources needed to deal with it.

2 Pedrini on Internal Promptings

Patrizia Pedrini raises an interesting challenge to the kind of constitutivism I have proposed in *The Varieties of Self-Knowledge*, based on the existence of inner promptings. The challenge consists in the fact that the latter occur and are subjectively felt, while escaping conceptualization. Thus, if we are authoritative with respect to them, this does not depend merely on having the relevant concepts and on being rational. Following Pedrini, I am inclined to consider inner promptings as vague or imprecise sensations or feelings. Now, the kind of constitutivism I propose for sensations and feelings is devoid of any ontological commitment: sensations and feelings (and other mental states like perceptions, imaginings, etc.) occur to us, they are not created by means of the relevant self-ascriptions. Our self-ascriptions, however, individuate them for what they are. Clearly, however, they can do it more or less precisely, depending on our conceptual repertoire. For instance, if I have the concept of pins and needles, and the concept pain, I can distinguish between the two. If I do not have the former, but only the latter, say, then my experience will not result in different self-ascriptions. That much seems to be obvious. Internal promptings fall on the less precise end of the spectrum. We have a genus for them – ‘sensation’ or ‘feeling’ – some kind of species – ‘inner’ – but nothing more precise than that. Yet, that’s absolutely fine by constitutivist lights. After all, when inner promptings occur and we know of them, we know of them in the first instance as ‘inner sensations (or feelings)’, nothing more and nothing less. What we may do, afterwards, is to interpret them as symptoms of this or that more precise mental state, where this requires inference to the best explanation, as Cassam (2014) suggests. Thus, it seems to me that inner promptings do not constitute an objection to the kind of constitutivism I propose.

What I found extremely intriguing in Pedrini’s comments is the idea that the cartography of the mental is in fact much more complex and variegated than I made of it in the book. This is definitely an idea I am very hospitable to. Still, I am not entirely sure about some of the suggestions Pedrini makes. Concerning hidden commitments, it seems to me that they are ruled out by definition, as it were. In the book, I characterize propositional attitudes as commitments fairly precisely (even though I make clear that I am not giving a definition). Simplifying a little, commitments are mental states we form by making occurrent judgements based on explicitly considering evidence for or against a given content. If so, it is hard to see how we could have hidden ones. Of course, there is an element of stipulation in all this, and I do not dispute the fact that in everyday discourse we sometime talk of

commitments we have unbeknownst to us. In some sense, I suppose, a child may be said to have a commitment to “Physical objects exist even when they are not perceived”, in virtue of being able to take part in a practice, which comprises giving orders like “Go and fetch your teddy bear in your bedroom”, and in obeying them. Yet, these would not be commitments in the same sense as the propositional attitudes as commitments I introduce and discuss in the book. In fact, they would be more like assumptions, in the same sense in which I introduce and discuss them in Coliva (2015).

Again, for trivial reasons, I do not think we can have first-personal self-knowledge of our character traits. Suppose I am brave. How would I ever know that first-personally? At the very least, I would have to reflect on my behavior vis-à-vis some danger and conclude that it was an instance of courage (and perhaps be able to rely on a wider inductive basis). Similarly for perhaps more mundane character traits, such as being lazy, or impatient, etc. Now, these character traits may be accompanied by some distinctive sensations and feelings. For instance, when I perceive an injustice I feel outrage and I feel pressed to intervene no matter whether that may get me into trouble, say because the person I am reacting against is physically, or “positionally” more powerful than I am, or maybe just unpredictable. I would happily grant first-personal self-knowledge of all these feelings, but to take them as revelatory of my alleged courage takes more than that. As said, it depends on inferring to their common explanatory cause, or even on taking others to their word. Suppose someone saw me act that way and suppose they later told me “You were brave”. Knowledge of that character trait would then depend on testimony.

Still, I agree with Pedrini that we may be alienated from emotions we would know of first-personally. Suppose you look at corpses and feel some kind of attraction towards them. If I experienced anything like that, I think I would feel very alienated from myself. Yet, that experience could also teach me something about myself – both positive and negative, like having impulses, which are frightening and yet being able to resist them – and might give me some clue into the kind of overall psychological make-up people I would consider deviant, if they acted on that impulse, would have.

Conversely, I agree that there may dispositions we would know of third-personally, from which we would not be alienated and with which we could identify ourselves a lot. The case of positive character traits, like being brave, may be a good example. You would know of that third-personally and yet you could strongly identify yourself with that and even make it your own commitment to act on that disposition whenever there is an opportunity. In this sense, I take it, there may be cases of first-personal self-knowledge based on third-personal ones, as Pedrini predicts.

3 McGlynn and Parent on Moore’s Paradox

Both Aidan McGlynn and Ted Parent raise objections to the distinction between beliefs as dispositions and as commitments I introduce in chapter 2 of *The Varieties of Self-Knowledge* and to my use of that distinction in connection with Moore’s paradox.

McGlynn favors an account of Moore’s paradox according to which if you assert that *p*, you believe it (at least). As a consequence, if you asserted (or judged) “I

don't believe that p , but p ", you would in fact commit yourself to a contradiction like "I don't believe that p , and I believe that p ". But what would the diagnosis of the other form of Moore's paradox, namely "I believe that p , but it isn't the case that p ", be? By application of the same principle, that form of the paradox would come down to "I believe that p , and I believe that not- p ". The latter, however, is not a contradiction and could in fact be used, after discovering one's inconsistent beliefs, to describe the kind of cognitive situation one is in. There would be nothing paradoxical in so doing. Thus, the proposed analysis simply loses Moore's paradox along the way.

So does my "first pass". If it were possible to commit oneself to both p and not- p at once, or to open-mindedness about p while also committing to p (or not- p), then it would always be possible to make the corresponding self-ascription either in speech or in thought. That is why the resolute account of beliefs as commitments – which I propose in the "second pass" – is called for (for a development of the account, see Coliva (2018)).

Returning to Jane's odd case: McGlynn finds it Moorean paradoxical. Now, I have often witnessed the reaction of those who would demote Jane's belief in her husband's infidelity to a different kind of attitude (some would talk of fear, others would consider it a hunch, the philosophically trained would revert to Gendler's (2008) distinction between 'alief' and 'belief', or to Schwitzgebel's (2001) notion of 'in-between believing'). Presumably, the underlying motivation is that they find this kind of case quite possible. Yet they would like to maintain that *any* judgement or assertion, which is Moorean paradoxical in form, is also a genuine instance of that paradox. They take the paradox to consist in some kind of impossibility, not to just irrationality (in the form of self-deception) –whence the proposal of demoting the first conjunct to something less than belief. Thus, McGlynn's reaction is quite unusual.

Moreover, in the literature there is now a growing consensus that Moorean-paradoxical judgements in form can be passed, for instance when one recognizes one's dissonant beliefs (Borgoni 2015). Indeed, some people take cases such as Jane's to show that there is no such thing as a genuine Moorean paradox *tout court* (Leite *forth*), in the sense of anything like an impossibility which the relevant judgements (or assertions) would manifest. Without going that far, we may acknowledge that a Moorean paradoxical judgement in form would be the natural description of several possible situations subjects might be in (see Borgoni (2015) and Leite (2018) for some other examples). A particularly intriguing one would be afforded by implicit bias and the results of one's testing for it. If one took them at face value, they would lead to the following kind of self-ascription "I believe [based on the test, and hence in the dispositional sense] that p [something negative about a target group], but it is not the case that p [which would express one's considered judgement, and hence one's belief as a commitment, about p]". Thus, it seems important to propose an account of Moore's paradox that does not over-generalize to cases such as Jane's and to several other ones, which are now more and more acknowledged in the literature.

Concerning McGlynn's argument that Jane's assertion would be Moorean paradoxical, while its counterpart in the past tense wouldn't, I think it is neither here nor there. The fact that the latter judgement or assertion is irreproachable is usually appealed to in order to argue that Moore's paradox does not reduce to a

contradiction, since contradictions remain so no matter whether their tense is changed. Yet, the crucial assumption in that argument is that, in the present tense, we are actually confronted with some kind of impossibility. Thus, McGlynn is presupposing that even in Jane's case her Moorean paradoxical assertion would amount to a genuine paradox. This is precisely what I deny. Thus, if I am wrong about Jane, it needs to be shown otherwise.

Ted Parent raises an objection to the account I provide of beliefs as commitments, which has been aired before and to which I have replied in writing (Coliva 2018). The objection is based on the known fact that dialetheists and, at any rate, those who think we should not uphold the principle of contradiction, would likely commit themselves to incompatible contents. Here I will discuss only the case of dialetheists, since the other examples Parent presents are less precise and I am not entirely sure whether they should be considered as legitimate challenges to the principle of contradiction. A first important point is that dialetheists are not committed to the truth of all contradictions, but only to the truth of some specific ones, or so they say. In particular, they (allegedly) commit themselves to the truth of paradoxical sentences, such as "This very statement is false (or not true)".¹ Yet what we are considering here is the possibility of knowingly committing oneself to simple contradictions like "It is raining and not raining here and now". Thus, cases in which a dialetheist would have us accept true contradictions would not be ones that would make trouble for the view about beliefs as commitments I have been proposing. Nevertheless, it is important to notice that by committing to the truth of the liar sentence, dialetheists could not be committed to its falsity, or to open-mindedness with respect to it. Thus, it would be unclear whether their views could really represent a counter-example to what we have been seeing so far.

Furthermore, on closer inspection, it does not seem at all clear what they would be committed to, if they were committed to the truth of the liar sentence. If belief is an intentional mental state, which, together with desires, can lead to action, there must be a content to it and a course of action that would count as acting on that belief. Yet, with "This very statement is false", if the statement is true, it is false; and if it is false, it is true. Thus, by committing to its *truth*, a dialetheist, who does perfectly well know and realize those entailments, would actually have to represent the world in such a way that that very statement would be *false* and vice versa.

Furthermore, by committing to the truth of a dialetheia, one would commit to using it as a premise in one's reasoning. However, being a dialetheia, if it is true, it is false and, as a dialetheist, one would know that. Thus, one ought not use that proposition as a premise of one's reasoning, and ought to use its negation instead. Thus, one would have committed to both using and not using that very proposition as a premise of one's reasoning. Yet this is something that it seems impossible to do *at one and the same time*.² Thus, no commitment would actually have been made.

¹ I am confining myself to this example because it is one for which dialetheism has standardly been invoked. Dialetheists are very careful to say that *not all* contradictions would be true, for that would commit them to trivialism. See Priest et al. (2016).

² The position seems to get purchase only because one could think of entering the liar and its negation separately. But the logic of beliefs as commitments is synchronic, not diachronic. That is, one can perfectly change one's mind and revise one's previous beliefs as commitments. This is not at all equivalent to (knowingly and willingly) having incompatible commitments at once.

The important result, then, is that simply saying or thinking that one might have a belief as a commitment in a given proposition is not sufficient for actually having it. Of course, one might have another propositional attitude towards it, which may even be an attitude of endorsement, and yet differ in normative profile from belief as a commitment (it may be an acceptance or a supposition, it may be categorical or merely in reasoning – that is, for inferential purposes, to see what would follow from it³).

Moving on to Parent's discussion of some variants on Jane's case, he writes:

Thus, take the omissive example in which Jane sincerely asserts (J2) ["Jim is faithful to me, although I don't believe that he is"]. Suppose she is prompted to assert the first conjunct in a spontaneous, knee-jerk way, abetted by the fact that she strongly *wants* to believe in Jim's fidelity, is strongly habituated in believing in his fidelity, etc. But then, she follows with the second conjunct "...although I don't [really] believe it", as a way of admitting her considered *agnosticism* on Jim's fidelity. (Assume here the second conjunct is not merely an indirect or "coy" way of expressing positive disbelief.) Then, the second conjunct plausibly expresses some kind of Colivan commitment. Yet the case is not Moore-paradoxical because the *first* conjunct expresses a kind of dispositional belief.

I agree that this is not a case of Moorean paradox and I think the distinction between beliefs as commitments and dispositions explains why. The interesting feature of (J2), interpreted along the ways proposed by Parent's scenario, is that the first, non-doxastic conjunct expresses a belief as a disposition, rather than a belief as a commitment. I agree this is a possibility, although I would maintain that usually assertions tend to express beliefs as commitments rather than beliefs as dispositions. One might even go so far as suggesting that, if Jane uttered (J2), the first conjunct would not constitute the content of a speech-act of assertion, but of some weaker act, like merely saying or mumbling. After all, it is uttered in an impulsive, non-reflective way. Similarly, if (J2) occurred in thought, then the first conjunct would not be the content of a judgement, but of a thinking.

Then Parent presents a different scenario in which (J2) plays a different role. He asks us to consider Sam, who "just asserts agnosticism about her partner's fidelity: "I'm not sure...I don't believe [but nor do I disbelieve] that Alex is faithful." He then notices that, on my account, if there is a *commitment* to neither-believing-nor-disbelieving, it would come with a disposition to defend the attitude from challenges. But then, Parent remarks, "even a considered agnosticism about your partner's fidelity might not co-occur with a disposition to *defend* such agnosticism". In more detail:

Kelsey may challenge Sam's reflective agnosticism by recalling some specifics of Alex's behavior, which clearly suggests strong devotion to Sam. Sam might then *eagerly* relinquish her agnosticism in favor of belief, and thank Kelsey for reminding her of what she had neglected. Surrendering agnosticism in response

³ And we know from Scotus' law that contradictions are explosive inasmuch as anything would follow from them. Various kinds of paraconsistent logic have tried to mitigate this result by employing different key ideas.

to the challenge might even be *hasty*, which would further the case that in no meaningful sense did Sam have a disposition to defend agnosticism.

I am not sure how damaging this is. Nowhere do I impose that one should strongly defend one's views, in order to count as having a commitment. All I say is that, insofar as we are dealing with beliefs as commitments, one should be able to offer one's initial reasons for them. Yet, this is perfectly consistent with being immediately convinced by countervailing ones to change one's mind, and, in this case, to relinquish one's open-mindedness. Thus, I do not think Parent's example is one in which the open-mindedness is merely dispositional and yet (J2) would still be Moorean-paradoxical. That is, the scenario is compatible with interpreting Sam as committed to open-mindedness (albeit for weak reasons that she may easily abandon) and thus her assertion of (J2) would be Moorean-paradoxical as it would confront us with the impossibility of being open-minded and yet committed to Alex's fidelity at once. (Alternatively, and somewhat less intuitively, given the specifics of the scenario as described by Parent, one could interpret Sam's doxastic self-ascription as an expression of a self-discovered dispositional open-mindedness and then (J2) would *not* be Moorean-paradoxical).

4 Zimmerman on Belief and Commitment

Zimmerman is skeptical of the distinction between beliefs as commitments and as dispositions, and favors a unified picture of belief, which in (Zimmerman 2018) he takes to be wide encompassing. So why do I favor the bipartite conception instead? Well, essentially for interconnected theoretical reasons. As we saw in the previous replies, because it allows us to make sense of Moore's paradox and of cases in which Moorean judgements and assertions are made and yet are not Moorean-paradoxical. Since the concept of belief (or indeed, the term 'belief') is involved in both kinds of self-ascription, it would hardly be possible to explain this finding if we did not distinguish between two species of belief.

Furthermore, the distinction helps us explain cases of motivated self-deception, and the kind of inner conflicts they typically originate in (see Coliva 2016, pp. 197–200) and, as we saw in the previous reply, it helps account for cases of self-discovered implicit bias. In addition, it can help us explain different cases of intrapersonal disagreement (see Coliva (2018)). In particular, it allows one to account for cases of diachronic vs. synchronic intrapersonal disagreement. Thus, it is a theoretically fruitful distinction. To the extent that philosophy aims at understanding the multiplicity of phenomena by refining our concepts, it would seem entirely anti-philosophical to insist on their identity in the face of that diversity, or by appealing to the uniformity of our everyday linguistic usages.

On top of that, that distinction allows us to preserve the characteristic traits of first-personal self-knowledge, while admitting for the possibility that in several interesting cases our knowledge of our own beliefs is obtained by exploiting methods largely similar to those we would employ to know other people's beliefs.

Zimmerman, however, raises a crucial point. Namely, if and to what an extent beliefs as commitments involve dispositions. More specifically, if and to what an

extent they depend on having the relevant first-order dispositions. He contends that if we lack the latter, then we don't have the former either. Still, beliefs as commitments are normative mental states and we can breach them, to some extent. For instance, you believe it is raining and yet, despite not wanting to get wet, you go out without the umbrella. Or else, consider the case where you have the commitment to help the poor, while not giving to charity (or doing anything else which would help them). On a resolute notion, in both these cases there would be no real commitment. However, this seems fast. For, as long as you are prepared to be self-critical or to accept criticism for acting the way you did, then you could still count as having the commitment. Thus, for instance, if, upon noticing that you left without the umbrella, you went back home to fetch it, that would show you had the commitment. Or if, upon noticing that you didn't do anything to help the poor, you then decided to donate to charity, that would show you had the commitment in the first place. Thus, I agree that first-order dispositions are usually present whenever commitments are involved, or even that they are normally fostered in case they were not present from the very beginning. Yet, I think it is also possible for them not to be manifested at all. To continue with our two examples: you realize that you went out without the umbrella, you still don't want to get wet, and yet you don't go back home to fetch it. As long as you are self-critical or accept criticism from others for doing so, you will still count as having that belief as a commitment. Similarly for not doing anything to help the poor: as long as you understand that you are falling short of your commitment and/or accept criticism for not doing anything, you will still count as having that commitment. Thus, while first-order dispositions are usually manifested when commitments are involved (let them be attitudinal or otherwise), or will be manifested, if one understands that one is falling short of them, they need not be manifested, to count as having the relevant commitments. What is necessary, in contrast, is to have the kind of reactive attitudes we have just discussed. That is to say, the second-order attitude of being self-critical or to accept criticism if one does not "live up" to one's commitments. Indeed, it is imaginable that someone may have a given commitment *C*, while never manifesting the first-order dispositions which would normally go with it, and who would struggle throughout their lives to actualize them, and yet in vein. It would be a kind of tragic life, I suppose (if the commitment is sufficiently important and central to one's life), yet it is a life we may conceive of. Presumably, as long as they would still think in their death-bed, as it were, "I should have been stronger and done differently", I think we should still grant them the commitment to which, sadly, they didn't manage to live up, at all. Call this, if you will, "the Catholic" conception of commitments. The label is especially apposite for two reasons. First, because it allows to grant commitments quite generously, such that they would turn out to be more widespread than Zimmerman's suggestion would allow for. Secondly, because it is really central to that view that our religious commitments may be something we constantly fall short of, as long as we repent and *try* to do better, perhaps in vein. (It is perhaps an irony that what I have herein labeled the "Catholic conception of commitments" is essentially the one Isaac Levi proposed (1997)).

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