



Deep disagreements and the genealogical challenge

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Abstract

This paper looks at the so-called “genealogical challenge”, encapsulated in the “you just believe that because ...” (YJBTB) schema, through the lens of hinge epistemology. It is claimed that hinges are typically believed just because one has been brought up to believe them (§1). Yet, due to their extreme variability, it is not always the case that hinges are not rationally held, while fitting into the YJBTB schema. In particular, they are rationally held when either different (de facto empirical) hinges are taken for granted merely because of one’s position in history, or else when (de jure) hinges, constitutive of epistemic rationality, are plugged into the YJBTB schema. By contrast, they are not rationally held when different hinges are taken for granted while aware of the fact that one’s reasons for them are either question-begging or no stronger than the ones in favor of incompatible ones (§§3–4). These would all be cases of “deep disagreement” – that is, disagreement that depends on different and incompatible hinges, which prevent parties from utilizing a common epistemic method or practice to rationally resolve the disagreement. Finally, we look at the possible extension of this framework to what may be regarded as religious and moral hinges. It is claimed that, depending on the hinge in question, these disagreements may (or may not) be “deep” (§5). Hence, looking at the genealogical challenge through the lens of hinge epistemology helps elucidate its nature, its epistemic significance and its scope.

Keywords Wittgenstein · Deep disagreement · Genealogical challenges · Hinge epistemology

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1 Introduction

In the rapidly expanding literature on the contingent origins of belief there is no convergence on the assessment of the epistemic significance of the so-called “etiologically” or “genealogical challenge”, often expressed by saying “You just believe that because you were brought up to believe it” (YJBTB, in the following).¹

Paradigmatic instances of the genealogical challenge concern religious beliefs. As John Stuart Mill put it (Mill, 1859: 17, emphasis added), the person who uncritically accepts the opinion of “the world”:

devolves upon his own world the responsibility of being in the right against the dissentient worlds of other people; and it never troubles him that *mere accident* has decided which of these numerous worlds is the object of his reliance, and that the same causes which made him a churchman in London would have made him a Buddhist or a Confucian in Peking.

Now, Mill’s point could easily be extended to moral beliefs. That is, we could easily say, of the person who uncritically accepts the opinion of the world, that he “devolves upon his own world the responsibility of being in the right against the dissentient worlds of other people; and it never troubles him that *mere accident* has decided which of these numerous worlds is the object of his reliance, and that the same causes that made him a meat-eater in London, or an anti-slavery in (present-day) London, would have made him a vegan in India (Jainism) or a pro-slavery in Ancient Greece or Rome”.

Of course, the extension to morality is not new. As is well known, Nietzsche mounted a genealogical challenge to morality itself. Genealogical challenges, *à la* Nietzsche and Foucault, are often presented as ways of debunking objectivist stances with respect to ethical, epistemic, and other values, by seeing them as arising from contingent social and historical factors, and as serving the interests of dominant

¹The disagreement over the import of the genealogical challenge is widespread. According to some theorists, it points to the fact that a belief, which, as such may be true, and even justified or known, is held merely based on causal factors that are not truth conducive, such as where and when one was brought up, the schools one attended, or the political or religious groups one joined. This, however, does not capture the allegedly debunking import of the challenge, for it does not show that there is anything epistemically amiss with “*p*” itself. For the method through which “*p*” may have been acquired might not be typically truth-conducive, but still “*p*” might be true. Furthermore, if education, or the upbringing within a community connoted by religious or political views, were generally epistemically problematic, then many more beliefs than the ones normally targeted by genealogical challenges would be problematic. Likewise, the debunking import of this kind of challenge isn’t captured by thinking that the genealogical challenge merely shows the “modal fragility” of a given belief – that is, the fact that it could have easily been false. For once again that a given belief may have easily been false does not show that as a matter of fact it is false or held for the wrong reasons (at most it shows that it doesn’t amount to knowledge, and only on certain modal accounts of knowledge). I take it that, insofar as the genealogical challenge is supposed to be epistemically relevant, and hence such as to show that there is something epistemically amiss or problematic not just with the circumstances that led one to hold a given belief but with the belief itself – i.e. its content – or the very reasons for it, we need to dig deeper into said epistemic credentials. That is the primary goal of this paper. As will become clear, it will lead to a differentiated account based on the type of proposition embedded in the YJBTB schema. Further discussion of alternative accounts of the genealogical challenge can be found in §3.3 and *infra*.

social groups. And while these critical elements will not be the focus of this paper, the general underlying assumption which will drive it is that genealogical challenges are characterized by a debunking, anti-objectivist stance.² That is, they aren't merely insisting on the fortuity of one's true and possibly justified or even known beliefs. Rather, they are meant to show that there is something epistemically amiss or problematic with them.

In this paper, we look at the genealogical challenge through the lens of hinge epistemology. It will be claimed that hinges are typically believed (in a sense to be specified) just because one has been brought up to believe them (§1). Yet, due to their extreme variability, it is not always the case that hinges are not rationally held, while fitting into the YJBTB schema, even after a disagreement comes to light. In particular, they are rationally held when either different (de facto empirical) hinges are taken for granted merely because of one's position in history, or else when (de jure) hinges, constitutive of epistemic rationality, are plugged into the YJBTB schema. By contrast, they are not rationally held when different hinges are taken for granted while aware of the fact that one's reasons for them are either question-begging or no stronger than the ones in favor of incompatible ones (§§3-4). These would all be cases of "deep disagreement" – that is, disagreement that depends on different and incompatible hinges, which prevent parties from utilizing a common epistemic method or practice to rationally resolve the disagreement (§3.2.1). Finally, we will look at the possible extension of this framework to what may be regarded as religious and moral hinges and will see that, depending on the moral hinge in question, these disagreements may (or may not) be "deep" (§5). Hence, looking at the genealogical challenge through the lens of hinge epistemology, with an attendant account of deep disagreement, helps elucidate its nature, its epistemic significance and its scope.

2 YJBTB it's a hinge

The idea that hinges are believed just because they have been inculcated in us through acculturation is a leitmotif of Wittgenstein's *On Certainty*. Numerous passages testify to its inheritance from one's community. Writes Wittgenstein, OC 93–94:

... Everything that I have seen or heard gives me the conviction that no man has ever been far from the earth. Nothing in my picture of the world speaks in favour of the opposite.

But I did not get my picture of the world by satisfying myself of its correctness; nor do I have it because I am satisfied of its correctness. No: it is the inherited background against which I distinguish between true and false.

²Alternatively fictional genealogies (such as the ones presented in Williams (2002) and Craig (Craig, 1999), regarding truth and knowledge respectively) are presented as models by means of which the purpose of a given concept is revealed.

Thus, for Wittgenstein, hinges are what paradigmatically fits into the YJBTB schema. The idea, then, is that we just believe hinges because they form our “picture of the world” and that picture is something we are convinced of not because we have “telling grounds” for it, even less because we know or can prove that it is “the right one”, but because it has been inculcated in us through acculturation (OC 91–92). Indeed, it is at least conceivable that people could be raised differently and be brought up to believe different hinges, thereby adhering to a different picture of the world. Such a picture, therefore, is not inevitable and indeed, for Wittgenstein, it is neither true nor false (OC 94); neither known nor unknown (OC 10); neither reasonable nor unreasonable (OC 110, 559).

Wittgenstein also tells us something more about the process of acculturation that “screws” hinges into us. In OC (143–144), he writes:

I am told, for example, that someone climbed this mountain many years ago. Do I always enquire into the reliability of the teller of this story, and whether the mountain did exist years ago? A child learns there are reliable and unreliable informants much later than it learns facts which are told it. It doesn’t learn at all that that mountain has existed for a long time: that is, the question whether it is so doesn’t arise at all. It swallows this consequence down, so to speak, together with what it learns.

The child learns to believe a host of things. I.e. it learns to act according to these beliefs. Bit by bit there forms a system of what is believed, and in that system some things stand unshakeably fast and some are more or less liable to shift. What stands fast does so, not because it is intrinsically obvious or convincing; it is rather held fast by what lies around it.

That is, in many cases, hinges are not explicitly taught. We are taught many things that presuppose them and, by learning the former we “swallow” down the latter.

If we look at these passages through the lens of the contemporary debate about “nurtured beliefs”, an important difference becomes immediately evident, though. Here is how Cohen characterizes nurtured beliefs:

When I say such a thing [that is, S believes that p because S was brought up to believe it] ... I do not mean that her belief is groundless. Nor do I mean to deny that she has reflected on and assessed the grounds she has for holding it, and continues to hold it because her belief survived that reflection. I have in view nurtured beliefs, which have passed the test of reflection for the believer. (Cohen, 2000: 10)

Now, I take “passing the test of reflection for the believer” to be a feature of at least some “nurtured beliefs”,³ like believing in the analytic/synthetic distinction after

³This is Cohen’s (2000) own terminology, which I am going to borrow in the following, while adapting it to hinges.

going to graduate school at Oxford in the 1960's.⁴ With religious and moral beliefs, however, it may well be that, at least in some cases, subjects sometimes hold them based on habit and trust in moral and religious authorities, rather than based on careful reflection.

Be that as it may, there is a wrinkle here, which is that, for Wittgenstein, hinges – contrary to nurtured beliefs as characterized by Cohen – are not the content of j/k-apt belief. That is, they are not held because one has reasons or “telling grounds” for them. Still, they are accepted (OC 161, 196, 279, 344, 360, 399, 551), taken on trust (OC 34, 125, 133, 150, 159, 275, 302–303, 337, 509, 599–600, 603–604, 672), or assumed (OC 87, 134, 146182, 228, 295–296, 343, 411, 429, 492, 556–557, 659, 661),⁵ where all these alternative attitudes have in common with belief the fact that they consist in holding a content true, in being committed to it, and in being led by it in one's thinking and acting, while not requiring having reasons or “telling grounds” for their content. Bearing this in mind, I will still talk of belief in the YJBTB schema, but “belief” here will be meant to cover these other attitudes as well, as is indeed common in everyday talk.

It is important to forestall a possible objection from the start. Namely, that since hinges aren't j/k-apt beliefs then hinge epistemology hasn't anything relevant to say regarding the genealogical challenge because the latter targets only j/k-apt beliefs. First, the various contents of beliefs considered to be open to the genealogical challenge in the literature significantly overlap with hinges as characterized by Wittgenstein in *On Certainty*, and by hinge epistemologists more generally, as we will see at length in the following. Secondly, it would be question-begging against a hinge-epistemological account of the genealogical challenge to assume from the start that it only targets j/k-apt beliefs. Whether certain propositions are the content of j/k-apt beliefs or rather play a hinge-role is a theoretical decision to be made based not on the content, or the degree of personal confidence with which a given proposition is believed by a given subject, but based on the *role* that the proposition believed – in the loose sense of the word – plays within our shared epistemic practices.⁶ Thirdly, the correct account of hinges doesn't dispense with at least some of them being supported by reasons and evidence (of various kinds, as we shall see in the following). Rather, it dispenses with the idea of there being non-circular reasons for them (de jure hinges); or with the idea of those reasons being stronger than hinges themselves (de facto hinges, once they play that role, rather than the role of empirical propositions); or, finally, with the idea of those reasons being stronger than those for alternative, incompatible hinges (nurtured hinges).

⁴ It falls beyond the scope of this paper to provide an account of how certain philosophical theses, like the distinction between analytic and synthetic propositions (or its denial), could become hinges of this or that philosophical school. Yet, there is no bar in principle to that extension. For a hinge-account of philosophical disagreement, see (Coliva & Doulas, 2022, 2025).

⁵ I discuss these attitudes in the context of *On Certainty* and of the development of hinge epistemology in Coliva (2010, 2015, 2022). We will return on the epistemic status of hinges in the following.

⁶ Thus, “Human beings have never been on Mars” is a hinge (and a de facto one at that), while “My mother loves me”, or, preposterously, – as one reviewer suggested – “I am the smartest person on Earth”, aren't, no matter how convinced one might be of either, or indeed no matter how much evidence there might be in favor of “My mother loves me” or “I am the smartest person on Earth”.

Thus, the question I will be focusing on is whether believing hinges – that is, taking them for granted/trusting/accepting or assuming them–, just because we have been acculturated in a certain way, is rational.⁷

3 On the rationality of YJBTB it's a hinge

Surely, for Wittgenstein, taking hinges for granted – and therefore believing them, in a sense – is not rational if, by “rational”, we mean “supported by reasons”. To be sure, we have plenty of evidence in favor of hinges – ranging from perceptual, to testimonial. Yet, either such evidence is no stronger than what it is supposed to prove, or indeed it presupposes what it is supposed to prove.

Consider “Here is my hand” in a Moore-like scenario. According to Wittgenstein, one may be tempted to say that Moore believes – indeed knows – that there is his hand there because he sees it. Yet, for him, seeing one’s hand entails that one’s sense organs are working reliably at least on that occasion. Yet, to prove that they are, one would presumably take a bunch of familiar objects around one and check whether one can recognize them. To that end, one will therefore have to take for granted that such familiar objects around one exist and are visually presented to one. Moore’s hands are just one handy – pun intended – instance of the objects which may fulfil this function in that context. Thus, for Wittgenstein, the grounds Moore has for believing “Here is my hand” are no stronger than his antecedent conviction that there is indeed his hand there. Even if one allowed that “Here is my hand”, for Moore, is the result of easy knowledge (Greco, 2020), and therefore allowed for its being initially held based on reasons, as I recommend (Coliva, 2023), it would not be subject to the kind of empirical scrutiny and control that ordinary empirical propositions may be subject to. In this sense, the conviction of there being one’s hand, in the relevant context, would be stronger than any reason we may adduce to believe the opposite.

Consider now “The Earth has existed for a very long time”. Again, one may be tempted to say that one believes or knows that because one has been taught geology and history, which testify to the long existence of the Earth. Notice, however, that fossils and historical evidence owe their epistemic status to the prior acceptance of the fact that the Earth has not been created just a few minutes ago, replete with everything that can be found on it, including those very fossils and pieces of historical evidence. Hence, the grounds we have to believe that the Earth has existed for a very long time presuppose the acceptance of that very proposition. They also entail that much, but do not lend any independent epistemic support to that hinge. While they allow us to discount the opposite proposition – as nothing in our picture of the world speaks against such a hinge (OC 93)–, they do not corroborate the epistemic credentials of that hinge either. They just keep it fixed within our picture of the world (OC 152, 210).

⁷The other issue, of course, is whether hinges are propositional in nature at all. While I agree that they are mostly manifested in action, the more radical view that *qua* hinges they are *only* manifested in action (Moyal-Sharrock, 2005) is a minority view among present-day hinge epistemologists. For a defense of the propositionalist reading, see (Wright, 1985, 2004; M. Williams, 2005, Pritchard 2015; Coliva, 2010, 2015, 2022). I will assume that reading throughout.

I will waive the issue of whether accepting hinges is rational, if by “rational” we mean something other than “supported by reasons” till later (§ 4). For now, I would like to insist on a different point. Namely, that even if hinges are not supported by reasons or “telling grounds” – that is, stronger and non-circular grounds–, or if they are more strongly held than any evidence against them, at least in context, they play a fundamental role with respect to the production of reasons. For, according to Wittgenstein, they need to stay put for reasons for or against ordinary empirical beliefs to be possible at all. Indeed, the hinge metaphor at the heart of *On Certainty* (OC 341–344) encodes just that idea.

That is to say, the questions that we raise and our doubts depend on the fact that some propositions are exempt from doubt, are as it were like hinges on which those turn.

That is to say, it belongs to the logic of our scientific investigations that certain things are in deed not doubted.

But it isn’t that the situation is like this: We just can’t investigate everything, and for that reason we are forced to rest content with assumption. If I want the door to turn, the hinges must stay put.

My life consists in my being content to accept many things.

Notice that the lack of rational support for hinges is not a function of their fitting into the YJBTB schema. As a moment reflection shows, and in keeping with Cohen’s characterization of nurtured beliefs, fitting into the YJBTB schema is not sufficient for lacking rational support.

Compare: many people believe that the square built onto the hypotenuse of a square triangle is equal to the sum of the squares built on its sides. They do so just because they have been taught basic Euclidean geometry – irrespective of whether they know or remember the proof. Yet, their belief is perfectly rational because there is indeed such a proof – whether they are capable of retrieving it or devising it. Similarly, many people believe that smoking causes cancer. They have no clue about the medical evidence for that, even less about the biology and chemistry that would go into an explanation of such a fact. Yet, their belief is rational because some epistemic authority – to whom (however tacitly) they defer – does possess that evidence. They do believe it just because they are part of a community that shares that belief. Yet, since the proposition believed is justified, even if they cannot access that justification directly, their belief is rationally held.⁸

⁸Of course, this means that the proposition believed is propositionally justified. However, deferring to experts in these cases – and therefore to the justifications they possess for a given proposition–, is exactly what allows also subjects who may not have direct access to such justifications to form justified beliefs. Very few of our beliefs would be justified and therefore rationally held if it weren’t so. In fact, all beliefs acquired *solely* through testimony – broadly understood, to include textbooks, and other didactic devices or perhaps the internet and AI, nowadays–, would turn out to be doxastically unjustified if things were different. I take this as a strong reason to opt for a view of doxastic justification that makes room for the

Rather, the lack of rational support for hinges is a function of the role they play with respect to our epistemic practices. Hinges, for Wittgenstein, constitute the “framework” for producing reasons in favor of, or for raising rational doubts against ordinary empirical beliefs (Moyal-Sharrock, 2005; Coliva, 2010).

Thus, the YJBTB schema is compatible not just with rational belief and indeed knowledge of various kinds – as the mathematical and the medical examples mentioned above show –, but with certainty understood as the attitude we have with respect to what makes reasons for or against empirical beliefs possible.

Noticing this, however, does not amount to producing a reason or a justification for hinges, or anything that speaks in favor of their truth. That is, noticing that thanks to our upbringing within a community we hold certain hinges that make the acquisition of reasons possible is not itself a reason for thinking that these hinges are true, or at least more likely true than alternative ones, according to Wittgenstein. So much so that, if we found a community that did not abide by our hinges, we could only convert them to ours by bringing them to *seeing* things differently and by convincing them to divest themselves of their prior picture of the world and to adopt ours. Of course, we could produce some reasons, but they would only get us so far and, ultimately, members of this community would have to accept that, for instance, science provides reasons stronger than the ones produced by the oracle, or the Bible, say, at least with respect to geological and astronomical matters.

The startling conclusion we *seem* to reach, on this reading of OC, is that epistemic rationality is made possible by hinges that are outside the realm of reasons and that are merely a function of our upbringing within a community, which contingently holds on to them. Had we been raised in a different community – whether real or virtual – we would hold on to different hinges and would have different practices for producing reasons for or against empirical propositions (at least), which could potentially diverge in their outcomes. That is, they could give rise to justification (and perhaps even knowledge) of propositions that, to us, are unjustified and possibly false.

The conclusion is startling because it would extend the skeptical gist, or the debunking effect, of the genealogical challenge, encapsulated in the YJBTB schema, from propositions pertaining to the religious or moral domain – such as “God is triune” or “Eating meat isn’t morally permissible” – to propositions that are nothing less than the conditions of possibility of epistemic rationality.

In the remainder of this paper, I will investigate these potential conclusions further.

idea that if a belief is held based on deference to such reasons, it is doxastically justified. Also, I am not suggesting at all that Pythagoras’s theorem or a medical thesis like “smoking causes cancer” are hinges. All I am saying is that while these propositions can fit into the YJBTB schema, it doesn’t mean that they aren’t rationally held. So, fitting into the YJBTB schema isn’t sufficient to show that there is something epistemically amiss with the proposition believed or with the reasons why it is believed.

4 Varieties of hinges and of reasons for fitting into the YJBTB schema

First off, it is important to draw some distinctions among the myriad hinges Wittgenstein considers in *On Certainty*.⁹ Here is a table with some notable hinges and some considerations for having them fit into the YJBTB schema.

“No one has ever been on the Moon” (OC 106, 108, 171, 286)	YJBTB you lived before 1969	Had you lived after 1969 you would not have believed it.
“The Earth is flat” (OC 85)	YJBTB you lived before the scientific revolution; or are part of a (conspiracy) group that has no trust in science	Had you lived after the scientific revolution you would have not believed it. You would not believe it if you were not part of such a group.
“The Earth has been created (by God) in less than 7 days” (OC 336)	YJBTB you have been raised in a creationist community	Had you not been raised in a creationist community you would not believe it.
“God exists” (OC 107)	YJBTB you have been raised in a theistic community	Had you not been raised in a theistic community you would not believe it
“There are physical objects” (OC 35–37, 53–55, 57–59, 447, 454)	YJBTB you have been raised in a community that speaks the “thing-language”.	Had you not been raised in a community that speaks the “thing-language” you would not believe it.
“There is an external world” (OC 20, 338)		

Based on the taxonomy of hinges adopted thus far, it is therefore important to distinguish between *de jure* hinges, such as “There are physical objects”, and “There is an external world”,¹⁰ and *de facto* empirical ones, like “No one has ever been on the Moon” and “The Earth is flat”, or “The Earth has been created (by God) in less than seven days”; and what we may call “nurtured hinges”, like “God exists”. *De jure* hinges are constitutive of basic and universal epistemic practices such as forming, assessing and withdrawing from ordinary empirical beliefs based on perceptual reasons, which are constitutive of epistemic rationality in their turn (Coliva, 2015, and §4). Whereas *de facto* ones play a normative role for non-basic and more local (empirical or factual) epistemic practices, like astronomy, or history and geology and aren’t constitutive of epistemic rationality as such. For instance, present-day astronomy takes it for granted that the Earth orbits around the Sun, and not vice versa. Such a proposition, which wasn’t a hinge before the Copernican revolution, is now taken for granted. Present-day astronomy investigates many things, but not *this*. And even if it took evidence and belief-revision – in the broad sense in which we have been using the term “belief” so far – to move from the Ptolemaic to the Copernican system, that proposition is no longer subject to verification. In this sense, it is a hinge of astronomy and plays, within it, a normative role. That is, if putative counterevi-

⁹Moyal-Sharrock (2005) too notices that hinges are variable and “striated”, meaning that some are more universal than others; Wright (1985) and M. Williams (2005) too insist on the non-uniformity of hinges. Pritchard (2015), in contrast, sees all hinges as ways of encoding the über-hinge commitment that we aren’t radically and fundamentally in error in our beliefs. In the riverbed metaphor Wittgenstein introduces in OC (95–99) he didn’t think of hinges as uniform and considered them as differentially subject to the possibility of change, both from context to context, and over time.

¹⁰I will come back to these hinges in §4.

dence came up, it would be dismissed, just like we dismiss the possibility that “ $2+2$ isn’t equal to 4”, if, after buying 2 apples and 2 pears we go home and realize we only have 3 pieces of fruit in our bag. Should we find someone who insisted on that much, we would likely start looking for the causes of their odd conviction, rather than take them to have made an ordinary mistake. Thus, *de facto* hinges aren’t “hinges in name only”. Instead, they serve a normative function, just like *de jure* hinges, but in a more context-dependent way. For example, the statement “I have hands” functions as a hinge under normal circumstances but could cease to be one after a car accident. Similarly, some hinges are subject to change over time – before the Copernican revolution, “The Sun rotates around the Earth” was a hinge, but afterwards, “The Earth rotates around the Sun” took its place.

Finally, nurtured hinges – as understood here – are those that play a normative role with respect to religion, for instance, or in other value-laden areas of discourse (as we shall see with some moral hinges in §5). They are typically acquired because of one’s upbringing within a given culture and are often marks of identitarian belonging. Yet, contrary to *de jure* hinges, they aren’t constitutive of epistemic rationality, and contrary to *de facto* hinges, they aren’t supported by overwhelming empirical evidence. Furthermore, whereas *de jure* hinges are not revisable, *de facto* ones are and often have been – i.e. they are/were hinges only up to a given moment in time, or relative to a certain culture. Some nurtured hinges, such as “God exists”, are constitutive of an entire area of discourse, and of the epistemic practices that are intertwined with that. For it is only by accepting that God exists, say, that one can engage in discourse about transcendence. Moreover, it is only by accepting that God exists that one can then take the Bible to be the revealed word of God, instead of merely the testimony of prophets and apostles. In its turn, it is only by taking the Bible as the revealed word of God, that one can then go on disputing whether God is triune, or whether Mary ascended to the heavens. Still, nurtured hinges are unlike *de jure* ones, for they aren’t constitutive of basic and universal epistemic practices which, arguably, are in their turn constitutive of epistemic rationality (§4). As we shall see (§5), the case of moral hinges, if there are any, is complex, but those hinges too would not be uniform.

4.1 Harmless instances of YJBTB it’s a hinge

While all hinges present on our table fit into the YJBTB schema, they are importantly different. As noted by Avnur and Scott-Kakures (2015), at least “No one has ever been on the Moon”, and possibly other hinges like it, such as “The Sun revolves around the Earth”, “The Earth was created in less than 7 days”, which, given our classification, count as *de facto* empirical hinges, may be believed because of one’s position in history. For instance, before the development of the technology necessary to fly to the Moon, it was fine to hold on to such a hinge. Simply, around 1969, the possibility of flying to the Moon became salient and finally realized itself. What used to be a (*de facto* empirical) hinge, got demoted to the role of ordinary empirical proposition, and became susceptible of epistemic and semantic evaluation.

Cohen (2000) too notices how we now have “overwhelming evidence” against “No one has ever been on the Moon”, *ditto* for “The Earth is flat” and “The Earth has been created in less than 7 days”, which, once again, fall into the category of *de facto*

empirical hinges, in our classification. Indeed, the negations of these propositions now play a hinge-role for us. That is, they are de facto considered as norms and may be used to evaluate the rationality of our interlocutors, or, in the case of infants and members of distant communities, their degree of acculturation and scientific knowledge. As we saw, the fact that hinges may be revised over time, or may change from context to context, or may change due to new evidence is not a reason to think they are just like ordinary empirical beliefs. For it is the normative role they come (or, in some cases, cease) to play that defines whether they are (or were) hinges, not their content. Note that it is totally compatible with being a (de facto) hinge that becoming (or ceasing to be) one is a process that unfolds in time, with previously held hinges being demoted to the role of ordinary empirical propositions and new ones becoming so only after having been corroborated by much empirical evidence.¹¹

These cases of (hinge) propositions falling into the YJBTB schema are not epistemically problematic. They only point to the fact that when and where one was born and raised may play a significant role with respect to one's epistemic situation. No big news there! After all, Dante did not know that America existed, while Amerindians did even if they certainly did not call it thus. Examples could be multiplied *ad libitum*. Yet none of them calls into question the fact that *knowledge and justification are in fact possessed* when one is lucky enough to have been born and raised at certain times or in certain places. And if one were not born in such circumstances but were exposed to the evidence, together with the kind of scientific methodology that supports it, one would have access to such justification and knowledge too, up to the point of considering certain propositions hinges of astronomy or some other discipline. So, the fact that one "may be in the right" – as Mill put it – merely "by accident" is not sufficient to generate an epistemic worry. If being embedded within the YJBTB schema is to signal a genuine challenge to the epistemic good standing of one's beliefs – broadly understood – then we need to look deeper and move away from de facto empirical hinges like "No one has ever been to the Moon" (prior to Wittgenstein, 1969).

Hence, one of the required factors of an epistemically problematic instance of the YJBTB schema isn't just the awareness of there being a culture or group that believes an incompatible hinge (or proposition). Rather, the disagreement should reveal the problematic character of one's justification for the proposition believed.¹²

Notice that the existence of religious and conspiracy groups that still hold on to some of those once-upon-a-time hinges is in no way a reason *for us* to doubt, not even for a split second, that we do know better. That is, awareness of such an alternative culture or group does not defeat *our* justification to believe that someone has been

¹¹ The relevant passages are OC 96–97 (my emphasis): "It might be imagined that *some propositions, of the form of empirical propositions, were hardened and functioned as channels for such empirical propositions as were not hardened but fluid; and that this relation altered with time, in that fluid propositions hardened, and hard ones became fluid*". "The mythology may change back into a state of flux, the river-bed of thoughts may shift. *But I distinguish between the movement of the waters on the river-bed and the shift of the bed itself; though there is not a sharp division of the one from the other*".

¹² I will come back to the characterization of the general conditions for giving rise to problematic instances of the YJBTB it's a hinge schema in §3.2. As will become apparent, the disagreement need not depend on any real confrontation.

on the Moon; even less does it show that we are not justified in so believing in the first place.¹³

Similarly, you may disagree with someone (including your earlier self) who has been primed to believe that pet therapy is effective in relieving pain, and still have no reason to be (epistemically) worried about it. For if – knowingly – that belief hasn't been formed in a reliable way – and priming is surely an unreliable belief-forming method –, the disagreement is no reason for you to be worried about your opposite belief.¹⁴

Interestingly, Wittgenstein maintains the very same conclusion (albeit relative to what was a hinge at his time, i.e. “No one has ever been on the Moon”). As he writes in OC 286 (cf. 264):

What we believe depends on what we learn. We all believe that it isn't possible to get to the moon; but there might be people who believe that that is possible and that it sometimes happens. We say: these people do not know a lot that we know. And, let them be never so sure of their belief – they are wrong and we know it. If we compare our system of knowledge with theirs then theirs is evidently the poorer one by far.

Yet, as we saw, our system of knowledge can be shared with those who don't possess it yet. Thus, becoming aware of it, for those who were not born and raised within it, would (or should) prompt an assessment of their own reasons for holding otherwise and would (or should) lead to rational change. Thus, we need to inquire more into the YJBTB schema to see if fitting into it can give rise to a specific epistemic challenge.

4.2 Problematic instances of YJBTB it's a hinge

Let us consider other hinges Wittgenstein discusses, such as “God exists”. Consider what in OC 336 Wittgenstein writes – mistakenly, in my view – about creationism, which, when *On Certainty* was written (in between 1949 and 1951), was already a *passé* doctrine:

But what men consider reasonable or unreasonable alters. At certain periods men find reasonable what at other periods they found unreasonable. And vice-versa. But is there no objective character here? Very intelligent and well-educated people believe in the story of creation in the Bible, while others hold it as proven false, and the grounds of the latter are well known to the former.

¹³I discuss conspiracy theories in the context of a hinge-epistemology framework in (Coliva, 2025a).

¹⁴See Vavova (2018) for this example and for an account of the YJBTB challenge which explains it as due to holding unreliably formed beliefs, due to contingent and irrelevant factors such as priming. This is fine as far as it goes, but it is difficult to see how it could pose an epistemically distinctive challenge. After all, whatever the causes of one's unreliably formed beliefs might be, we should revise them (or at least suspend them), whenever we become aware of them. Furthermore, as we shall see in the following, what counts as a reliable (or unreliable) belief-forming method may well depend on one's prior acceptance (or rejection) of certain hinges.

Now, despite what I consider to be a misapplication to creationism, this passage contains a deep intuition, regarding the problematic raised by fitting into the YJBTB schema, from an epistemic point of view.

First, what is relevant is the existence of a disagreement between parties concerning a putative hinge. Here it is crucial to keep in mind the distinction between “disagreement as a state” and “disagreement as an activity” (McFarlane, 2014). While we may disagree with someone in the disagreement-as-an-activity-sense only if we have a real debate with them, we may disagree with someone in the disagreement-as-a-state sense also with someone we never met or could never meet. Thus, I could disagree with Wittgenstein in the latter sense because I hold views incompatible with his; and I could disagree with the members of a hypothetical community that for instance believes that water’s chemical structure is XYZ, instead of H₂O, even if this community exists only counterfactually. I could also disagree with my (former) self regarding, for instance, whether sushi is tasty. Or I can probe my own beliefs by raising hypothetical genealogical challenges for them, in a process of self-examination.

Second, what is required is knowledge of the fact the other party has reasons – better, evidence, in the case of hinges – to hold on to such a hinge or for discarding it. Third, and contrary to “Nobody has ever been on the Moon”, such reasons – or evidence – are not enough to *conclusively* establish the hinge, or for discarding it. Where this is due not to the paucity of evidence, which could be remedied in the future, as in the case of the de facto empirical hinges we considered in the previous section. Rather, it is because the reasons for a given hinge are either circular – that is, they presuppose it – or no stronger than the reasons for discarding it.

Now, plug in “God exists” *in lieu* of the creationist hinge. This fourth element of the epistemic problematic raised by fitting into the YJBTB schema becomes evident: there are no non-circular or *non-question begging reasons* – or evidence – that can be adduced to decide the issue one way or the other – that is for or against theism, and for or against atheism or agnosticism. (Or at the very least one’s reasons are no stronger than one’s opponent’s). For ultimately the evidence from religion itself – like taking the Bible to be the revealed word of God – will be question-begging against the non-believer (and the agnostic), whereas the thorough-going appeal to merely scientifically acceptable efficient causes will be question-begging against the theist, who will likely contest that those causes are compatible with transcendent final ones, which the theist embraces and the agnostic merely considers as possible. Moreover, the appeal to what, following Pascal, may be called “reasons of the heart” – such as feeling secure or loved no matter what, or else feeling guilty come what may, etc. – would only be interpreted as revealing God’s existence, rather than a particular psychological outlook, by someone who is already prepared to countenance God’s existence. They will therefore carry no weight against an opponent. Conversely, imputing that evidence merely to individual psychology will be question-begging against a religious believer. And an agnostic will recognize the force of this stand-off and will not commit one way or the other, thereby ending up begging the question against either.

Thus, I agree with Mogensen (2016) that it matters *why* we disagree. To stress, in the proposal I am putting forward here, the reason for the disagreement must reside

in the nature of the topic under dispute that does not allow for rational resolution, one way or the other, and for principled reasons.

Similarly, I agree with Vavova (2018) that disagreement *per se*, in either the disagreement-as-a-state or as-an-activity sense, isn't sufficient to give rise to an epistemically problematic instance of the YJBTB schema. Yet, identifying problematic instances of that schema with cases of deep disagreement does more than simply expose a "correlation" between the two phenomena, and in fact gives us a way of individuating which instances of the YJBTB schema are problematic and an explanation as to why they are epistemically challenging.¹⁵

In short, in the case of nurtured hinges such as "God exists", absence of reasons or evidence that could be used to rationally resolve the disagreement is not a contingent fact, due to one's positioning in history, or in the "knowledge economy", where reasons and evidence are often possessed only by specific individuals, groups or even cultures, often spatio-temporally insulated from one another. Rather, it is a necessary feature, because those reasons are question-begging against one's opponents, or no stronger than theirs and not further improvable. Thus, calling the ensemble of at least these hinges a "picture" of the world (OC 93–94) is apposite: we are not and cannot be rationally convinced to go over different hinges. Either we *see* things a certain way or we don't. Only a kind of *conversion* could bring us to *see* things differently. As Wittgenstein writes (OC 611–612, cf. 262):

Where two principles really do meet which cannot be reconciled with one another, then each man declares the other a fool and heretic.

I said I would 'combat' the other man, - but wouldn't I give him *reasons*? Certainly; but how far do they go? At the end of reasons comes *persuasion*. (Think what happens when missionaries *convert* natives).

It is only when the propositions fitting into the YJBTB schema fulfil these conditions, like in the case of the nurtured hinge we have just considered, that realizing that we just believe them because we were so brought up undermines the epistemic credentials we thought we had for holding on to them. In fact, it shows that for all our evidence, those propositions could not be proved by means of it, for that evidence is epistemically powerless if those propositions are not already assumed. Notice, furthermore, that holding an agnostic position does not mean to hold the only rationally supported stance. Agnosticism is the rational stance to have – one that is motivated and stable – when there is no sufficient evidence for either "*p*" or "not-*p*". For instance, when we don't have a proof of a theorem *T*, or of its negation, then it is rational to suspend judgement. Here, however, it is clear what kind of evidence is lacking or, if possessed, would rationally compel one to change one's mind – i.e., a mathematical proof. Not so in the religious case. For in this case the

¹⁵ I am not sure we are after "causes" in philosophy the way Vavova (2018) suggests we should seek them, with respect to problematic instances of the YJBTB schema, rather than stay content with "correlations". It seems to me that it would be enough to present criteria for individuating and demarcating problematic and non-problematic instances of the YJBTB schema and an account of the epistemic defectiveness of the former. Appealing to deep disagreement would do just that, in my opinion.

evidence appealed to by the believer and the non-believer is different in kind (or is interpreted differently). The agnostic is simply someone who appreciates the nature of this stand-off and is noncommittal about which kind of evidence (or which interpretation thereof) should be embraced.¹⁶

Thus, it is only when we witness a *deep* disagreement with someone that fitting into the YJBTB schema signals an epistemic problem.

4.2.1 Deep disagreement

Deep disagreement – as this kind of disagreement is customarily called in the hinge-epistemology literature – is a disagreement with someone who does not hold on to our hinges and/or to our epistemic methods, while there is no non-question-begging (or stronger) evidence or epistemic method that could be used to convince them otherwise.

This is an epistemic characterization of deep disagreements, in the vein of Fogelin (1985), and in line with Lynch (2016), who stresses the role of different and incompatible epistemic methods, and of Ranalli (2020) who stresses the role of hinges.¹⁷

More recently, an axiological account of deep disagreement has been offered by Duncan Pritchard, in terms of the significance or the importance to one's life of the object of the disagreement, typically exhibited by disagreements over our deepest values (Pritchard, 2023: 302). Pritchard then lists four conditions – no misunderstanding, satisfaction of minimal standards of rationality, commitment to the truth of one's position, being the object of one's considered judgement – that would characterize deep disagreements. These conditions, however, are no different than what genuine, yet ordinary disagreements should exhibit. Thus, the key feature remains the significance of the topic of disagreement to one's life and/or its being about one of our deepest values. As we shall see, however, this is hardly sufficient to give rise to a deep disagreement. That is, there are cases of significant existential disagreement – e.g. over the legitimacy of slavery, say – that are not cases of deep disagreement, or, at any rate, should not be considered to be so, from an epistemic point of view.

Now, saying that being a problematic instance of the YJBTB schema signals the presence of the epistemic problematic of deep disagreement means acknowledging the derivative nature of the genealogical challenge. That is, genealogical challenges are no different in kind from cases of deep disagreement.¹⁸ Yet, fitting into this schema brings out the characteristic causal story that is responsible for our having the hinges we do in fact have, which typically remains in the background when epistemologists deal with deep disagreement as such. For it makes plain that the holding of different hinges (or epistemic methods), with the resulting unavailability of non-question-begging or stronger reasons that could convince one's interlocutor, is a

¹⁶An elaboration of the agnostic attitude and its connections with seeing and seeing-as falls beyond the scope of this paper.

¹⁷Lavorerio (2021) perceptively notices this element of commonality between these two views. She is critical, however, of epistemic accounts. Reasons of space prevent me from further discussing her proposal.

¹⁸Thus, on the proposed account, while all fitting into the YJBTB schema, not all hinges give rise to problematic instances of it, for they do not all give rise to deep disagreements.

function of entirely contingent events, such as where and when one was born, which schools one attended, which religious or political groups one joined, etc. Accordingly, this opens a line of inquiry, in between philosophy, sociology, anthropology, and pedagogy, which I will not pursue here, concerning the characteristic features of acculturation, and, at least in some cases, of indoctrination.¹⁹

4.3 Comparison with other disagreement accounts

White (2010) rightly notices the connection between fitting into the YJBTB schema and disagreement, but this *per se* is not sufficient to give rise to a distinctive epistemic problem. For if you and I disagree over how much we how when we split the bill, there is a perfectly agreed upon procedure to decide the issue, such that at most one of us is right.²⁰ Moreover, if I and Wittgenstein disagreed about whether anyone has ever been on the Moon, I would still have telling grounds and decisive evidence to prove that I am right, and he is wrong.²¹ So, even if Wittgenstein happened to believe that no one did because he died almost twenty years before the Moon landing, this is not a reason to call into question the epistemic credentials of *my* belief. Furthermore, those epistemic credentials would have presumably led him to believe the same, had he been aware of them.

Nor is it enough for the disagreement to be “significant” (Mogensen, 2016), or have an existential value (Pritchard, 2023). Surely it is significant if your share of the inheritance is \$200,000, or only \$100,000, as your siblings maintain. Yet presumably there is a non-question-begging way of establishing who is right or wrong. As we shall see in §5, there may be cases of disagreement about existential values which aren’t cases of deep disagreement because there are ways to rationally decide them.

Hence, I submit, it is only when the disagreement runs deeper – that is, there are no non-question-begging reasons to hold on to a proposition, or they are no stronger than the ones in favor of an incompatible hinge – that fitting into the YJBTB schema signals an important epistemic problem. For if there are no such non-question-begging reasons, then if there are reasons at all, they are produced within a system of assumptions, or hinges, that the other party has no epistemic reason to accept, not even if they were made aware of them. In short, troubling instances of the YJBTB schema are those which reveal to us the fact that we have no objective reasons to hold on to what we believe, and have thereby entered a relativistic area of discourse,²² where

¹⁹ DiPaolo and Simpson (2016) insist on the relevance of indoctrination to the etiological challenge, which is not a truth-conducive method of belief formation since it characteristically impedes criticism. Yet acculturation, which is not necessarily non truth-conducive and dogmatic, is also relevant to the acquisition of hinges. In the religious and political case, indoctrination may play, and often does play a significant role; in the philosophical one, hopefully less so. See Pleasants (2018) for an analysis along these lines of the raise of antisemitic beliefs in early 20th century Germany.

²⁰ See also Vavova (2018) for a similar point against White’s account.

²¹ *Ditto* for the case of a possible disagreement with someone who has been primed to believe that pet therapy is effective in relieving pain, discussed in §3.1. This is further evidence that merely realizing that one’s previously held beliefs were formed by following an unreliable method doesn’t give rise to any distinctive epistemic challenge – distinctive, that is, of what is labelled “genealogical challenge”.

²² See Coliva & Palmira, (2020, chapter 1) for a presentation and defense of the characteristic features of relativism, in particular, so-called “relativism of distance”, in the vein of Williams (1981).

positive reasons in favor of a given party's position are considered irrelevant or at least no-stronger than their own from supporters of the opposite view, and in which occupying a middle-ground, like in the case of the agnostic, is question-bagging against the reasons of either opponents.

If we reflect on the examples often discussed in the YJBTB literature, the connection between fitting into the YJBTB schema, deep disagreement, and the non-objectivity and potential relativity of the matter under dispute becomes evident. It is not by chance that religious and moral convictions, as well as philosophical precepts are the normal stock-in-trade in this literature. Notice that, if this is the case, the genealogical challenge is a philosophically deep one, for it would show not that one's reasons are defeated or weakened by the emergence of disagreement. Rather, it would show that what counts as a reason *tout court* – indeed as a propositional justification for one's belief – is itself a function of a system of reference that it doesn't hold objectively and universally. Classic examples would thus be the contrast between a scientific and a religious outlook (broadly conceived), where the believer will consider religious visions, for instance, as propositional (and consequently doxastic) justifications for a given belief, while the non-believer will not. Of course, we may decide to side with the non-believer – as probably most philosophers would nowadays do – but this would be question-bagging against the believer.

What is potentially new, and startling is that, following Wittgenstein, one might be led to thinking that also “There is an external world” (or “There are physical objects”) is a candidate argument for an epistemically problematic instance of the YJBTB schema. We shall now consider this case more closely.

5 The rationality of YJBT there are physical objects because it's a hinge

Here is what Wittgenstein has to say about “There are physical objects” (“There is an external world”), in OC (35–37):

But can't it be imagined that there should be no physical objects? I don't know. And yet “There are physical objects” is nonsense. Is it supposed to be an empirical proposition? - And is this an empirical proposition: “There seem to be physical objects”?

“A is a physical object” is a piece of instruction which we give only to someone who doesn't yet understand either what “A” means, or what “physical object” means. Thus it is instruction about the use of words, and “physical object” is a logical concept. (Like colour, quantity,...) And that is why no such proposition as: “There are physical objects” can be formulated. Yet we encounter such unsuccessful shots at every turn.

But is it adequate to answer to the scepticism of the idealist, or the assurances of the realist, to say that “There are physical objects” is nonsense? For them after all it is not nonsense. It would, however, be an answer to say: this assertion, or

its opposite is a misfiring attempt to express what can't be expressed like that. And that it does misfire can be shown; but that isn't the end of the matter. We need to realize that what presents itself to us as the first expression of a difficulty, or of its solution, may as yet not be correctly expressed at all.

The point dear to Wittgenstein, and to Carnap (1950),²³ is that “There are physical objects” should not be interpreted as a description – i.e., as a statement about *what there is*. This is the mistake both realists and idealists are making – even though the former assert it and the latter deny it – and *that* leads to nonsense. Rather, “There are physical objects” should be interpreted as a statement about *the language we speak*, which countenances the category of physical object. That category licenses inferences concerning the continued existence of instances of that category even when they are not perceived. It is indeed a fact that we speak the “thing-language”, as Carnap (Carnap, 1950: 22) calls it, rather than an idealistic or a phenomenological one, which would not license the same inferences. Hence the battle between supporters of different ontologies is pre-empted for they are both guilty of the same kind of mistake. That is, considering that statement as a description about what there is in the world, with the realist maintaining what the idealist denies (or reinterprets in such a way that physical objects are constructed out of sense data).

Taken as a descriptive statement, the reasons appealed to by the realist are question-begging with respect to the idealist's position and vice versa. Even their respective starting points, such as, on the one hand, the certainty of there being a hand here – *à la* Moore – or merely an experience as of a hand – *à la* idealist – would be question-begging against the opponent. Hence, taken as a descriptive statement, “There are physical objects” would fit into the YJBTB schema and would produce a problematic instantiation of it.

By contrast, according to Wittgenstein (and Carnap), we believe there are physical objects because, to use Carnap's phrase, we speak the “thing-language” (Carnap, 1950: 22). Once we speak that language we can ask “Is there a piece of paper here?”, assuming that the senses will certify its presence before us; or we may say “Yesterday I put the piece of paper you gave me in the drawer. You will find it there”, assuming that unless the piece of paper has been removed, or unless I misremember what I did with it, that piece of paper will still be in the drawer even if I am not currently perceiving it. That hinge therefore functions as a norm of evidential significance that allows us to bring our sense experience to bear onto the existence of specific objects, conceived of as mind-independent entities.

Now, the important point is that the very possibility of having justifications and reasons for and against ordinary empirical statements understood as about mind-independent objects depends on taking for granted the hinge “There are physical objects”. Thus, while it is true that we just believe that there are physical objects because we have been brought up in a community that speaks the thing-language, taking that hinge for granted is a condition of possibility for producing reasons and justifications for ordinary empirical statements, and is therefore constitutive of

²³For a more nuanced and thorough treatment of Wittgenstein's and Carnap's respective views on the matter and their interconnections, see Coliva (2025b).

epistemic rationality. We cannot reconstruct that practice or vindicate the harmony between its outcomes and its presuppositions (cf. Coliva & Palmira, 2020, 2021), and therefore make sense of epistemic rationality, which is tied to such a practice, starting with idealist or phenomenalist premises. If, as I have maintained in Coliva (2015), epistemic rationality extends beyond what is justified to what makes the acquisition of justifications possible, then, in the case of this kind of hinge – that is, in the case of a *de jure* hinge such as “There are physical objects” – its fitting into the YJBTB schema may still be compatible with its being rationally believed even in the absence of “telling grounds” or epistemic reasons for (or against) it.

6 YJBTB it’s a moral hinge

Even though in the *Introduction* I suggested that it seemed obvious that Mill’s genealogical challenge to religious beliefs could easily be extended to moral ones, the extension to the moral case is more complex than it may first seem. The difficulty of molding moral disagreements onto the YJBTB scheme as we have been using it so far is that it isn’t clear either whether there are moral hinges, or, even if there are, whether they are a uniform category, and whether they may be subsumed under the proposed taxonomy of *de jure*, *de facto* and nurtured hinges. In addition, *On Certainty* doesn’t help us here, because no examples of moral hinges are discussed in those notes.

Let us therefore start our – tentative – investigation by considering the possibility of there being what we might call “*de jure* moral hinges”. If there were any, they would have to be constitutive of the very possibility of engaging in moral judgement, and therefore in practical rationality, in the specific sense of providing reasons with respect to what is the right or the wrong thing to do from a moral point of view. In this sense, therefore, moral hinges would be different from religious hinges, such as “God exists”, which, while constitutive of discourse about transcendence, aren’t constitutive either of epistemic or practical rationality (so understood). That is, practical rationality (so understood) seems to be universal among human beings, in a way in which discourse about transcendence isn’t (even though in many concrete cases moral judgements are intertwined with religious convictions).

For the sake of argument, I will assume here that there are moral hinges and will rely on Pleasants (2008, 2009) to proceed further in our investigation. According to Pleasants, candidate moral hinges are “Death is bad” and “Killing is wrong”. For “were we to encounter someone who asserted he ... doubted that murder is wrong, we would have reasons to regard her as a corrupt or incompetent moral agent” (Pleasants, 2008: 262–263). These hinges, therefore, seem to be constitutive of the very possibility of engaging in practical rationality (understood as we specified it above) and in this sense could be said to be “*de jure* moral hinges”.

The problem with these suggestions is that, upon reflection, it is quite clear that these moral hinges aren’t universally valid. Of course, in the normal run of cases, “death is bad” is a hinge; yet in extraordinary contexts, such as the one depicted

in *Hymn of Death*,²⁴ or in circumstances of extreme physical pain, it becomes an ordinary moral proposition, for which reasons for and against can be given, and with respect to which one can make up one's mind and decide, for instance, to commit suicide. Similarly, in the normal run of cases, "Killing is wrong" is a hinge. Yet, in special circumstances, e.g. self-defense, it becomes an ordinary moral proposition, subject to rational evaluation.

Now, we could fix the problem by substituting Pleasants' original examples of moral hinges with the following ones: "Unmotivated killing is bad"; or even "Inflicting unmotivated pain is wrong".²⁵ For It is difficult to imagine scenarios in which unmotivated killing/pain infliction would be morally permissible. Thus, paraphrasing Pleasants, we could say that "were we to encounter someone who asserted they ... doubted that [unmotivated killing/pain infliction] is wrong, we would have reasons to regard them as a corrupt or incompetent moral agent" (Pleasants, 2008: 262–263).

If so, then, we could say that even if such de jure moral hinges are believed just because we were raised within human communities that hold on to them, they are constitutive of practical rationality (in the sense of the very possibility of engaging in moral reasoning). Were we to encounter alien subjects, who didn't abide by them, we would therefore be within our rights in considering them as falling outside the boundaries of practical rationality (so understood). Hence, being a possible instance of a YJBTB schema does not raise a challenge to the good standing of these moral hinges.

Still not all moral beliefs are like "Unmotivated killing is bad", or "Inflicting unmotivated pain is wrong". For example, "Slavery is (morally) wrong" or "Eating meat is (morally) wrong" are clearly different. For, in the former case, even though it is a hinge for us, it wasn't one in antiquity or even in much more recent times, at least in some parts of the world, alas. The latter case, in contrast, is a hinge for some people, and even cultures (such as Jains in India), while it isn't so for different ones.

On the one hand, "Slavery is wrong" looks very similar to a de facto hinge, insofar as plenty of reasons can be, and have been adduced in its favor, such that for us the investigation is closed with respect to it. Thus, the disagreement as-a-state (§3.2) we may have with someone who was in favor of slavery back in antiquity is such that we could perfectly well take ourselves to have cogent reasons to rule in favor of our hinge. Thus, in this case too, the embedding within the YJBTB scheme isn't a challenge to the good standing of that moral hinge.

On the other hand, "Eating meat is wrong", while certainly a de facto hinge for vegetarians, for whom the investigation into this issue is closed and who take themselves to have decisive reasons to stick to vegetarianism, isn't one for non-vegetarians. If parties to this debate hold their positions based on reflection, it would then seem that the reasons adduced by vegetarians are considered either no stronger

²⁴This is the story, inspired by true events involving the Korean opera singer Yun Sim-deok and the poet, playwright, essayist, and literary critic Kim U-jin, of two lovers who decided to commit suicide together, since they could neither live together, due to societal pressures, nor live apart, because of the pain that caused them. Before dying, the soprano Un Sim-deok recorded the song after which the story is named.

²⁵Of course, there would still be difficult cases, due to the variability in interpretation of the modifier "unmotivated". Yet, there would be clear cases of unmotivated killing or pain infliction. Thus, the presence of borderline cases for which it would be difficult if not impossible in principle to determine whether they are or aren't unmotivated should not threaten the present proposal.

than, or even question-begging against those of non-vegetarians, and *vice versa*.²⁶ Importantly, it seems that where non-vegetarians would just *see* a piece of meat, or of food with animal origin, vegetarians would likely *see* the same thing *as* a part of an unjustly killed animal (or something to that effect).

If so, “eating meat is wrong” would resemble a nurtured hinge, such as “God exists”, even though it wouldn’t be constitutive of moral discourse and of practical rationality in the same way in which “God exists” is constitutive of discourse about transcendence and of the practice of producing reasons for or against specific religious beliefs. In such a case, then, an instance of the YJBTB that had that hinge as an argument would signal a problem with the rational standing of that moral hinge (or its negation), and would show that if we feel inclined to hold on to it (or else, to deny it) it is rather a function of where we were born and raised, or of the community to which we want to belong or to which we aim to pledge allegiance.²⁷ The genealogy of our commitment then matters because it brings about a different way of looking at the same thing. Hence, it is only to be expected that uniquely a conversion or a change of heart, rather than amassing further evidence of the same kind as the one already possessed by opposite parties, could bring about a change in view.

7 Conclusions

While Wittgenstein’s (mostly factual) hinges, as well as nurtured hinges (such as “God exists”), and what may be considered moral hinges, fit into the YJBTB schema because they have been inculcated in us through inculturation, they do not always give rise to epistemically problematic instances of that schema, despite their possible cultural and historical variability. In some cases, where *de facto* empirical or moral hinges such as “No one has ever been on the Moon”, “The Earth is flat” or “Slavery is wrong” are plugged into that schema, they merely show a positional difference that does nothing to undermine justification and knowledge when in fact possessed (in the first two cases for the opposite views). In the case of flat-earthers, instead, their holding on to “The Earth is flat” is no reason for us to doubt the fact that we have “overwhelming evidence” against it. When *de jure* hinges – be them moral ones or not – like “Unmotivated killing is bad” or “There are physical objects” are plugged in, given their constitutive role with respect to practical and epistemic rationality respectively, their fitting into the YJBTB schema is compatible with their being ratio-

²⁶I am not saying that they are. In fact, I am inclined to think that reasons in favor of vegetarianism are stronger than the ones against it, and hence that it may be on its way to become a *de facto* hinge for all. Still, large swaths of Western society haven’t embraced vegetarianism, even after considering the issue. With respect to vegetarianism, therefore, we witness something like a (uneven) split, like the split between religious believers and non-believers, or the one between pro-life activists and those in favor of abortion (on moral grounds). Should one find the example of vegetarianism problematic, one may substitute it with the case of pro/anti-abortion, or any other moral case one may consider to be such that reasons for or against are question-begging against, or no stronger than those of one’s opponents, because largely incommensurable with one another and due to different ways of looking at things.

²⁷If so, it would not be surprising if a conversion to vegetarianism, for instance, were to be achieved not so much through rational argumentation but by means of a change in view – for instance from seeing something as meat to seeing it as an unjustly killed animal.

nally held, at least on an extended conception of rationality, such as the one advanced in Coliva (2015), and its possible extension to the case of practical rationality. Yet, when we plug into the YJBTB schema nurtured, culturally variable hinges, like “God exists”, or perhaps some moral hinges, like “Eating meat is wrong”, the awareness that reasons for them would be question-begging against an opponent’s or at least no stronger than theirs does reveal that those propositions and precepts are held on problematic grounds. That is, it reveals that while we may adduce evidence in their favor, that evidence is not going to conclusively settle the issue against one’s opponent and for *principled reasons*. That is, because where we were born and raised, or the community to which we have decided to pledge allegiance later in life, inevitably shape our sensibility and what kind of evidence (or interpretation thereof) we are going to be admitting as an epistemic reason in the relevant area of discourse. Far from making those hinges and precepts any less important to us and to our personal (and professional) identity, this shows that some of our deepest convictions belong more to the way we *see things* – with respect to customs, ethics, religion (and philosophy) – than to the way things are, or indeed need be for epistemic and practical rationality to be possible.

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