Abstract
Williamson (1986) presents a troublesome example of the contingent \textit{a priori}; troublesome, because it does not involve indexicals, and hence cannot be defused via the usual two-dimensional strategies. Here I explore how the example works, via an examination of crucial belief-forming method M, partly in response to Hawthorne (2002) and the questions there raised for “hyperreliable” belief-forming methods. I suggest that, when used to form a belief, M does its special work through creating a verifying state of affairs which guarantees the truth of the belief thus formed. This creative link can be said to account for the knowledge-conferring status of M. But it also provides us with a way to defuse the purported example of the contingent \textit{a priori}. The knowledge at issue is only \textit{a priori} in virtue of this creative link, an importantly different epistemic achievement from standard cases of \textit{a priori} knowledge. One important moral to be drawn is that the \textit{a priori}/\textit{a posteriori} distinction does not appear to be slicing the epistemological beast at its joints.

1. Introduction
For a long time it was taken for granted that anything that was necessary was \textit{a priori} and everything \textit{a priori} was necessary (and the same for the contingent and the \textit{a posteriori}). In the 1970’s Kripke challenged this traditional view by presenting an array of counterexamples in his \textit{Naming and Necessity},\footnote{Kripke, S. \textit{Naming and Necessity} (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 1972)} namely, examples of necessary truths that were knowable only \textit{a posteriori} (e.g., that gold has atomic number 79, or that Cicero is Tully) and examples of contingent truths that could be known \textit{a priori} (e.g., that stick S is one metre long at time \(t_0\)). It might be thought that the latter of these two types of counterexample is more worrying than the former. It seems \textit{prima facie} plausible that some truths just require us to mount an empirical investigation in order to discover them, regardless of whether they could have failed to be the case or not. But the thought that one could come to know something which could genuinely have failed to be the case, without needing to check via experience whether or not it did fail to be the case, seems more difficult to accept. That \(p\) could have genuinely failed to be the case appears to completely undermine any \textit{a priori} warrant you might have for believing \(p\).

In response to such worrying examples, various forms of two-dimensional semantics were marshalled to dispel the force of the counterexamples, and save the traditional view.\footnote{See e.g. Evans, G. “Reference and Contingency” \textit{Monist} 62 (1979), pp.161-189, Davies, M. and Humberstone, L. “Two Notions of Necessity” \textit{Philosophical Studies} 38 (1980), pp.1-30, Stalnaker, R. "Assertion" in Cole, P. ed. \textit{Pragmatics}, pp. 315-332. \textit{Syntax and Semantics}, 9. New York: Academic Press 1978.} It turned out that the crucial examples made critical use of \textit{indexicals}. These two-dimensional strategies turn on how the behaviour of indexicals differs with respect to the two dimensions, those dimensions being characterized in terms such as \textit{world of utterance} and \textit{world of evaluation} or similar. For instance, the solution offered for Kripke’s stick S example rests on the behaviour of the indexical expression “actually”, given that the reference of “one metre” is fixed according to what is \textit{actually} the length of stick S. If you bought two-dimensional semantics, you had a way to defuse Kripke-style counterexamples, and hence a way to retain the idea that necessity and \textit{a priori} always go hand in hand.

In 1986 Williamson introduced a new kind of counterexample to the debate; a contingent \textit{a priori} truth that did not involve indexicals.\footnote{Williamson, T. “The Contingent A Priori: Has It Anything to Do with Indexicals?”} As such, it cannot be defused by the
usual methods, and more importantly, casts new light on the debate. It is surprising that this example has not been more widely discussed. Not only does it push two-dimensional semantics to the sidelines of the debate and show that there is more to the purported phenomenon of the contingent \textit{a priori} than the consequences of the semantics of indexical expressions, but as such a strange example, it presents a curious epistemological specimen. In short, what is at stake here is more than just quibbling over examples. Williamson’s example is interesting not only because it poses a new and worrying challenge to the intuition that it is just wrong-headed to think that we could know contingent facts \textit{a priori}. My hope is that by studying Williamson’s example in more depth, we may also learn something new about the different kinds of knowledge we can have.

In the following I explore how the example works, via an examination of crucial belief-forming method M. This investigation is framed largely as a response to John Hawthorne’s “Deeply Contingent A Priori Knowledge”.\textsuperscript{4} Where he highlights the need for more exacting criteria than mere “hyperreliability” for a belief-forming method to count as knowledge-conferring, I attempt to explain the mechanism by which method M does indeed go beyond this. By understanding better how one is supposed to have come to know the contingent truth \textit{a priori} in this case, we may discover that the \textit{a priori} is not the homogenous class that we previously assumed it to be.

2. Williamson’s Believer

Does the contingent \textit{a priori} have anything to do with indexicals? Timothy Williamson argues not, by giving an example of a deeply contingent \textit{a priori} truth that does not involve any indexicality, i.e.

There is at least one believer.\textsuperscript{5}

First, it is contingent that there is at least one believer. Furthermore, it is \textit{deeply} contingent; its contingency is not merely in virtue of a semantic function making it false at some worlds. Rather, it could really have failed to be the case that there is at least one believer. Second, it involves no indexicals. Explicitly, there are no indexical terms used in the statement. Williamson also argues that there are no hidden indexical elements at work, which I will grant.

Third, one can know it \textit{a priori}. This is based on a canny method for forming beliefs:

\begin{equation}
\text{M Given a valid deduction from the premise that someone believes that P to the conclusion that P, believe that P.}\textsuperscript{6}
\end{equation}

Now, consider the case where P is the proposition (fact, state of affairs…\textsuperscript{7}) that there is at least one believer. The following deduction is logically valid.

\begin{align*}
\text{Someone believes that there is at least one believer.} \\
\text{There is at least one believer.}
\end{align*}

\textsuperscript{4} Philosophy and Phenomenological Research LXV (2002), No. 2 pp. 247-269.
\textsuperscript{5} This is to be read tenselessly or eternally, i.e. there was, is or will be at least one believer.
\textsuperscript{7} I will use these more or less interchangeably. I don’t want to commit myself to an account of propositions or facts or states of affairs. I only want to use the general idea of something’s \textit{being the case}, or \textit{things being thus and so}. 

So, according to method M, one may now believe P, that there is at least one believer. Whenever a belief is formed via this method, it will be true. Indeed, because the deduction holds of logical necessity, necessarily, whenever a belief is formed by this method, the belief will be true. This kind of belief-forming method is sometimes called hyperreliable: it necessarily yields true beliefs. What higher mark of reliability could you hope for if you want to count a belief-forming method as knowledge-giving, beyond necessarily forming only true beliefs via that method? So the belief that P formed via this method counts as knowledge.

Since (M) is an absolutely reliable method for forming true beliefs, any reasonable theory of knowledge should count a belief that P which has been formed by use of (M) as a case of knowledge that P.8

This knowledge that P is a priori, given that it was not necessary to bring to bear experiential evidence to the effect that there is at least one believer, rather only an a priori logical deduction along with the belief-forming method. Hence we appear to have a clear example of the (deeply) contingent a priori.

The purpose of this example is ostensibly to show that the contingent a priori is not a phenomenon exclusively tied to semantic features of indexicals, which means that we can’t defuse the phenomenon by appealing to a two-dimensional semantics for indexicals. Granted, it seems that Williamson has shown that there is indeed more to the contingent a priori than this. However, in the following I will present a way to understand how his example works, which I hope will make it more palatable to those who find the thought that we can know of contingently obtaining states of affairs without any help from experience intolerable.

3. Method M
What kind of considerations will help to defuse Williamson’s example? Not trying to show that the example involves indexicals, but examining more closely the belief-forming method M. There is undoubtedly something strange about such a method, which relies only on a valid deduction (not even a sound one), and which can nevertheless always yield true beliefs. There is also something strange—another qualm about the contingent a priori—about a belief-forming mechanism which can provide information about contingent matters of fact without there being any experiential link between the belief formed and the contingent matters of fact.

Hawthorne has already cast doubt on method M.9 He raises two challenges to M as a knowledge-conferring method of forming beliefs. First, he argues that the method is questionable given certain liar-paradox-like consequences. Second, he argues that so-called “hyperreliability” is not a sufficient condition for a method to be knowledge-conferring, calling for further conditions to distinguish methods like M from more dubious, yet hyperreliable, methods.

The first objection suggests that M is not hyperreliable after all, given that it can go wrong in certain contexts.

Consider a world where there is only ever one believer who believes three true things and in addition, attempting to use M, deduces that there is at least one fallible believer. In that case it seems that M will, in effect, produce a liar sentence.10

[Proof of the valid deduction: someone believes that there is at least one fallible believer. Either that someone is infallible, in which case the belief must be true, so there is at least one

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8 Williamson, “The Contingent A Priori: Has It Anything to Do with Indexicals?”, p.114
9 See Hawthorne “Deeply Contingent A Priori Knowledge”.
10 ibid. p.259.
fallible believer. Or that someone is fallible, in which case it follows that there is at least one fallible believer.] How does this produce a liar sentence? Well, suppose this believer, call him Y, comes to believe that there is at least one fallible believer. Is the belief true or false? For there to be a fallible believer there must exist a believer with some false beliefs. All of Y’s beliefs so far are true. And Y is the only believer ever. So, if Y’s belief is to be true, Y must have a false belief. As the other beliefs are true, it must be the belief that there is at least one fallible believer that is false. So if the belief is true, is it false. Conversely, suppose that Y’s new belief that there is at least one fallible believer is false. Then Y must be a fallible believer, given that he has a false belief. So there is at least one fallible believer. So the belief is true. Y’s new belief will be true iff it is false.

This does not immediately show that M does not always produce true beliefs. For example, Williamson might counter that in such cases ‘There is at least one fallible believer’ does not express a proposition. But even so, Hawthorne concludes:

Once we realize that attempted implementations of a method may misfire and produce incoherent sentences rather than true beliefs, the knowledge conferring capacity of a hyperreliable method may be thrown into question.11

One might then wonder why we should expect M to provide us with true beliefs rather than mere pseudo-propositions. One answer to this lurking paradox may be that, if M is indeed the hyperreliable method it claims to be, then the situation described is not logically possible. As long as M is available as a method for forming only true beliefs, then believers will always have the facility to form a new true belief through its use, and so the kind of situation described, where a believer has a fixed number of only true beliefs and the use of M, does not describe a possible state of affairs. Alternatively, and more simply, it might just be that we got the meaning of “fallible” wrong here. Williamson defines it thus:

One is fallible, in the required sense, if and only if not all of one’s beliefs are true.12

But surely “fallible” does not mean has some false beliefs but rather could have some false beliefs (note the modal element in “ible”).13 In this case, if Y comes to truly believe that there is at least one fallible believer, then he must be a fallible believer. So although he only has (4) true beliefs, he could have some false beliefs as well. If God, our infallible believer, is lurking about, he may have lots of true beliefs, but he couldn’t have false ones.

The second objection is perhaps more telling. Hawthorne furnishes us with two candidate belief-forming mechanisms, M2 and M3.

M2 Given that P is true, believe that P.
M3 Whenever a nearby dog is irradiating one’s retinal surface, believe that there is a dog nearby.

These methods are as hyperreliable as M. Necessarily, if used to form a belief, the belief will be true. But one would be reluctant to count these as knowledge-conferring. Perhaps M2 is the starker example. Hawthorne points out that if we count M2 as a belief-forming method, and hyperreliability as a mark of knowledge-conferring, then any true belief will count as knowledge. [I believe P, so I take it as given that P. I run M2, come to believe P again via M2. As M2 is knowledge-conferring, I come to know that P.] Therefore, necessarily providing true

11 ibid. p.260
12 Williamson, “The Contingent A Priori: Has It Anything to Do with Indexicals?”, p.115
13 Here I am taking “has some false beliefs” as interchangeable with “does not have only true beliefs”.

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beliefs is not enough. Further conditions must be met such that one can distinguish genuine knowledge-conferring belief-forming methods from imposters such as M2.

Williamson needs a construal of ‘method’ such that M2 and M3 do not count as methods in the sense relevant to epistemic evaluation. I do not, however, know what the construal is to look like.\textsuperscript{14}

A half-hearted suggestion is made by Hawthorne that the required extra condition might involve supervenience of the fact of one’s using the method on one’s internal states. Whatever the general criteria may be, in the following I will try to draw out what seems to be the particular kind of link in the case at issue, the \textit{creation} of an appropriately verifying state of affairs.

How does M achieve its goal? Consider a world \textit{w} where there exist no believers at time \(t_0\), only a potential believer (an individual with the mental capacity for belief, but no beliefs as yet). Let us call him X. At time \(t_1\) X uses method M. X reflects that there is a valid deduction from the premise that someone believes that there is at least one believer to the conclusion that there is at least one believer, and so in accordance with M X comes to believe that there is at least one believer.\textsuperscript{15} The belief is true. X is now, at \(t_2\), a believer, so there is at least one believer at X’s world. It turns out that the tenseless fact that there was, is or will be at least one believer at \textit{w} is (was always) true. If use of M has provided X with knowledge of this fact, then this knowledge is \textit{a priori}: X did not look at his world to try and find a believer. The fact that there is at least one believer is contingent: there are other worlds with no believers at all (ever). And there is no indexical element at work: X need not know that \textit{he} is the believer, even though he is arguably what makes his belief that there is at least one believer true.

There is something odd about this story. We are considering potential knowledge of a general fact or state of affairs, that there is at least one F. What is strange is that there need be no singular state of affairs, that a is F, underlying the general fact, until the belief-forming method is put into action. No wonder we come to know \(P\textit{ a priori}:\) the method itself seems to have contributed to the creation of the very contingent fact that we come to know. Or rather, use of M has ensured the existence of the singular state of affairs, that X is a believer, which goes towards making it the case that the general state of affairs, that there is at least one believer, obtains. No wonder M is hyperreliable: necessarily, any belief formed by M is a true belief because in forming the belief a verifying state of affairs is always thereby created. It is this feature of principles like M that appears to be doing some shifty work, not a hidden indexical element.

Of course, there may be other believers around to verify the belief formed via M, i.e. to contribute to the general state of affairs that there is at least one believer, but it is the believer that is created by use of M that \textit{guarantees} that the belief will always be true. Or indeed the agent using M may already be a believer himself. To be more precise, then, when an individual X uses method M to form the belief that there is at least one believer, he thereby creates the fact that X believes that P. This will underlie the fact that X is a believer, which in turn underlies the fact that there is at least one believer. It will often be the case that X is already a believer, or there are other believers around, in which case the fact that X is a believer and/or the fact that there is at least one believer will already exist. But the fact created by X’s use of M will nevertheless \textit{guarantee} the existence of these further facts: if none of the facts existed, and the fact that X believes that P were created, then the other facts

\textsuperscript{14} Hawthorne, “Deeply Contingent A Priori Knowledge” pp.258-9

\textsuperscript{15} If you hold the view that there is a necessary believer, i.e. God, modify the example to “There is at least one fallible believer”, understanding “fallible” in the modal sense suggested above.
would also be brought into being. What is common to all cases is that use of M creates the fact that this individual believes P, which guarantees the existence of the additional singular and general fact. In the most extreme case, use of M creates all three.

The point I am hoping to draw out is that somehow any knowledge that is legitimately gained in this example is thus gained, and is a priori, precisely because the epistemic agent has a hand in creating the fact to be known. One utilizes method M, and thereby ensures the existence of a verifying state of affairs for the belief that there is at least one believer. This is a priori in virtue of the appropriate guarantee that the state of affairs obtain. I will label the view “epistemic creationism”, as the key idea seems to be that an appropriate warrant for knowledge is created. Hawthorne has also noted the possibility of this kind of warrant.

…while the meaning of s might not guarantee a verifying state of affairs, mightn’t the fact of one’s believing that s is true guarantee a verifying state of affairs? And mightn’t this fact be exploited to secure knowledge of truths that are deeply contingent?16

Part of the aim of this paper is to flesh this idea out a bit more.

4. “Epistemic Creationism”

So, what is to be made of “epistemic creationism”? First, in answer to Hawthorne’s request for an additional constraint on hyperreliable belief-forming methods, a starting point might be that there is an appropriate link between the fact known and the belief or the formation of the belief. In normal cases, that link might involve perception, testimony, deduction from true premises, and so on. In this peripheral case, that link is that the belief-forming method employed may itself create the fact that is known (or at least create a fact that guarantees the existence of the fact that is known). One mustn’t forget that there may be other verifying states of affairs around independently, such that we appear to have gained substantial knowledge about contingent matters of fact (there may be lots of other believers etc.). But it is important to note that this knowledge is guaranteed a priori only in virtue of the state of affairs created through use of the belief-forming mechanism. The important link between belief and fact that makes this knowledge is the creative link to the state of affairs or fact that guarantees the existence of the fact that is purportedly known.

A few words need to be said about what I mean by “creation of a fact”. First, I don’t want to be committed to a particular metaphysical thesis about facts. All I mean by ‘fact’ or ‘state of affairs’ is the idea of things being thus and so; I want to remain neutral on whether a special or sui generis ontological status should be afforded here.17 What is important is that we can have knowledge of these things, and that these things play some role in the truth of our beliefs and so forth. So, for example, things might be such that grass is green. I can know that grass is green. And things being such that grass is green plays some role in ensuring that my belief that grass is green is a true one. ‘Fact’ or ‘state of affairs’ is, for present purposes, a handy way to say ‘things being thus and so’.

Second, it doesn’t seem so strange that we have the ability to bring about things being thus and so. I may purchase a new bookcase and assemble it in my sitting room. I thereby bring it about that there is a bookcase in my sitting room in the year 2009, and guarantee that there is (was or will be) at least one bookcase in my sitting room. What if you think that facts are eternal and tenseless? So the fact that there is at least one bookcase in my sitting room must always have existed. Under such views, “creation” cannot be considered to mean

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16 Hawthorne, “Deeply Contingent A Priori Knowledge” p.248
17 Others are welcome to apply their own favourite theory of facts and flesh out epistemic creationism in their own terms.
“caused to exist” or anything else that would require that my action be temporally prior to the existence of the thing “created”. The idea must be that the existence of this fact still depends in some important way upon, e.g., my purchasing and assembling of the bookcase. If I hadn’t done that, the fact would never have existed.

What objections might be raised against epistemic creationism? One might worry that it makes no sense to say that we come to know P via a certain method, when P arguably does not exist prior to coming to know that P. Or, to be more precise and more complicated, where P is a general tenseless fact, but we come to know P only through coming to know a subordinate time-indexed or tensed fact, how can we know that P prior to the crucial time associated with the obtaining of the subordinate fact? Consider: I can introduce a proper name by using it in a particular way for the first time, e.g. I utter ‘Tiger is my new dog’. There is then an interesting question as to whether such utterances count as making assertions with truth-values. Technically speaking, the name doesn’t yet have a referent, and only receives one in the course of the utterance being made. One may allow that the initial name-introducing speech act does not make any assertion, and then that further claims made using the name are truth-evaluable, can be assertions, and are candidates for knowledge.\(^{18}\) But in the case of M, can one allow that the first time it is used a verifying fact is created, and only on subsequent uses will beliefs be formed and knowledge be conferred? No. That will take away from M’s hyperreliability. In any case, whether or not the relevant fact was the case prior to the belief-forming exercise, the resultant belief is nevertheless true. There just is at least one believer after the exercise has been completed, so on what grounds could one argue that the belief that there is at least one believer is not true?

Another worry relates to considerations of direction of fit. It has been argued that we can distinguish between different kinds of attitudes, for example between beliefs and desires, with respect to direction of fit. The idea is that whereas beliefs ought to conform to the world (we aim at true beliefs), desires are such that we try to make the world conform to them (we aim to satisfy our desires, not necessarily to desire what is already the case). But doesn’t the purported belief formed via method M get things the wrong way round? The so-called belief-forming method ensures that the world conforms to the belief, rather than vice versa. So perhaps the result shouldn’t be counted as a belief at all, and the method not a method for forming beliefs.

In reply, Humberstone\(^ {19} \) argues that we can only get a good explication of direction of fit in terms of the following conditional intentions:

An attitude is world-conforming (thetic) if the agent has the intention to not have the attitude towards P given that P is false.

An attitude is mental-state-conforming (telic) if the agent has the intention that P be the case given that he has the attitude towards P.

Even though it appears that the fact that there is at least one believer is in this case somehow conforming to the belief that there is at least one believer, just in terms of classifying the given attitude, we find that it is correct to deem it true (or false), and hence that we intend the attitude to conform to the world. It would not make sense to call the belief true if this were not an appropriate evaluative condition on the attitude. So Humberstone’s account of direction of fit classifies the attitude formed as a belief after all. The case is perhaps analogous to the situation where a benevolent demon watches over an epistemic agent, call him Bob, and performs small miracles to ensure that any belief that Bob forms is true. There is something


about Bob’s beliefs that results in the world conforming to them, rather than *vice versa*, but they still count as beliefs given that Bob has the intention that they conform to the world. It just so happens that other mechanisms are afoot to ensure that they do so conform. Likewise, an agent using method M intends their attitude formed via M to conform to the world. It just so happens that M ensures that it will so conform.

Note that in terms of the structure of the *method*, there is no obvious asymmetry between beliefs and desires. Consider:

- **M_B**: Given a valid deduction from the premise that someone believes that there is at least one believer to the conclusion that there is at least one believer, believe that there is at least one believer.
- **M_D**: Given a valid deduction from the premise that someone desires that there is at least one desirer to the conclusion that there is at least one desirer, desire that there is at least one desirer.

**M_D** is perhaps an odd way to come to desire something, but it will guarantee that your resulting desire will be satisfied. Both methods ensure that the world will conform to the attitude thereby formed—that the belief will be true and that the desire will be satisfied. But it still seems right to think of them as different attitudes, one which is true or false, one which is satisfied or not. This suggests that Humberstone is right to look for a further explanation of direction of fit, and our method *qua belief*-forming method stands.

One might also raise an objection if there were cases where, although there is a creative link between a belief and a fact, the belief does not count as knowledge. Consider, for example, the case of beliefs of the “self-fulfilling prophecy” type, such as the belief that one will indeed be successful in a certain venture, success in which causally requires—and will in the circumstances be ensured by—such confidence.20

Say Bob believes that he will win the race. This self-belief gives him the right state of mind to be able to go into the race and perform well, and so causally contributes to his eventually winning the race. So Bob’s having the belief contributed to the obtaining of the state of affairs that makes the belief true. But arguably Bob doesn’t know that he will win the race. Even if he did know, it would be through inductive research, perhaps his experience of his state of mind before many races and his associated results, not *a priori* reasoning. Either Bob does know, in which case the creative link is knowledge-conferring, but not *a priori* knowledge-conferring. Or, more likely, Bob does not know, in which case the correct explanation seems to be that the belief does not ensure the existence of the fact alone. There are too many other factors in play. Although Bob’s belief causally contributes to a verifying state of affairs for it, it is not sufficient. Note also that the case is one where the holding of a belief can bring it about that the belief is true. This is not a case of a *method* for forming beliefs. Epistemic creationism is supposed to suggest why beliefs formed via a certain method always count as knowledge. It is unclear whether we can apply it to individual cases of beliefs.

This does however lead on to a much more pressing question regarding what it would take to count as actually using method M. In the story I told about X, X had no beliefs prior to using M. But surely X needs to have some intentional relation to the valid deduction in order to form a belief on the basis of its existence? To count as a method for forming a belief, surely the condition on forming the belief that P—that there be a valid deduction from someone believes that P to P—has to count as some kind of cognitive input, the cognitive output of

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20 Humberstone, “Direction of Fit” p.71. Humberstone uses this example to make a different point.
which is the belief that P. What form could this input take, if not the form of a belief or even knowledge that there is indeed that valid deduction? Being brief, I would suggest two answers. Either some kind of belief (or other intentional relation such as knowledge) that there is the valid deduction is required for an agent to succeed in using M to form a belief, or not. In the former case, my example with X is strictly incorrect: X would have to already be a believer. But I hope it can still be employed as an illustration of the point, to be tidied up later once it is made clear how M works (although not yet clear how it is used). In the latter case, my example is safe, but significant work needs to be done to explain how M could then be used.

5. Some Morals: Epistemic achievements and epistemological distinctions

If one accepts that an appropriate knowledge-conferring link between a belief and a fact can be that the method used to form the belief itself ensured the existence of the fact, this will shed light on how we are to understand so-called \textit{a priori} knowledge of deeply contingent matters of fact. Of course we need no recourse to experience: P doesn’t even have to exist yet! The mechanisms we have for forming beliefs will sometimes have the side-effect of producing verifying states of affairs for those beliefs. And so we have a \textit{a priori} knowledge of a kind. What we do not have is interestingly \textit{a priori} knowledge of contingent matters of fact that are the case independently of our knowledge-seeking activities. A paradigm case of a \textit{a priori} knowledge might be knowledge of mathematics. Granting that it was a fact that 2+2=4 before there were any believers and in worlds with no believers, this is an example of an atemporal fact that we came to know \textit{a priori}, without particular empirical experience. That surely is an exciting epistemic achievement. In contrast, it seems rather a cheat to gain knowledge without particular empirical experience merely in virtue of creating a fact oneself.

Recent doubt has been cast on the distinction between the \textit{a priori} and the \textit{a posteriori}, accompanied by a call for distinctions that cut more finely at the epistemic joints.\footnote{I am thinking in particular of Williamson’s account of knowledge of counterfactuals and modal statements in Williamson, T. \textit{The Philosophy of Philosophy} (Oxford: Blackwell 2007).} Perhaps the current discussion provides another point towards this. Williamson\footnote{For example in Williamson, \textit{The Philosophy of Philosophy}.} has argued that there is a middle ground between experience being merely enabling (akin to \textit{a priority}) and strictly evidential (akin to \textit{a posteriority}). Going further than this, it seems that looking at method M has enabled us to highlight one of two importantly different ways that experience can be merely enabling. On the one hand, merely enabling experience can put us in a position to exercise our conceptual abilities and powers of reasoning to come to know facts without particular empirical experience of those facts. But on the other, merely enabling experience can get us as far as having certain belief-forming mechanisms which will produce or guarantee the existence of facts to immediately be known, with no particular empirical experience of those facts. If this is correct, then the vaunted title “contingent \textit{a priori}” does not have the gravity one might think. The sense in which these cases can be said to be \textit{a priori} is different to the kind of phenomenon occurring when we acquire \textit{a priori} knowledge of necessary facts. In the former case, we know the fact \textit{a priori} only in virtue of our capacity to create a fact, in the latter case, we genuinely come to know something that was the case independently of our attempts to know it.

This conclusion should be interesting to both the metaphysician and the epistemologist. First, the metaphysician should be curious about the apparent ability of a belief-forming mechanism to, when employed, guarantee the existence of certain facts. If we take Williamson’s example as a starting point, there may be interesting lessons regarding the nature and dependence relations of facts to be learnt. Second, the example gives the epistemologist reason to question traditional distinctions, and consider more carefully the
differences between certain epistemic achievements. There seem to be interestingly different ways that we acquire knowledge, even after we have taken into consideration the role of evidence. Finally, spanning metaphysical and epistemological issues, hopefully something like “epistemic creationism” will sweeten the pill for those who cannot stomach the idea that we could genuinely know contingent facts \textit{a priori}. Perhaps we can, but only in a diminished, self-serving manner.\textsuperscript{23}

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