Mere Belief and the Etiolations of Language

Maria van der Schaar
Institute for Philosophy
Leiden University

Abstract
The paper uses the method of linguistic phenomenology to explain how mere belief can be elucidated as botched knowing. First, three kinds of non-attributive terms are distinguished, modifying, privative and restorative terms. It is shown what the logical properties are of terms like ‘mere’ and ‘botched’, words that etiolate the meaning of the terms to which they belong. A distinction is made between semantic, conceptual and ontological modification or privation. The topic of the paper is thus related to the traditional idea of privation. Finally, the phenomenological order of explanation of the concepts mere belief and knowing judgement is used to elucidate the relation between judgement and knowledge.

I. Introduction

My *Doktorvater* Gabriel Nuchelmans was an advocate of analytic philosophy in the Netherlands, but his innovative research was primarily related to the history of philosophy. Writing my thesis, I was in need of someone who was doing original work in philosophy, who shared my interest in analytic philosophy and phenomenology, and who understood that philosophy and its history are in need of each other. At a summer school on

Austrian philosophy in Bolzano, in 1988, I told Kevin I was working on a thesis on G.F. Stout, and we stayed in touch. I could spend some time in Geneva living with his students, who were renting a house near the border in France. Notwithstanding a wide variety of topics we were working on, we were all engaged in doing *linguistic phenomenology*, as Austin puts it in his paper 'A Plea for Excuses' (Austin 1956, 182). We learned that analytic philosophy is in need of more examples than 'The morningstar is identical with the eveningstar', 'The king of France is bald' and 'A bachelor is an unmarried man', and that many of the fruitful insights in analytic philosophy were predated in phenomenology. Kevin's sensitivity to the varieties of language and experience was an example to us.

Although the explanation of knowledge in terms of justification, truth and belief has been criticized since Gettier, the criticism has not been directed at the explanation of knowledge in terms of belief. Timothy Williamson is an exception, for he takes knowledge to be a primitive notion, and explains mere belief as a kind of botched knowing (Williamson 2000, 47). The term 'botched' is a modifying term, like the term 'fake' or 'false': a false Rembrandt looks like a Rembrandt, pretends to be one, but is not a Rembrandt. Normal adjectives are attributive: the term 'red' in 'red jacket' is attributive, because it is used to attribute the quality of being red to the jacket. Modifying terms are non-attributive, because these terms are not used to attribute a quality to the object: we do not attribute the property of being false to the painting, although we do attribute to it the property of being a false Rembrandt, when we claim that it is a false Rembrandt. Other kinds of non-attributive terms are 'mere', 'true', 'actual' and 'real'. Neither a false nor a true Rembrandt is a special kind of Rembrandt, but the latter is a

Rembrandt nonetheless. Non-attributive terms play an important role in phenomenology in the explanation of knowledge, judgement and intentionality. Interest in the etiolations of language can also be found in J. L. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words*, *Sense and Sensibilia* and 'Other Minds'. How can one use the phenomenological method and the linguistic method developed by Austin to elucidate the relation between knowledge and belief, especially the idea that mere belief is a form of botched knowing?

II. Four ways to relate *knowledge* and *belief*

(i) Knowledge may be explained in terms of belief. If someone says: "I know that dogs descend from wolves, but I don't believe it," we rightly call him irrational. And we may react: "If you know it, how is it possible that you don't believe it?". Because belief is a necessary condition for knowledge, one might be tempted to understand knowledge as a special kind of belief, and explain knowledge in terms of belief. There are, though, some problems with this order of explanation. A general rule of defining is that the less clear notion should be explained in terms of the clearer notion. And it seems that the term 'belief' is not at all clearer than the term 'knowledge', for 'belief' has several meanings, which all seem to be relevant to the notion of knowledge.

The term 'belief' may mean:

(1) *(a disposition to) judge*, which is an all or nothing affair;[1]

[1] The term 'judgement' itself may stand for the act of judgement, the judgement product, the judgement candidate, or the faculty of judgement; cf. Schaar (2007).

(2) *conviction*, which has degrees;

(3) *opinion*, which is opposed to knowledge; and

(4) unquestioned *faith*, a kind of trust.[2]

If knowledge is explained in terms of belief, the meaning of 'belief' as opinion is excluded. If knowledge is explained in terms of justification or a related notion, the meaning of 'belief' as unquestioned faith seems to be excluded, too. So, we need to focus on meaning (1) and (2). It seems that both meanings play a role in the explanation of knowledge: a necessary condition for knowing that *S* is that we judge, or are in a disposition to judge, that *S*. Furthermore, a minimal degree of conviction is also a necessary condition for knowledge. In modern analytic philosophy, knowledge and belief are generally understood as states of the mind, but what a state of mind is, is not explained. 'Belief' in sense (1) and 'belief' in sense (2) can be considered as mental states, but in two different meanings of the term 'state'. We speak of 'a state of doubt', and because the state of doubt is a conviction of a very low degree, belief in the sense of conviction can be called a state of mind, too (cf. Reinach 1911, 320). Such a mental state extends over a certain period of time, and its temporal parts are homogenous, that is, these parts are of the same quality. Because a state extends over a certain period in time and has homogenous parts, a mental act cannot be identified with a mental state: acts are not extended in time the way states are. The act of judgement, for example, is not a mental state. As a silent act of assertion it belongs to the same mental category as the speech *act* of assertion. Some acts seem to be stretched out in time, such as an act of proving, but in these cases the parts of the act are not homogenous.

[2] These different meanings of the term 'belief' are given an account of in Schaar (2009).

Furthermore, only the final moment makes the act an act of *proving*. If such a final moment is not obtained, the act is merely an act in which one purported to prove something. An *act*, it is true, but not one of the right kind.

Another point of difference between acts and states is that acts are internally related to their products: the act of proving results in a (proven) theorem, and the act of building a house results in the house built. Equally, an act of writing a letter results in a written letter; an act of promising in the promise made; an act of assertion results in an assertion made; and an act of judgement results in a judgement made (cf. Twardowski 1912). States such as a state of doubt are not thus internally related to products. Being in a state of doubt has a beginning and an end, which are homogenous to the other temporal parts of the state.

There is a sense of 'state' in which one may call a disposition or capacity to judge a *state* of mind, but this is not the same sense in which we call doubt or conviction a mental state. In contrast to a state of conviction, a disposition to judge is a capacity. It belongs to the essence of a capacity, being a potentiality, that it can be actualized, and the explanation of a capacity is to be given in terms of its actualizations. One has to make a distinction between a general and a specific capacity. The boy who is able to make more complex calculations, has the general capacity to come to know the sum of 67 and 88, and has in this sense the capacity to judge, to come to know, that the sum of 67 and 88 is 155. As long as he hasn't made the calculation, though, he doesn't have the specific capacity to judge that 67 and 88 is 155. Only the specific capacity to make the judgement is standardly called a 'belief', where the term is to be taken in sense (1). The belief that *S* in the sense of disposition to judge that *S* can now be explained as: one has once judged that *S*, and one judges that *S* in appropriate

circumstances. And knowledge can be understood as a special case of belief in this sense. In another sense of 'to know', the boy may be said to know the sum of 67 and 88, as soon as he has mastered the general capacity.

Those philosophers who call an act of judgement an 'occurrent belief' may understand the relation between *belief* and *act of judgement* in two ways: either they consider belief to be a general term covering both states in the sense of dispositions, and acts, or they consider 'belief' to cover primarily a state or disposition, and when this state is manifested, there is a manifestation of a belief, a belief made manifest, or an 'occurrent belief'. On the latter account, an occurrent belief is not a special case of belief, but an expression of it, just as coughing may be the expression of a cold. On either account, the act of judging is explained in terms of the dispositional notion belief. There is a reason, though, to prefer the Aristotelian order of explanation, in which a disposition is understood as a capacity or potentiality, and, because a potentiality is a potentiality to be actualized, the potentiality is to be explained in terms of its actualization. Instead of calling a judgement an *occurrent belief*, it is thus preferable to call a belief a *disposition to judge*.

The verb 'to know' can be used for an *act* of knowing that results in a certain product, and for a *state* of knowing, as well. Acts of perceiving, acts of recognizing, acts of proving and acts of insight are examples of the former. An act of insight or understanding may be expressed - 'Now I know it!'-, or described - 'Suddenly I knew.' These acts are allowed to have non-homogenous temporal parts. A state of certainty is preferably not called a state of knowing. Knowledge may be accompanied by a subjective state of certainty, that is, a high degree of conviction, but the two concepts should be distinguished, for I may be in a state of certainty without knowing, and I

may be knowing without being in a state of certainty. Knowing is thus not a state in the sense in which a state of doubt is a state.

Knowing whom prince William is going to marry, what the sum of 7 and 5 is, and that it has been raining yesterday are examples of mental states in the sense of a disposition that can be actualized in acts of judging. We are said to know these things whether awake or asleep. The boy knows the sum of 7 and 5 as soon as he has understood that the sum of 7 and 5 is 12. Understanding that 7 and 5 is 12 is an *act* of knowing, and the knowledge obtained through this act of understanding is a *state* of knowing in the dispositional sense explained above, that is, knowing as a specific capacity. The boy is able to manifest such a state of knowing, and will do so when asked by the teacher, by making the assertion that 7 plus 5 is 12.

Following the Aristotelian order of explanation, the first way to relate the concepts knowledge and belief can be put thus: Knowledge is explained in terms of belief, and belief in terms of the act of judgement. Or, knowledge is explained in terms of the act of knowing, and the act of knowing can then be explained in terms of the act of judging. These are the different ways to explain knowledge in terms of belief.

(ii) A second way to relate the two concepts is to say that knowledge and belief are not explained in terms of each other, because they are exclusive categories. When someone asks me whether I believe that John is unfaithful to his wife, I might answer: "I do not believe it; I *know* it." The Platonic distinction between scientific knowledge (*episteme*) and opinion (*doxa*) is not only exclusive, knowledge and opinion also have different objects. On the Platonic account, 'belief' means *mere belief* or *opinion*.

A contrast between the terms 'knowledge' and 'belief' may also be used as an expression of the contrast between the concepts knowledge and *unquestioned faith*. In Wittgenstein's *On Certainty* one can find the idea that we have an unquestioned faith in certain propositions, the hinge propositions, and that this makes it possible that other propositions may be doubted, or be certain and known. Such an unquestioned faith is improperly expressed by a declarative sentence, for hinge propositions are neither true nor false (§ 205). Unquestioned faith rather shows itself in the way we act (§ 402). Such a faith is hinted at by Husserl when he speaks of 'das Weltglauben', our belief in the being of the world, which never will be doubted (cf. Husserl 1939, § 7, p. 25).

Knowledge, in Hume's *Treatise*, is concerned only with relations of ideas, and is therefore certain, whereas belief's objects are matters of fact, which means that our belief may at most reach a certain degree of probability. Belief is thus not a general category of which knowledge is a species; knowledge is certain, whereas belief is probable. In this sense, knowledge and belief are exclusive categories, and belief has the meaning of *opinion*. This is not the only meaning of 'belief' in Hume's writings. There are degrees of belief (*Enquiry*, § 6, 131), and because Hume considers belief to be a certain feeling or sentiment (*Enquiry*, § 5, part 2, p. 124), namely of security, 'belief' has the meaning of state of *conviction*. Furthermore, belief in external objects and an external universe is rather a 'natural instinct' (*Enquiry*, § 5, part 1, p. 123, and § 12, p. 200); belief has here the meaning of *unquestioned faith*. It is also clear that Hume wants to give an analysis of what is called 'judgement' in the tradition. In Hume's mental geography, belief or judgement is primarily an *act of the mind* (*Treatise* 1.3.7: 67, note 20), that is, an act of judgement. Hume attacks the traditional account of

judgement that he attributes to Locke. Hume's account of belief has more in common, though, with Locke's than Hume wants us to believe. Like Locke, Hume considers knowledge and belief to be exclusive categories, and he likewise exploits all the ambiguities of the term 'belief' and 'judgement'. For Locke, though, the faculty of judgement is, like the faculty of knowledge, a rational one, and it is therefore possible for him to give an explanation of judgement that is analogous to that of knowledge.[3] Hume thus separated the concepts knowledge and belief in a more radical way than Locke had done.

(iii) A third way to relate the concepts of knowledge and belief, is to explain belief in terms of knowledge. This means that knowledge is a concept prior in the order of explanation to belief. Not all meanings of 'belief' distinguished above seem to be relevant here: *mere belief* or *opinion* is pre-eminently secondary in the order of explanation to *knowledge*. Only with the benefit of hindsight one might say: "I used to think I knew this, but I now see that it was mere belief." Judgement and belief purport to be knowledge, and, from a first person point of view, one might even say that judging or believing and knowing are not distinguished. A judgement or assertion purports, or is expected, to be knowledge, but may turn out not to be what it purports to be, at a later time.

There is here an agreement with speech acts that are misfires. Just as an utterance like 'I name this ship the Lady Di' can be a misfire, because "the procedure that we purport to invoke is disallowed or is *botched*" (Austin 1955, p. 16; italics mine), in this case, because I am not entitled to

[3] On Locke's use of the terms 'belief' and 'judgement', see Schaar (2008).

name the ship, so a mental act like a judgement can be a misfire because it does not do what it purports to do. Like the botched speech act, mere belief or mere judgement is void or without effect. The word 'mere' in 'mere belief' is not enriching the meaning of the term 'belief' in the way attributive terms do. A common belief is a belief that is commonly held. The term 'common' is thus enriching the meaning of the predicate: the extension of the phrase 'common belief' is therefore smaller than that of 'belief. Commonly held beliefs form a subclass of beliefs. The word 'mere' does not enrich the meaning of the predicate. In its modern meaning it is synonymous with 'nothing but'. A 'mere belief' is a belief that is nothing but belief, that is, a belief that is not what it originally purported to be, namely knowledge. Such a term as 'mere' can be informative, though: asserting that something is 'mere belief' is asserting that it is a belief, and that it is not what it purports to be, which, if true, is more informative than asserting that something is a belief.

At first sight, one might think that mere belief is a species of belief, but the problem is that mere belief does not have a specific difference that distinguishes it from other beliefs, for these other beliefs may also turn out not to be what they purport to be. The relation between the concepts belief and mere belief seems to be unique, not unlike the relation between water and pure water. The terms, 'mere' and 'pure', and other non-attributive terms, such as 'botched', are important in order to understand our epistemic language. Section III will be devoted to these etiolations of language, and in the last section I will show how these terms can be of use in the explanation of *mere belief*. Standard forms of conceptual analysis will not help to elucidate the relation between *belief* and *mere belief*; a different form of conceptual analysis needs to be developed in the sections below.

(iv) The explanation of concepts like knowledge, belief, judgement, assertion, justification or ground, and truth will always be circular, one might argue, because none of the attempts (i), (ii) and (iii) gives an ultimate account of these notions. One may give necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge, but the terms used in these conditions are not better understood than the concept of knowledge itself. To understand these notions is precisely to understand how these concepts are related to each other. None of these notions is clearer than any of the others, which means that none can be used to explain any of the others.

The danger of this position is that it may function as a licence to leave the concepts as they stand. When one recognizes that the term 'belief' has several meanings, it is possible to understand that when one explains knowledge in terms of belief one makes use of a certain meaning of the term 'belief', namely that of a certain degree of conviction, and, perhaps, of a disposition to judge, and that, when one explains belief as botched knowing, one makes use of the concept of mere belief or opinion. Perhaps, those who think that only a circular explanation can be given of these notions, do not realize that the meaning of their terms change in the different accounts given.

III. The etiolations of language

Modern philosophy has been interested in three of the four meanings of the term 'belief': judgement and its linguistic counterpart assertion; conviction and degrees of belief; and unquestioned faith, whether in the form of

religious belief, animal instinct or faith in hinge propositions. The concept of mere belief or opinion has not received much attention (Price (1969) is an exception): the idea that mere belief is botched knowing is hinted at, but not worked out. The idea is often used, though, in every day language when people speak of 'subjective opinions'; in Dutch one often hears, 'dat is maar een mening' ('that is a but an opinion', in English), implying that it is not knowledge. Early analytic philosophy conceives complex concepts to be wholes consisting of atomic parts, which can be obtained by analysing the complex concept.[4] Or, it conceives of concepts as obtained through analysis of judgemental contents; we obtain different concepts depending on the way the judgemental content is analysed (Frege 1879, § 9). In both cases, the concept of *mere belief* cannot be further analysed, and cannot be elucidated by means of the concept of belief. The relation between the concepts belief and mere belief should therefore be elucidated in a non-standard way.

Mere belief is not a special case of belief in the way a true or a false belief is, but it is certainly a belief. Belief purports to be knowledge, or, at least, to be true. If one finds out that the content of the belief that someone holds is ungrounded or false, one may call the belief 'mere belief', that is, a belief that is not what it purports to be. We first have to understand that a belief is expected to be knowledge in order to determine what 'mere belief' means. The complex term 'mere belief' is thus parasitic upon the normal use of the term 'belief'. We can use the term 'mere' in combination with other nouns: the *mere thought* of putting a bomb in an airplane is punishable these days. You expect that what is punishable is having the thought *and* planning the action of putting the bomb in the airplane. The thought is thus rightly called 'mere thought', because of our unfulfilled expectations.

[4] "A thing becomes intelligible first when it is analysed into its constituent concepts." Moore (1899, 182).

‘Mere’ does not have an independent meaning; it is a syncategorematic term, a term that can be given a meaning only together with the noun that follows. The term ‘mere’ functions as an operator upon the term that follows, but not precisely in the way negation does. Unlike negation, ‘mere’ cannot sensibly be iterated. It is true that the term ‘mere’ includes a negation, but what is negated is not the attribute that is denoted by the general term. For a mere judgement *is* a judgement. What is negated is determined by what we expect if something is called a ‘judgement’. In other cases, what is negated is determined by what we expect in the situation as a whole, as in the example of mere thought. What is denied, if one speaks of ‘mere thought’ in the example above, is the planning of the action. But, if one says ‘The mere thought of her still makes him angry’, what is denied is that the thought of her combined with her presence makes him angry. The term ‘mere’ *restricts* the meaning of ‘belief’, ‘thought’, or whatever noun that follows, in the sense that it denies a purported or expected aspect of what is denoted by the general term, which aspect can generally be determined only in the context of the described situation. For this reason I call ‘mere’ a *restrictive term*. In standard cases, adjectival or adverbial terms are attributive in the sense that the speaker attributes a property to an object. The term ‘red’ is attributively used in ‘He is wearing a red jacket.’ This means that one can sensibly say: ‘He is wearing a jacket that is red.’ Restrictive terms are not attributive: we do not use them to attribute a property to an object. One can say ‘That is mere belief’, but not ‘That is a belief that is mere’.

The term ‘pure’ has characteristics similar to the term ‘mere’. If we say that a statue is made of pure gold, we say that it is made of gold and of nothing else. A pure-bred Arabian is an Arabian horse that is not mixed with

other breeds. The difference is one of evaluation: the term 'mere' can generally be substituted by the phrase 'nothing more than' whereas the term 'pure' can be substituted by 'nothing less than', 'not mixed with anything else, especially things of lesser value', as in 'pure wine'. Sometimes we can use both 'pure' and 'mere': 'pure Platonic love' or 'mere Platonic love', depending on what is given a higher value. 'Pure' is a restrictive term, too.

Philosophers from all traditions have been using such terms as 'mere', 'pure', 'true', 'real', 'actual', 'authentic', 'proper', 'genuine', terms that do not seem to add anything to the meaning of the term it precedes. Philosophers say such things as that the "things that are really real last a very short time" (Russell about sense data, see his 1918, 274). Or, that symbolic judgements are substitutes for real judgements (*die wirkliche Urteile*, Husserl 1890, 361).[5] Or, that the bed you are sleeping in is not a real bed, because the really real bed is the Form bed. When Plato says that the Form is more real than its sensible instances, which fall between the purely real and the wholly unreal (*Republic* 477a), 'real' is not to be understood in its existential sense. Plato is not asserting that there are different degrees of reality (cf. Vlastos (1965, 219); he is using the term 'real' or 'really real' ('οντως ουσης' *Rep.* 597D) in its non-existential sense. According to Göran Sundholm, the normative notion of rightness, or 'truth of things', is at issue when we deny that someone is a true friend (Sundholm 2004, 439). We use these terms in ordinary language, too: 'Were you really listening (or were you just pretending)?'. 'This is real gold (not a substitute metal).' 'Is it a real

[5] Cf. "Jede künstliche ('artificial') Operation mit Zeichen dient in gewisser Weise Zwecken der Erkenntnis; aber nicht führt eine jede wirklich zu Erkenntnissen, in dem wahren und echten Sinn ('in the true and real sense') logischer Einsichten." (Husserl 1890, 368).

Rembrandt (or is it painted by one of his pupils)?' 'These flowers aren't real (they're artificial, but you can't see the difference with real flowers)'.

According to Austin, in these cases the negative use wears the trousers, that is, the meaning of such a phrase as 'real gold' is parasitic upon its negation, that it is 'not real gold' (Austin 1962, 70). We first have to understand what it is for something to be not real gold, that is, to be a metal that looks like gold but does not have the chemical properties that would make it into a piece of gold. Only against this background does the phrase 'real gold' get a meaning. Saying that this isn't a real Rembrandt, is not denying that it is a painting, nor is one generally claiming that it is a forgery. The question is rather whether it is painted by Rembrandt, or by one of his pupils. Only against the background of this question is the assertion that it is a real Rembrandt given sense. The question might also have been whether it is a forgery or not, and then asserting that it is a real Rembrandt has a different meaning. If it is not a real, not a true or genuine Rembrandt, it is a fake, but a painting nonetheless. The Rembrandt is false, that is, it is not a Rembrandt at all. Terms like 'proper' or 'authentic' belong to this group of terms, too, for they make sense only if it is explained in what sense something may be called 'improper', or 'inauthentic'.

According to Twardowski, terms like 'real', 'true' and 'actual' may restore the change in meaning that was caused by such terms as 'fake', 'false' and 'former' (Twardowski 1923, 142). It is for this reason that these terms come in pairs: 'true' and 'false; 'real' and 'fake'; 'actual' and 'former'; 'authentic' and 'inauthentic'; 'proper' and 'improper'. Terms like 'real', 'true', and 'proper' differ from the terms 'mere' and 'pure', because the latter, restrictive terms do not have a negative counterpart. Like restrictive terms, terms like 'real' and 'actual' are not attributive: being real,

actual or authentic is not a property of objects. Neither does it seem to make sense to say that one has a Rembrandt that is real, or that Obama is the president that is actual. Terms like 'real' and 'true' in the sense described can be called *restorative*,[6] because they restore the meaning of modified terms like 'fake pistol' and 'false gold'. So, what is the specific function of terms like 'false', 'fake' and 'improper' that we apparently have to understand before we can make sense of these restorative terms?

We have come now to the third group of non-attributive terms: the *modifying terms.*[7] Substituting a restrictive or a restorative adjective for *j* and a noun for *N*, the following inference is valid:

if an object is a *j N*, it follows that it is an *N*.

But it does not follow that the object is *j*; in fact, one cannot sensibly say that the object is *j*.

Such an inference is not valid in the case of modifying terms. In case one substitutes a modifying term for *j*:

if an object is a *j N*, it does not follow that it is an *N*.

There are two kinds of modifying terms: the strictly modal terms like 'potential', 'alleged', 'putative', 'questionable', and 'disputed'. I will not deal with these modal terms here. Another sub-class of the modifying terms

[6] I borrow this terminology from Twardowski; cf. Twardowski 1923, 142. I prefer this terminology to the less apt 'redundant terms': these terms are not redundant at all, when used in the right context.

[7] Cf. Brentano (1874, 62, note). Brentano uses the distinction between attributive and modifying terms to explain that the truth of the sentence 'The centaur is a fiction' does not imply the existence of a centaur. The sentence can be rewritten as 'There is a fictional centaur', which means that only the existence of a fictional centaur is implied by the truth of the sentence. The term 'fictional' is a modifying term, according to Brentano, like the term 'dead' in 'dead man'.

is formed by the *privative* terms. If one substitutes a privative term[8] for *j*, the following inference is valid:

if an object is a *j N*, it follows that it is *not* an *N*.

Whereas a German pistol is a certain kind of pistol, namely one made in Germany, a fake pistol is not a pistol. From the truth that this painting is a false Rembrandt one can derive the truth that it is not a Rembrandt. The term 'false' modifies the meaning of a noun *N* which it precedes by deleting a crucial part of its meaning, while attributing to the object the property that it has the appearance of an *N*. It is expected to be *N*, because of its form, but it isn't *N* at all. A fake pistol has the appearance of a pistol, but misses the essential ingredient: it cannot be used to kill someone. In order to be called 'fake' or 'false' it has to be made in order to deceive the perceiver: a false Vermeer is made in order to deceive the art-lover. Not all privative terms have the aspect that if an object is a *j N*, it follows that the object has the appearance of an *N*. Prefixes like 'non', 'ex', 'in-', and 'un-' in front of a noun operate like privative adjectives, and can therefore be called privative terms, too (think also of the Greek *alpha privative*). These prefixes form the sub-class of *purely privative* terms. The purely privative terms do not simply negate the quality denoted by *N*; they rather indicate the positive contrary of that quality. One used to call someone an *infidel* because he has an unorthodox faith, not because he has no religious belief at all. Those privative terms for which it is true that if an object is a *j N*, then it has the appearance of an *N*, will be called *non-purely privative* terms, or, in order that terms do not proliferate beyond necessity, they may be called *modifying* terms *in the strict sense*.

[8] These terms do not only include adjectives, but also prefixes like 'non', and adjectivally used nouns such as 'toy' and 'fake'.

If the aspect of deceiving is not essential to modifying terms in the strict sense, 'presented' and 'painted' are modifying terms in the strict sense, too.[9] The modifying sense of the term 'false' should be distinguished from its attributive sense: a false proposition *is* a proposition. This does not imply that all non-propositional uses of the term 'false' are modifying. A false cat is still a cat, just as a false name is a name, false play a form of play, and false alarm a form of alarm. These uses of the term 'false' have in common with the modifying sense of the term that the perceiver is deceived: a false cat is not simply a cat with a bad character, but a cat that seems nice, and suddenly changes its mood. The aspect of deception therefore does not seem to be part of modifying terms in the strict sense, and there is thus no reason to exclude the terms 'presented' and 'painted' from the class of modifying terms in the strict sense. 'Painted', in one of its uses, is thus a modifying term, too. From the fact that this is a painted horse, it follows that this is not a horse. The word 'painted' deletes part of the meaning of the term 'horse'; what is left is the idea that the object has the appearance of a horse, but is not a horse. According to Brentano and Twardowski, 'former' is also a modifying term, whose restorative counterpart is 'actual'.[10] I am not sure, though, whether it is a modal or a privative term. If it is always true that a

[9] Twardowski (1894, § 4, p. 12ff) uses the distinction between the modifying and the attributive sense of the term 'presented' to explain the distinction between the content and the object of an act. There is a distinction between *presented object as object*, where 'presented' is used in its attributive sense, because we say about the object that we have a presentation of it, and *presented object as content*, where 'presented' is taken in its modifying sense, because the term modifies the meaning of the term 'object'. If 'painted' is used as modifying term in 'painted landscape', the landscape is a painted one, that is, not a true landscape ("sie ist keine wahrhafte Landschaft," Twardowski 1894, p. 13). 'Painted' can also be used attributively: we can talk of a landscape near Amsterdam that was painted by Rembrandt.

[10] Twardowski (1923, 141). Cf. Brentano (1914, 46): a former king is no more a king than a beggar is, for he might at this moment be a beggar himself.

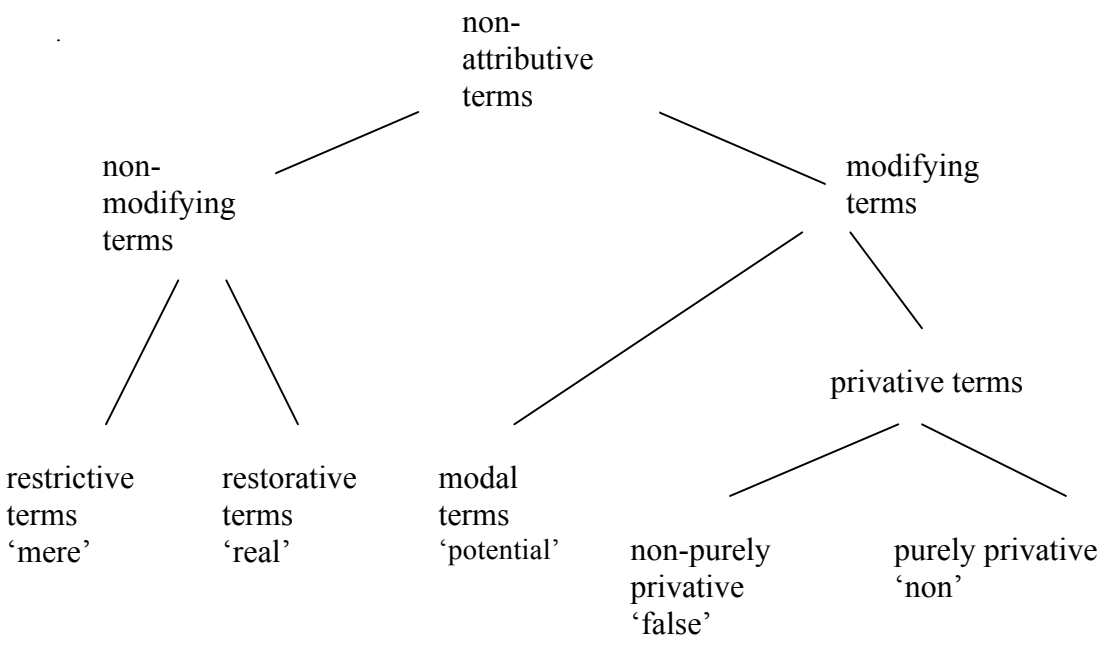
former senator is not a senator, I have to classify ‘former’ as privative, but it seems to be a modal term, too. It seems that all modifying terms in the broad sense, except perhaps the purely privative ones, create intensional contexts, and can thus be called modal in that sense of the term. The term ‘botched’ in ‘botched knowing’ is a modifying term, too, in the strict sense of the term. Mere belief is botched knowing in the sense that it has the appearance of knowing, but is not knowing at all. In contrast to ‘painted’ and ‘presented’, the terms ‘fake’, ‘false’, and ‘botched’, in front of the noun *N*, have in common the idea that the object denoted purports to be *N*, or is expected to be *N*, but fails to do so.

Sometimes the modifying term follows the noun, as in ‘president-elect’. And some more complex phrases have the characteristics of modifying terms, too. An act that is an assertion on stage is not a real assertion, just as murder on stage is not real murder. The phrase ‘on stage’ thus functions like a modifying term. The phrase ‘in mind’ may function as a modifier, too: one may have a million dollar in mind, and be completely broke at the same time.

Recently, Barbara Partee has proposed the thesis that there are no privative or modifying terms (cf. Partee 2010). She gives three arguments for this original thesis. (1) Because one can sensibly say ‘Is that gun real or fake?’, the term ‘gun’ must include both real and fake guns among its extension. (2) Unlike restrictive and restorative terms, modifying terms can split in some languages, such as Polish. Finally (3), treating nouns as including both real and false instances among its extension makes the adjectives ‘true’ and ‘real’ no longer redundant, for real guns form now a sub-class of all guns.

With respect to (1), one might rebut that the phrase ‘that gun’ functions like a demonstrative term in the way ‘the man drinking a Martini’ at Donnellan’s party can be used to refer to a man drinking water. If one asserts ‘That Rembrandt is false’, one is not implying that the term ‘Rembrandt’ is a general term including both true and false Rembrandts. The general term is used in a deviant way for what people *call* a ‘Rembrandt’. This makes it possible that privative terms can sometimes split, that is, that we can say both ‘That is a false Rembrandt’ and ‘That Rembrandt is false’. We can thus also split privative terms in English. Regarding argument (2), although we can sensibly say ‘Zeus is a god who is fictitious’, this does not mean that there are two kinds of gods: fictitious and real ones. Possibility of splitting is apparently not a reliable indication of attributive terms. Regarding (3), I agree with Partee that ‘real’ in ‘real Rembrandt’ is not redundant, but not for the reason that ‘real’ is an attributive term. The phrase is given a meaning, once there is a suggestion that the painting is *not* a real Rembrandt.

To conclude, one may put the different kinds of non-attributive terms in a schema, where the non-purely privative terms can be called modifying in the strict sense:



IV. A linguistic phenomenology for mere belief

Sometimes it is said that belief or judgement aims at knowledge. This is a metaphorical way of speaking, for beliefs do not literally aim at something. What is meant can be formulated in two ways. From a first person perspective, one can say that there is no distinction between belief and knowledge, because one takes one's beliefs to be knowledge.[11] This is not to say that the degree of confidence is the same in the case of belief as in the case of knowledge, although this may also be so. 'Belief' is here to be understood not as *conviction*, but as *judgement*, either in the act sense or in the dispositional sense, depending on whether we speak of acts of knowing

[11] Cf. Schaar (2011) and Adler (2002, 275): "From the first-person point of view, one treats one's belief as factive, which is the central property of knowledge."

or knowledge as state. From a third person perspective, if a man utters a declarative, one takes him to make an assertion unless there are signs to the contrary. When one makes an assertion, one is expected to know what one asserts. When it is shown that what is asserted is false or ungrounded, that is, when it is shown that someone does not know what he has asserted, he is expected to withdraw his assertion. We take an assertion to be the manifestation of knowledge.[12] From both the first and the third person point of view, there is thus a conceptual relation between assertion or judgement and knowledge.

It is a fact, though, that not all our assertions are manifestations of knowledge. Some of our judgements turn out to be mere judgements, and may therefore be called *opinions*. The terms 'mere judgement' and 'judgement' differ in meaning. The term 'mere' in front of the term 'judgement' works as an operator upon the meaning of the latter term, but not in the way a modifying term does, for a mere judgement *is* a judgement. If you call it a 'mere judgement', you are not denying that it is a judgement, but you *are* implicitly denying something. The term indicates that the denoted judgement is not what it purports to be, not what we expect it to be, namely knowledge. 'Mere judgement' thus means (1) a judgemental act that purports, is expected, to be knowledge, but (2) is, from a third person perspective, not knowledge.[13] The concept of mere judgement thus has the concept of knowledge as part of its explanation. Because of the partial negation, the operator 'mere' restricts the meaning of the term 'judgement'.

[12] A full account of assertion I have given in Schaar (2010).

[13] If one starts with the thesis that the denoted judgement is made from a first person perspective, the second judgement, that the denoted judgement is mere judgement, is made from a third person perspective. This description might be misleading, for the judgement that the denoted judgement is mere judgement, is itself made from a first person perspective.

The term ‘mere judgement’ has the same meaning as ‘opinion’, in the sense in which it is opposed to knowledge. This means that ‘act of mere judgement’ has the same meaning as ‘act of opinion’, the latter being a term that is not so common today, but in Dutch and German one commonly uses the terms ‘menen’ (Dutch) and ‘meinen’ (German) in the sense of *to opine*.

According to Husserl, in the fifth *Logical Investigation*, the term ‘mere’ (*das ‘bloss’*) is a sign that there is something lacking (*ein Mangel*), and this shows something about the order of explanation of the relevant concepts. Husserl uses this idea to elucidate the relation between the concept of perception and that of (mere) hallucination, which can be understood as a special case of the distinction between knowledge and mere belief.[14] The concept of perception is not obtained by adding something to the concept of mere hallucination. The term ‘mere’ is a sign that the concept of perception is prior in the order of explanation, and that the concept of (mere) hallucination is obtained by subtracting a part of the concept of perception. The example Husserl gives concerns an illusion rather than a hallucination. There is a difference between the two: in the case of an illusion something is there, although it is not what it seems to be, and the illusion generally happens in accordance with certain rules, like the stick that appears to be broken when held partly in the water. Husserl’s example takes us to a waxwork show. When we enter the show, we see a charming, unknown lady on the staircase inviting us to come with her. One moment later, we realize that it is an optical illusion, that a trick was played upon us. Now, we see a

[14] “ Das *bloss* (die Blösse) weist hier, wie überhaupt, auf einen Mangel hin; aber nicht immer ist ein Mangel durch eine Ergänzung zu beheben. So setzen wir ja der Wahrnehmung die ‘blosse’ Einbildung gegenüber. Das Unterscheidende liegt in einem Vorzug auf Seiten der Wahrnehmung, aber nicht in einem Plus.” (Husserl 1901, V, § 28, 463).

wax figure that is presenting a lady. According to Husserl, the perception when we enter the show does not consist in an act in which something that is common to the perception and the illusion, is presented, together with an act of perception, which contains the 'belief'-moment. The act is nothing but the perception of the lady on the stairs. Later, we perceive a puppet that has the appearance of a lady (Husserl 1901, V, § 27, 458, 459), and we may call the former 'perception' a hallucination. The idea of a hallucination of the lady on the stairs is to be explained in terms of a perception that is lacking something.

In *Experience and Judgement*, Husserl says that the phenomenological genesis of judgement shows us something about the order of explanation of the concepts *mere judgement* and *knowing judgement*. We first experience assertions as products of purported knowing (*prätendierte Erkenntnisse*), and we do not distinguish between mere judgement (*bloss prätendierte, blosse Urteile*) and knowing judgement (*wirkliche Erkenntnis*) (Husserl 1939, § 5, p. 15). Only in a later phase, we may come to realize that the judgement is a mere judgement. This shows, according to Husserl, that mere judgement is 'an intentional modification' of knowing judgement.[15] The term 'mere' (*bloss*) is not a modifying term, so how should one read Husserl here? In the first place, Husserl does not understand the operation of modification in semantic terms: there is no term that does the operation of modifying. For Husserl, the modification is intentional in the sense that there is a change in the intentional content of the act.

[15] " dass blosses Urteilen eine intentionale Modifikation von erkennendem Urteilen ist." (Husserl 1939, § 5, p. 15). Stepanians (1998, ch. 10) gives an extensive account of Husserl's idea of modification in the fourth and fifth *Logical Investigation*.

I will call this type of modification *conceptual*, distinguishing it both from semantic modification and ontological modification, the latter type of modification being explained below. The concept of mere judgement is obtained by deleting a part of the more primitive, and possibly simple notion of knowing judgement, for the first person concept of judgement is identical with the first person concept of knowing. If the change is a modification, something essential is missing from a mere judgement as compared to the knowing judgement, notwithstanding a similarity of form. The mere judgement is botched knowing, to use the terminology introduced earlier. As in the case of semantic modification, the concept *knowing judgement* is prior in the order of explanation to the result of the modification, the concept *mere judgement*. One has to understand first what a *knowing judgement* is in order to understand what *mere judgement* is. The difference with semantic modification is that there is no term that operates as a modifier.

Besides semantic and purely conceptual modification, there seems to be a third type of modification, namely ontological modification, or what is generally called *privation*. A blind man is deprived of his ability to see, an ability that belongs to his manhood (cf. Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, book Δ; chapter V; section xxii; cf. *Met.* X. 1055a). Privation is not mere absence, for a stone does not have the ability to see, but it is not *deprived* of this ability. The Augustinian tradition has it that evil is privation of the good.[16] And because cognitive error is a special case of moral error, or sin, cognitive error is a privation, too. It is in this Augustinian sense that Descartes explains error as privation in the *fourth Meditation* (*privatio, sive carentia, AT* 7: 55).

[16] As Augustine writes in the *Confessiones*, III. vii. 12: "I did not know [at that time] that evil was only the privation of good".

It may be doubted that we need a separate concept of ontological modification, besides conceptual modification. For Spinoza, error and sin are concepts that make sense only insofar as *we* compare things with one another, and this holds for everything we call a 'privation'. From God's point of view, there is no privation.[17] The false judgement may be called a privation insofar as we compare the judgement with a knowing judgement; we can attribute the privation only insofar as we relate the false judgement to the idea of a knowing judgement. A mere belief is called botched knowing only insofar as we expect our beliefs to be knowledge. This is not to say, though, that we can decide either to expect or not to expect our beliefs to be knowledge: conceptual modification is not a psychological notion. It is part of the concept of judgement that judgement purports to be knowledge.

V. Conclusion

Because the first person perspective has priority when one uses a phenomenological method, the concept of mere belief or opinion is secondary in the order of explanation to that of judgement. The idea that mere belief is a form of botched knowing makes it clear that the concept of mere belief can be understood as a conceptual or semantic modification of the concept of knowing. The term 'botched' in 'botched knowing', being a non-purely privative term, involves the idea that what is called botched knowing is denied to be knowing, although it does have the appearance of

[17] "[W]hen we consider God's decree and God's nature, we can no more assert of that man that he is deprived of sight than we can assert it of a stone … privation is simply to deny of a thing something that we judge pertains to its nature," *Ep.* 21 to Willem van Blyenbergh (1665). In the *Cogitata Metaphysica* (Part II, Chapter 7), Spinoza says that evil and sin are nothing in things, but only in the human mind as it compares things with one another.

knowing, and may therefore be misleading. By allowing non-attributive terms in our logical geography we are able to relate philosophical concepts such as knowing and believing in a more sophisticated way, on the presupposition that we have disentangled the ambiguities of our central philosophical terms.

References

Adler, J. E. (2002) *Belief's Own Ethics*. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press)

Aristotle, *The Metaphysics*, vol. I and II, Loeb classical library, tr. by H. Tredennick (Cambridge, Ms.: Harvard University Press, 1980, 1977)

Augustine, *Confessiones / Belijdenissen*, tr. by G. Wijdeveld (Baarn: Ambo, 1988)

Austin, J. L. (1946) 'Other Minds', in J.L. Austin, *Philosophical Papers*, sec. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970) 76-116.

Austin, J. L. (1955) *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962, 1975, lectures held in 1955)

Austin, J. L. (1956) 'A Plea for Excuses', in J. L. Austin, *Philosophical Papers*, sec. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970) 175-204.

Austin, J. L. (1962) *Sense and Sensibilia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964)

Brentano, F. (1874) *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkt*, II, ed. by O. Kraus (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1925)

Brentano, F. (1914) *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkt*, III, ed. by O. Kraus and F. Mayer-Hillebrand (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1968), part I, ch. 5, 37-52.

Frege, G. (1879) *Begriffsschrift.* In I. Angelelli (Ed.), *Begriffsschrift und andere Aufsätze* (Hildesheim, New York: Georg Olms, 1971)

Hume, D. (1739) *A Treatise of Human Nature*, I, ed. by D.F. Norton and M.J. Norton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)

Hume, D. (1748) *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, ed. by T.L. Beauchamp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999)

Husserl, E. (1890) 'Zur Logik der Zeichen (Semiotik)', in *Philosophie der Arithmetik mit ergänzenden Texten*, ed. by L. Eley (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970) 340-373.

Husserl, E. (1900-01) *Logische Untersuchungen* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2009)

Husserl, E. (1939) *Erfahrung und Urteil* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1985)

Moore, G. E. (1899) 'The Nature of Judgment' *Mind*, N.S., 8, 176-193.

Partee, B. (2010) 'Privative Adjectives: Subsective plus Coercion', in *Presuppositions and Discourse; Essays offered to Hans Kamp*, ed. by R. Bauerle, U. Reyle, T.E. Zimmerman (Bradford: Emerald) 273 ff.

Plato, *Republic* / *Politeia*, Greek and German, tr. by F. Schleiermacher (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1991)

Price, H.H. (1969) *Belief* (London, New York: Allen & Unwin)

Reinach, A. (1911) 'On the Theory of the Negative Judgement', in *Parts and Moments*, ed. by B. Smith (München, Wien: Philosophia Verlag, 1982) 315–400.

Russell, B. (1918) 'The Philosophy of Logical Atomism', in *Logic and Knowledge*, ed. by R.C. Marsh (London: Allen & Unwin, 1956) 177-281.

Schaar, M. van der (2007) 'The Assertion-Candidate and the Meaning of Mood' *Synthese*, 159, 61-82

Schaar, M. van der (2008) 'Locke and Arnauld on Judgement and Proposition' *History and Philosophy of Logic*, 29, 327-341.

Schaar, M. van der (2009) 'Judgement, Belief and Acceptance', in *Acts of Knowledge: History, Philosophy and Logic; Essays Dedicated to Göran Sundholm*, ed. by G. Primiero and S. Rahman (London: College Publications) 267-286.

Schaar M. van der (2010) 'Assertion and Grounding; a Theory of Assertion for Constructive Type Theory' *Synthese,* online available: http://www.springerlink.com/content/e66130001vx00804/

Schaar M. van der (2011) 'The Cognitive Act and the First-Person Perspective; an Epistemology for Constructive Type Theory' *Synthese,* 180, 391-417.

Spinoza, *Cogitata Metaphysica / Metafysische Gedachten*, Appendix to Spinoza's *Descartes' Principles of Philosophy*, in Spinoza, *Korte Geschriften*, ed. by F. Akkerman, *e.a.* (Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek, 1982)

Spinoza, *Correspondence* / *Briefwisseling*, ed. by F. Akkerman, *e.a*. (Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek, 1992). I use Shirley's translation in *Spinoza: The Letters* ed. and transl. by Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995)

Stepanians, M. S. (1998) *Frege und Husserl über Urteilen und Denken* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh)

Sundholm, G. (2004) 'Antirealism and the Roles of Truth', in *Handbook of Epistemology*, ed. by I. Niniluoto, M.Sintonen, and J. Wolenski (Dordrecht: Kluwer) 437-466.

Twardowski, Kasimir (1894) *Zur Lehre vom Inhalt und Gegenstand der Vorstellungen Eine psychologische Untersuchung* (Wien: Hölder) (reprint: München, Wien: Philosophia Verlag, 1982)

Twardowski, K. (1912) 'Actions and Products. Some Remarks from the Borderline of Psychology, Grammar and Logic', in Twardowski (1999) 103–132.

Twardowski, K. (1923) 'On the Logic of Adjectives', in Twardowski (1999) 141-143.

Twardowski, K. (1999) *On Actions, Products and Other Topics in Philosophy*, ed. by J. Brandl and J. Woleński (Amsterdam, Atlanta: Rodopi)

Vlastos, G. (1965) 'Degrees of Reality in Plato', in G. Vlastos, *Platonic Studies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973) 58-75.

Williamson, T. (2000) *Knowledge and its Limits* (Oxford: Clarendon Press)

Wittgenstein, L. (1951) *Über Gewissheit*, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Werkausgabe 8 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1984)