1. A Skeptical Challenge from Divine Omnipotence and Buridan’s Solution

1.1. A Skeptical Challenge

- “For example, we could not know that the sky is moving, that the sun is bright and that fire is hot, because these are not evident. God could annihilate all these, and it is not evident to you whether He wills to annihilate them or not; and thus it is not evident to you whether they exist. (Summulae de Dialectica 8.4.4)”

- “For God can form in our senses the species of sensible things without these sensible things, and can preserve them for a long time, and then [, if He did so,] we would judge those sensible things to be present. Furthermore, you do not know whether God, who can do such and even greater things, wants to do so. Hence, you do not have certitude and evidentness about whether you are awake and there are people in front of you… (Questions on Metaphysics II. 1)”

1.2. Buridan’s Solution: Two Kinds of Evidentia

- “Assent to the truth with certitude requires the firmness of truth and the firmness of assent … The firmness of assent is that whereby we adhere and assent to a proposition without fear of the opposite and this can take place in three ways … In the third way, firmness proceeds in us from evidentness. And it is called (1) the evidentness of a proposition absolutely, when … man is compelled, though without necessity, to assent to a proposition so that he cannot dissent from it … (2) Evidentness is taken in another way not absolutely, but with the assumption that things obey the common course of nature, as was said earlier. It is in this way that it is evident to us that every fire is hot or that the heavens are moving… (Questions on Metaphysics II. 1)”

2. Interpretations of Buridan’s Solution

2.1. Process Reliabilism (Jack Zupko)

1) Zupko’s Interpretation

- Naturally evident knowledge is justified by the fact that it is produced by a reliable cognitive process

2) Problems

   (1) Does the reliabilist account fit also with the case of demonstrative knowledge?

   (2) No need to read natural evidentia in a reliabilist way (fits also well with evidentialism)
2.2. Fallibilism (Elizabeth Karger)

1) Karger’s Interpretation

   - “If one is engaged in an inquiry having nature as its object, a judgment by which one assents to a naturally evident proposition, provided the proposition is in fact true, will be legitimately regarded as an act of knowledge. On Buridan’s theory, then, not all knowledge need be infallible knowledge. Naturally evident knowledge is fallible knowledge. (“A Buridanian Reponse…,” 223)”

2) Problems

   (1) Hybrid account of fallibilism (natural) and infallibilism (demonstrative)?

   (2) Even naturally evident knowledge is infallible in some sense: “Human being cannot be deceived in the common course of nature on the basis of natural evidence. (Questions on Posterior Analytics I. 2; Summulae de Dialectica 8.4.4)”

2.3. Contextualism (Dominik Perler)

1) Perler’s Interpretation

   - “He chooses what might be called a contextualist strategy: in the context of everyday life and natural science, it is perfectly legitimate to make knowledge claims that are based on sensory information. The standards of justification should not be raised to a point where just any absurd hypothesis must be refuted. That is why natural evidence is perfectly sufficient for natural knowledge. (“Scepticism and Metaphysics,” 557)”

2) Problems

   (1) Not an account of knowledge, but an account of knowledge ascription?

   (2) Knowledge ascription seems to be explained in terms of appellation of form by Buridan

3. A Revised Version of Perler’s Interpretation

1) Infallibilist Relevant Account of Knowledge

   - S knows that \( p \) iff S’s evidentia eliminates all \( \neg p \) possibilities relevant in a context C

2) What Determines Context-relevancy?

   - The type of inquiry in which \( p \) is discussed

   e.g. “Some people speak very wrongly, wanting to destroy the natural and moral sciences on the grounds that their principles and conclusions are often not absolutely evident, but can be falsified by supernatural possible situations. Because such sciences do not require absolute evidentness, but … non-absolute or conditional evidentness suffice. (Questions on Metaphysics II. 1)”