

Boghossian and Epistemic Analyticity*

Abstract: Boghossian claims that we can acquire a priori knowledge by means of a certain form of argument, our grasp of whose premises relies on the existence of implicit definitions. I discuss an objection to his 'analytic theory of the a priori'. The worry is that in order to employ this kind of argument we must already know its conclusion. Boghossian has responded to this type of objection in recent work, but I argue that his responses are unconvincing. Along the way, I resist Ebert's reasons for thinking that Boghossian's argument fails to transmit warrant from its premises to its conclusion.

I Boghossian's Argument

Boghossian (1996, 1997 and elsewhere) has argued that certain truths can be known a priori because of the existence of implicit definitions; that is, because it is stipulated that certain (implicitly definitional) sentences are to be true or that certain (implicitly definitional) inferences are to be valid, and that certain components of those sentences or inferences (their definienda) are to be interpreted in whatever way will make the sentences true or inferences valid. He believes that epistemic analyticity can help to 'demystify' a priori knowledge (2003, p.17).

Boghossian helpfully distinguishes two notions in the vicinity of analyticity as traditionally conceived. One is epistemic analyticity: truth purely in virtue of meaning. This notion, he thinks, has been debunked by Quine. The other is epistemic analyticity: knowability purely in virtue of understanding. This notion, according to

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Boghossian, is in good standing and can help us understand a priori knowledge of certain truths.

Boghossian thinks that epistemic analyticity occurs owing to the existence of implicit definitions. A priori knowledge (of certain truths) is available to us because we have available to us instances of the following argument schema (Boghossian 1996, p. 386 and 1997, p. 348; this one appeals to validity but a similar schema is available for truth):

1. If **C** is to mean what it does, then **A** has to be valid, for **C** means whatever logical object in fact makes **A** valid
2. **C** means what it does

Therefore,

3. **A** is valid

In more recent work (Boghossian 2003), Boghossian disclaims the obvious view of how appealing to this argument helps explain a priori knowledge. He suggests that the argument is not to be thought of as an inference we can make which justifies its conclusion, but as somehow 'constitutive' of one's justification for the conclusion. I find this claim somewhat confusing, but later in his 2003 paper (p. 26) it transpires that it amounts to the idea that one actually has *no* positive warrant for the conclusion reached at line 3, but nonetheless is 'not epistemically blameworthy' in accepting it or in trusting the inference rule it mentions. This lack of epistemic blameworthiness is supposedly due to the fact that one must be disposed to reason according to the rule in order to have the kind of thoughts required to entertain the conclusion.

This 2003 proposal looks like a false step. For one thing, it might be that epistemic error is attendant upon having the kind of thoughts in question. Maybe these thoughts involve a defective concept that we cannot employ without

irremediable error (cf. Field 2006, p. 85). In which case it is no defence against the charge that one is epistemically blameworthy in accepting the validity of **A** to say that one could not think **C**-thoughts without accepting this.

Perhaps, as some of his discussion of defective concepts suggests, Boghossian wishes to make the externalist claim that we are justified in accepting the conclusion in exactly those cases where we are (as a matter of fact) dealing with non-defective concepts **C**. But unless there is some other relevant difference in our epistemic situation between the defective and the non-defective cases, this is deeply unsatisfying. We haven't ruled out the possibility that our possession of non-defective concepts is accidental or lucky in some knowledge-destroying way.ⁱ We might as well say that beliefs are justified in just those cases where they are, as a matter of fact, true. This is not, of course, simply to reject epistemic externalism. The extra factor which makes possession of non-defective concepts non-accidental need not be one that an internalist would approve of.

Perhaps Boghossian has in mind that in some sense we cannot avoid thinking **C**-thoughts, so that it is not merely conditionally impossible but absolutely impossible for us to avoid accepting the validity of **A**, and this explains why the latter is epistemically permissible. But this would suggest reliance on something akin to an ought-implies-can principle, and I have argued elsewhere (Jenkins forthcoming) that such principles are suspect in the epistemic case.

Boghossian claims that the 2003 proposal, whereby the argument 1-3 is not to be understood as providing our grounds for its conclusion, is what he intended all along in his 1996 and 1997 papers. This is a strange reading of those papers, however, where emphasis is repeatedly placed on the question of how the premises of this argument are known. It is hard to see why that would be relevant on the new

view; it isn't required on the new view that we have knowledge of the premises. Our justification for the conclusion does not rest on this knowledge, but on facts about the conditions under which it is possible to entertain certain thoughts. (And, for all Boghossian says, we need not know these facts either).

Indeed, it is quite hard to see what the new view has to do with the argument 1-3 at all; its premises mention some of the things that are relevant to Boghossian's 2003 reasons for thinking the conclusion is justified, but not all of them, by a long shot. The argument does not draw out the point which is really epistemically significant on the new view, namely the impossibility of entertaining certain thoughts without relying on corresponding inferences. In short, the argument does not offer anything close to a revealing third-person account of how we know its conclusion. And nor do we use the argument ourselves as our epistemic grounds for that conclusion. So what is the argument for?

Regardless of what Boghossian may or may not have intended, in this article I shall be discussing the 1996/1997 view as it is most naturally read, since as far as I can see the 2003 interpretation is not very promising. In what follows, 'Boghossian' refers to a defender of the 1996/1997 view on its natural reading, irrespective of whether the real Boghossian held that view at the time.

According to Boghossian, it is 'intuitively clear' that the premises of the type of argument he is interested in are knowable a priori. He believes he has done enough to defend epistemic analyticity if he has shown the following conditional is true:

J: If someone knows the relevant facts about meaning, then that person will be in a position to form a justified belief about the truth of certain propositions.

A few comments about this. Firstly, and obviously, if our epistemic access to the meaning facts (the premises of the above argument) is not a priori,ⁱⁱ or if the way we

know the inferential rules for moving from the arguments premises to conclusion is not a priori, then for all Boghossian shows epistemic analyticity bears no relevance to the debate over how to account for a prioricity. Secondly, and more interestingly for current purposes, if the way we know the meaning facts expressed in the premises is *by knowing the conclusion propositions*, then J will presumably be true but it will bear no relevance to the question of how we come to know propositions like 3 in the first place. I shall argue that this is in fact the situation (provided, as I assume for the sake of argument, that there are indeed implicit definitions of the kind Boghossian appeals to).

This is not in itself a new claim. However, in this paper I shall do four new things. Drawing on recent work by Philip Ebert, I shall put a new structure on the objection which reveals the different ways that the objection can be pressed (depending on how you read one of the premises of the argument). Since Boghossian has responded to the objection in his recent work, I shall argue that his response is unconvincing. I shall develop some new side-objections to Boghossian. And, along the way, I shall resist Ebert's reasons for thinking that Boghossian's argument fails to transmit warrant from its premises to its conclusion, and show how Ebert's objection differs from the one I am defending.

One concern worth mentioning briefly here, although it will not be the focus of my attention in this article, is that in order for an implicit definition of (say) 'and' to work, we need to know which of the many logical objects that would make the given rules valid is the intended interpretation of 'and'. One possibility is that 'P and Q' is to be interpreted as P conjoined with Q, but another is that it is to be interpreted as P conjoined with itself and with Q. Since propositions involving this quirky kind of conjunction are logically equivalent to ones involving straight conjunction, the same

rules are valid for both. So there is no such thing as *the* logical object which makes valid the set of rules supposedly definitional of 'and', as Boghossian's 1 assumes.

II Transmission Failure

Ebert claims that arguments of the form of 1-3 above, far from showing how a priori knowledge can be acquired through implicit definition, have a fatal flaw: they fail to transmit warrant. Transmission of warrant failure is a phenomenon associated with Crispin Wright (see Wright 1985). This sort of argumentative failure is supposed to occur when an argument can provide no stronger grounds for acceptance of its conclusion than one already possesses for that conclusion in virtue of having warrant for its premises. Classic cases include Moorean arguments for the existence of an external world. Consider the argument:

(I) I have two hands

(II) If I have two hands then an external world exists

(III) Therefore, an external world exists

It is claimed that this argument fails to 'transmit a warrant' from its premises to its conclusion because one's grounds for accepting premise (I) can be no stronger than one's pre-existing grounds for accepting (III). And so, it is claimed, whatever grounds for (III) one ends up with by following through this argument can be no stronger than whatever grounds for (III) one started with when one accepted (I).

Why does Ebert think Boghossian's argument fails to transmit warrant? Well, as Ebert helpfully points out, Boghossian's argument schema is not quite complete as stated: it omits to make transparent a 'disquotational step', without which the conclusion – line 3 above – is merely metalinguistic. Even though Boghossian claims (2003, p. 16) that it doesn't matter whether his line 3 concerns linguistic items or

propositions, anything like line 3 will be metalinguistic in the sense that it merely mentions the inference **A** (even if the metalanguage in which it is couched is the same as the object language to which **C** belongs). Hence a disquotational step will always be needed to take us from something like 3 to a first-order piece of logical knowledge.

The argument as revised by Ebert and applied to the connective 'and', runs as follows:

1. If 'and' is to mean what it does, then 'P and Q \Rightarrow P' has to be valid
2. 'and' means what it does
3. 'P and Q \Rightarrow P' is valid
4. P and Q \Rightarrow P

Ebert uses the symbol ' \Rightarrow ' to 'represent an inference' (see his footnote 12). I am therefore not quite sure how to read Ebert's 4; it doesn't appear to be a proposition. So I propose instead to talk about the following argument (which, judging by his footnote 12, Ebert would think was an acceptable variant of the above).

1. If 'and' is to mean what it does, then 'P and Q \Rightarrow P' has to be valid
2. 'and' means what it does
3. 'P and Q \Rightarrow P' is valid
4. P and Q \models P

My 4 is to be read as expressing the (non-metalinguistic) schematic claim that the proposition P is a consequence of the proposition P and Q. While the step from 3 to 4 is no longer disquotation proper, it is (as far as I can see) the closest alternative

available. All references to numbered propositions in what follows are to the lines of the version of the argument which I have just laid out.

Ebert objects to Boghossian that the essential disquotational step cannot be made unless one already understands ‘and’. (This claim is supported by a trivial principle about disquotation, which he calls A1: the principle that being warranted to disquote a sentence requires an understanding of that sentence.) Ebert also argues, by appeal to a Context Principle, that this understanding of ‘and’ requires that one understands things like 4. Context Principles are claims that the basic unit of semantic understanding is something larger than a word; typically a sentence-sized chunk. So according to (certain kinds of) Context Principle one understands a word by understanding sentence-sized units in which it occurs – perhaps, as Ebert appears to require in this case, by understanding *particular* sentence-sized units in which it occurs.

But by Boghossian’s lights, 4 is epistemically analytic, so that understanding it suffices for being warranted in believing it. Hence, Ebert argues, anyone who can use the disquotational step already has a warrant for believing the conclusion of the argument. This, he says, means that the argument fails to transmit a warrant for its conclusion.ⁱⁱⁱ

Ebert discusses three possible replies to this objection, of which I want to defend the third, which occupies his section 5C. This third reply is that the epistemic analyticity of 4 only means that a warrant for believing 4 is in some sense *available* to anyone who understands 4, not that understanding implies *possession* of a warrant. But no worry about transmission of warrant failure arises unless understanding 4 implies prior possession of a warrant. If all that is shown is that a warrant is available, Boghossian can agree, but maintain that what is required for a subject who

understands 4 to *possess* the warrant in question is that she run through the argument 1-4 (which, by Ebert's result, is something that will always be available to her). Thus he can safely deny that the warrant is possessed prior to running through the argument.

Ebert has two criticisms of this line of defence. Firstly, it is argued that 'making this revision ... will lead to an insufficiency in the account, as put forward by Boghossian'. The insufficiency is that the appeal to epistemic analyticity will not show us how we move from understanding 4 to *possessing* a warrant for 4. All he would have shown is that such understanding *makes a warrant available*.

But, absent any further cause for alarm, this is not particularly worrying. It is comparable to the claim that an appeal to visual input is inadequate as an account of your justification for believing there is a church outside your window. It's true, of course, that to mention the visual input by itself is not to tell the whole story. You will have to be responding to that input in some appropriate fashion. (You won't be justified, for instance, if you form the belief that there's a church there by reasoning that you should always believe the opposite of what appears to you visually to be the case, but that the way things look to you now is exactly the way the absence of a church outside your window looks.) One fills in the story by assuming that some harmless form of reflective cognitive processing takes you from being in a position where the warrant is merely available to being in a position where it is actually possessed. If there is a reason to think that no such story is available in the kind of case Boghossian is discussing, Ebert has not yet told us what that reason is.

Moreover, Boghossian will in fact probably think that he has already told a story of the kind required. For he presumably intends reflection on 1-4 to be the kind of process that leads to the possession of a (previously merely available) warrant for

4.

Secondly, Ebert argues that the reply will not solve the problem, provided we make the (internalist) assumption that if we have adequately accounted for the subject's warrant for 4 we should have made clear how the subject can reflect on her warrants and hence be able to *claim* a warrant for 4. For, Ebert argues, the subject's being able to claim a warrant for 4 requires that she can claim to possess a warrant for the premises, in particular premise 2. And this in turn involves a claim to have available a warrant for the conclusion. So, he thinks, we still have a transmission of warrant issue.

Even if the internalist assumption were granted, however, the same kind of response can be made to this higher-order version of the original objection. It is not clear in what sense the claim to possess a warrant for the premise 'involves' a claim to have available a warrant for the conclusion. The claim that a warrant for the conclusion is available certainly isn't part of the *content* of the assertion that one is warranted in accepting the premise. It may be that it is only acceptable to claim a warrant for the premise provided *one is in a position to claim* that a warrant for the conclusion is available. But we can resolve this new worry in a similar way to the original, by distinguishing *being in a position to claim that a warrant is available* from *using a claim about the availability of that warrant as part of the argument*.

III Prior Knowledge of the Conclusion

I shall continue to use my revised version of the argument in setting out the objection to Boghossian's proposal which I intend to defend. My worry is related to Bonjour's general criticism of attempts to explain a priori knowledge by appeal to implicit definition. Bonjour has argued (1998, pp. 49-51) that an appeal to implicit definition

provides no explanation of how we know any proposition a priori. Saying that a sentence S is an implicit definition amounts to stipulating that any previously unknown terms it contains are to be interpreted so as to make S come out true. (Cf. Boghossian's 1). But this process of interpretation would seem to require that we *already know* that S is true on the intended interpretation of the terms. We must first know that the proposition S expresses on a certain interpretation is a true proposition, in order to see that this interpretation is the *intended* interpretation. The question then is: how do we explain this apparently prior knowledge of the truth of the proposition which S expresses on the intended interpretation?

My central concern is that Boghossian's argument cannot be the source of our knowledge of 4 because (by the lights of someone who thinks 'and' is implicitly defined, in part by 4) the argument can only be employed by someone already knows 4. There is clearly a problem in this area for Boghossian if his premise 2 is to be read *de re*: as asserting that 'and' means the particular thing that we all know it does mean, namely and. Our epistemic ground for premise 1 is supposed to be that 'and' is implicitly defined as whatever makes 'P and Q \Rightarrow P' (among other things) valid. But if 'and' is so defined, knowing 2 on its *de re* reading raises the BonJour problem. In order to know that 'and' means the thing we all know it does mean, where 'and' is defined as whatever makes such-and-such rules valid, we need prior knowledge of the fact that those rules are valid when 'and' means the thing we all know it does mean. But knowledge of this kind was supposed to be reached at the *conclusion* of the argument, and therefore cannot be relied upon for knowledge of its premises.

Boghossian (2003) has responded to this objection (which, as he says, is also pressed in Glüer 2003 at pp. 57-8). Assuming – with the majority, and without presuming to understand the phenomenon fully – that meaning facts are first-person

accessible in a privileged way, Boghossian interprets the BonJour objection as an objection to the effect that ‘in the *special* case where meaning is fixed by implicit definition, there is a problem with the assumption of privileged access’. ‘But’, he argues, BonJour has ‘supplied us with no special reason to think that, if [a term’s] meaning is fixed via implicit definition, the usual assumption of privileged access must be suspended’.

This comment seems to me to evince a misunderstanding of the objection. No argument is being offered in favour of the view that we *do not* know the meaning of ‘and’ in some privileged way of the sort Boghossian has in mind. Rather, Boghossian is being challenged to *account for* that knowledge, and rightly so, since it is one of the pieces of knowledge on which, according to Boghossian, our a priori knowledge that 4 rests, and the objector suspects that (if implicit definition is really going on) it rests on prior knowledge of 4. What is at issue is not whether we know in some privileged way or other, but whether we know in a way that depends upon prior knowledge of 4. It is reasonable to be concerned that not that much progress is made concerning the epistemology of 4 by claiming that a priori knowledge derives from knowledge of 2, given that it is on the cards that the only way we can have the required kind of knowledge of 2 is by knowing 4. At least, not much progress is made until some alternative account of our knowledge of 2 is forthcoming.

Gesturing to the fact that we have special, privileged access to meaning facts is in any case not very satisfying. It would not be satisfying to point to a special, privileged kind of access as soon as one is asked how a priori knowledge is possible, and it is no more satisfying to be forced into doing so a little further down the line. But this is not the main source of my concern. Rather, it is that given that ‘and’ is implicitly defined as Boghossian proposes, claiming that we have special, privileged

access to what ‘and’ means would seem to *amount to* claiming that we have special privileged access to the proposition $P \text{ and } Q \neq P$, since (by Bonjour’s objection) knowledge of this proposition is what is needed in order to tell which interpretation is appropriate for ‘and’ so defined, i.e. knowledge of this proposition is what is needed for understanding of ‘and’.

Before moving on, it is worth noting that Boghossian appears to be making a positive argument against the point of view which would motivate the Bonjour objection when he asks (p. 24):

But do Bonjour and Glüer really wish to say that if the meaning of ‘and’ is fixed by a thinker’s being disposed to use it according to its standard introduction and elimination rules that [sic] he cannot be said to know what ‘and’ means without first knowing that ‘A and B’ implies A?

One point to note about this is that how the meaning of ‘and’ is *fixed* is one question, and how its meaning is *known* is another. The objection under consideration only requires the claim that if the meaning of ‘and’ is *known* via our implicit definitions in terms of its standard introduction and elimination rules, then one cannot be said to know what ‘and’ means without first knowing that $A \text{ and } B \neq A$. That is the whole point of the Bonjour objection. So the answer to (a suitably adjusted version of) Boghossian’s rhetorical question is: yes, those who think the objection works really do wish to say this, for the reasons explained above.

A second point is that *this* piece of prior knowledge (that $A \text{ and } B \neq A$) is not the same as the one that Boghossian mentions, namely knowledge that ‘A and B’ implies A. It would seem pretty much *tautologous* that if the meaning of ‘and’ is known by our grasping its standard introduction and elimination rules, then one cannot be said to know what ‘and’ means without first knowing that ‘A and B’ implies A (or at least that it implies ‘A’). If there is any worry in this area which Boghossian

might reasonably be appealing to, it will surely be a worry about whether the piece of prior knowledge which *I* described is really necessary in order for us to know what ‘and’ means through implicit definition.

But even in this case I do not see what sort of worry there is supposed to be. Although we cannot know that $A \text{ and } B \not\equiv A$ without having a concept of conjunction (as distinct from knowing that ‘and’ expresses that concept), this fact does not reduce implicit definition to absurdity as a method of learning the meaning of the *expression* ‘and’. It is still perfectly possible that the way we understand ‘and’ is through implicit definition – e.g., by knowing that ‘A and B’ implies A (as well as any other relevant rules). For we would then be able to come to know what ‘and’ means by seeing that it expresses conjunction, of which we already have a concept, and for which we already know such principles as $A \text{ and } B \text{ implies } A$ (even if we don’t yet express these principles using ‘and’).

All that is strange, once this picture is set up, is Boghossian’s further suggestion that our knowledge of the meaning of ‘and’ somehow underwrites our knowledge of the proposition $A \text{ and } B \not\equiv A$. On the contrary, on this picture, it is our prior knowledge that $A \text{ and } B \not\equiv A$ that enables us to know that ‘and’ expresses conjunction. For it is our prior knowledge of this proposition which enables us to see that conjunction is the intended interpretation for ‘and’, i.e. enables us to see that this is the interpretation which makes ‘A and B’ imply A and the other rules hold.

Conflation between a proposition and its means of expression might explain Boghossian’s confusion concerning the Bonjour objection, and his neglect of the importance – and indeed the existence – of the disquotational step. A similar kind of conflation is familiar from (for instance) conventionalist accounts of necessity. Conventionalists argue that our conventions concerning linguistic items make it

necessary that all bachelors are unmarried. Of course, all our linguistic conventions actually do is make it the case that the sentence 'All bachelors are unmarried' expresses an already-necessary proposition. Similarly, Boghossian thinks that implicit definition of 'and' can give us knowledge that $A \text{ and } B \neq A$. Whereas in fact, all it does is enable us to see that the sentence 'A and B \models A' expresses this already-known proposition.

Boghossian claims (p. 16) that it doesn't much matter whether we think of implicit definitions as definitions of linguistic items or of concepts. Personally I think this matters a great deal as the two options generate radically different views, but in addition I don't think that any claim of this sort can help him avert the foregoing worries. For it is far from clear that talk of implicit definition makes any sense for anything but linguistic (or otherwise representational) items. But once it is understood that definitions are merely definitions of representational devices, and the gap between a proposition and its means of representation is appreciated, then we have all the tools we need in place to raise the BonJour objection against the view that implicit definitions can help us secure knowledge of propositions we did not already know.

IV Another Reading of Premise 2

The reader might wonder if the BonJour objection will disappear if 2 is read *de dicto*: as asserting merely that 'and' means whatever 'and' means. It would be charitable, and most in keeping with the spirit of Boghossian's writings, to assume that this is Boghossian's preferred reading.

However, this interpretation of the argument still runs into difficulties at the disquotational step. This step, as Ebert notes, cannot be made unless the subject

understands 'and'. And understanding 'and' requires more than knowing that 'and' means whatever 'and' means – it requires something much closer to knowing that 'and' means that very thing we all know it does mean. (Plausibly, we don't actually need knowledge of this *proposition* in order to understand 'and'. But we do need something pretty substantial.)

If 'and' is implicitly defined and the BonJour point is correct, then it looks as if this substantial understanding of 'and' will rest on prior knowledge of 4. For how could we get this understanding of 'and' just by knowing that 'P and Q \Rightarrow P' and the other rules are to be valid? How could we tell *which* interpretation of 'and' makes these rules valid? Only by already knowing the validity of the rules which are expressed by the definienda on the intended interpretation, i.e. by already knowing (among other things) that *P and Q \neq P*.

If our understanding of 'and' rests on our knowledge of 4 in this way, then the disquotational step cannot be made except by someone who already knows 4. In short, even on the *de dicto* reading of 2, there are reasons to doubt that a Boghossian-style argument can be the real source of our knowledge of 4, because such an argument can only be employed by someone who already knows 4. (Note that this problem with the disquotational step is also a problem for the argument when premise 2 is read *de re*.)

There are, moreover, further problems with this alternative reading of the argument. The *de dicto* reading of 2 may make it appear trivial, but that appearance would be misleading. Even if we do read 2 as having this *de dicto* sense, if 'and' is implicitly defined as Boghossian envisages, knowing 2 still requires knowing that 'and' so defined has some meaning or other (a point raised by Horwich in his 1997). In other words, it requires that we solve something pretty close to BonJour's problem,

namely the problem of saying how we know that the inference 'P and Q \Rightarrow P' is valid on *some* interpretation of 'and'. This is the familiar problem of saying how we know that 'and' gets any meaning assigned to it by this attempted definition. Plausibly, the way we know that there is an interpretation of 'and' which makes 'P and Q \Rightarrow P' come out valid is by knowing that $P \text{ and } Q \not\equiv P$, but that can't be Boghossian's answer. There is therefore considerable pressure for an alternative answer to be provided if his account of our knowledge of 4 is to get off the ground.

In the appendix to his 1997 (pp. 358-62), Boghossian addresses this sort of problem. His response is to claim that 'we are a priori entitled to believe that our basic logical constants are meaningful because we cannot coherently doubt that they are'. His reason for saying we cannot coherently doubt that they are meaningful is that any proposition expressing that doubt will employ the very constants whose meaningfulness it is supposed to be doubting.

However, this once again looks very dubious if we pay attention to the difference between propositions and their means of expression. Let's grant for the sake of argument that we cannot *express* the relevant doubt *in* (the English) *language* without using the constant 'and'^{iv}. Still, why does it follow that we cannot *entertain the concern* that 'and' may not be meaningful? For Boghossian's point to do the required work, it would need to be the case that whenever we think the thought that 'and' may not be not meaningful we will be somehow employing the very same representational device 'and'. That is a very strong assumption that many would reject.

Perhaps Boghossian would resist this objection as resting too heavily on the idea that the relevant implicit definitions are definitions of English expressions. Perhaps he had in mind rather that we think in a language of thought, and that the item

in that language which expresses conjunction is implicitly defined in that language in the way required for a version of his 1-4 argument to work for it. (I doubt this would be Boghossian's preferred response, since he claims that he is not committed to anything like a language of thought in order for his view to work – see his 2003, p. 16. But if the relevant implicit definitions are not definitions of English or Mentalese words, what are they "definitions" of? One possibility that remains is that implicit definition doesn't really come into it. This indeed seems to be Boghossian's 2003 view, as discussed above. But it cannot be a satisfactory interpretation of the argument of his 1996 and 1997.)

However, if Mentalese implicit definition were on the cards, we should need to hear a lot more about what it is, how it is supposed to work and why we should believe in it. It is far from clear that one has the same kind of control over the language in which one thinks (if indeed there is such a language) as one has over the language in which one expresses one's thoughts. It is far from clear that one is at liberty to stipulate regarding the meaning of Mentalese expressions in the kind of way that seems to be required for implicit definition. Moreover, no hint is given as to why we should not suppose that Mentalese logical constants can have synonyms within Mentalese. If they do, perhaps we can employ some synonymous expression (perhaps we can even define one for the occasion) in order to entertain a doubt about the Mentalese word for conjunction.

In addition, it is worth noting that even if it is incoherent to think that 'and' is not meaningful, it has not been established that it is incoherent to withhold judgement as to whether or not it is meaningful. For withholding judgement is not a matter of accepting some claim which involves 'and' in some objectionable way – it is simply a matter of not accepting that 'and' is meaningful. So even if it has been shown that we

cannot coherently *hold that* 'and' is *not* meaningful, it has not been shown that we cannot *doubt whether* it is meaningful – for we could have such doubts in virtue of withholding judgement on the matter.

Furthermore, even if it is right to think that for whatever reason we cannot coherently doubt that 'and' is meaningful, this is an unsatisfactory response to our original worry. The original worry was that the way we know 'and' has a meaning may be by knowing 4. The response that we cannot coherently doubt that 'and' is meaningful, even if true, is unsatisfactory for (at least) two reasons. Firstly, it does not address the worry. On the face of it, to point out that we can't coherently doubt that 'and' is meaningful is not to explain how (or even assert that) we know that it is meaningful. (This point is pressed by Margolis and Laurence 2001, p. 297.) Thus the worry remains that we know this by first knowing 4.

Perhaps our noticing that we cannot doubt that 'and' is meaningful is supposed to provide our warrant for thinking that 'and' is meaningful. If this is what Boghossian has in mind, it is another substantial assumption in need of defence. On the face of it, there is no reason why noticing such an incapacity of ours should provide warrant for beliefs about the relevant linguistic facts.

Boghossian acknowledges that we might interpret the impossibility of coherently doubting that our logical constants have a meaning as a 'merely pragmatic' result, but argues that '[t]o sustain the claim that the result is merely pragmatic, one would have to make sense of the claim that, although we cannot rationally doubt that our constants are meaningful, it is nevertheless possible that they aren't.' He proceeds: 'However, considerations similar to the ones adduced above would tend to show that we cannot make sense of this thought either' (p. 362). But this is to invite the same response over again. Among other things, we can respond that at best, all

the failure to ‘make sense of this thought’ would show is that we can’t coherently doubt that the result is merely pragmatic. It does not amount to providing a reason to think that the result is *not* merely pragmatic.

The second problem with Boghossian's appeal to the impossibility of doubting that 'and' has a meaning, even supposing that this is impossible, is that this appeal undermines the claim that implicit definition is at the root of our a priori knowledge of 4. According to Boghossian's account, knowledge of 2 is one of the things on which our knowledge of 4 rests. But knowing 2 (even on its *de dicto* reading) requires that we at least know that ‘and’ has a meaning. However, the way Boghossian thinks we are justified in this belief is through our not being able to doubt coherently that it does. This suggests that one of the interesting, ultimate grounds on which a priori knowledge of 4 rests is located, not in anything to do with implicit definition, but in the fact that *we cannot doubt* a certain proposition about ‘and’.

Even waiving concerns about the reasonableness of claiming that this incapacity of ours is a source of knowledge, if on Boghossian's account of how we know 4 makes our incapacity to doubt is one of the ultimate grounds of that knowledge, then on that account implicit definition is not the whole story about our epistemic grounds for 4. This being so, it is reasonable to ask whether Boghossian has really succeeded in 'demystifying' a priori knowledge, or indeed whether Boghossian's proposal has significant advantages over an account of our a priori knowledge of 4 which simply says that we are right to trust that 4 is true because we cannot doubt it. After all, according to Boghossian, that seems to be all we need to say about *some* of our a priori knowledge (namely, a priori knowledge that our basic logical constants are meaningful).

IV Concluding Remarks

It may be helpful to conclude by pointing out exactly how the main objection I have pressed against Boghossian is different from Ebert's. After all, we both object that in order to use the argument one must already have warrant for its conclusion. So some clarification of the differences is desirable.

Firstly, I have not claimed that Boghossian's argument always fails to transmit warrant from its premises to its conclusion. For all I say, it may be that (sometimes) a person's grounds for accepting 4 could be enhanced by following through the argument, even though one must already know 4 in order to employ that argument. Just because one needs to know 4 first, it doesn't follow that one already has as much justification for 4 as it is possible to have, and maybe following through the argument can provide more, in some circumstances (e.g. by helping one to get clearer about the relationship between 'and' and 4). All I am claiming is that thinking about Boghossian's argument cannot help us understand how we come to know 4 in the first place.

Secondly, unlike Ebert, I do not appeal to any Context Principle in arguing that prior knowledge of 4 is required by anyone who uses the argument. All that I require is that, as Boghossian himself thinks, our understanding of the word 'and' rests on implicit definition. From this alone it follows (by dint of the BonJour point, or so I claim) that our understanding of 'and' requires prior knowledge of 4. I then argue that understanding of 'and' is required for the argument to be employed (either for knowledge of 2 or to use the disquotational step), without any appeal to a Context Principle.

Finally, because my reasons for thinking that one needs to know 4 in order to use the argument are different from Ebert's, I do not run the risk assimilating the

availability of a warrant with its possession, as in my opinion Ebert does. Ebert only aims to establish that a warrant for 4 must be *available* to anyone who uses the argument 1-4. He thinks this is enough to establish a problematic kind of transmission failure. Whereas I argue for the stronger claim that, if this is a real case of implicit definition, then *knowledge* of 4 is *already possessed* by anyone who is able to use the argument. I think the stronger claim is necessary in order to make trouble for Boghossian, since otherwise he could respond (along the lines I described above) that having a warrant available is not the same thing as possessing one.

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Notes

ⁱ A very similar objection can be made against Peacocke's view, which Boghossian mentions as an alternative to his own on p. 28. I argue the point against Peacocke in Jenkins MS.

ⁱⁱ Thanks to my audience at the ANU here.

ⁱⁱⁱ Something close to Ebert's main claim is also made by Glüer 2003 (pp. 57-8), though not for the same reasons.

^{iv} I am assuming here that 'and' is a basic logical constant. Presumably Boghossian's account is not supposed to apply if 'and' is non-basic, but as long as it works for *some* set of basic constants, that will be a significant result. The worries I raise are, however, applicable whichever constants we are dealing with.