

Evidence and First-Person Authority¹

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I. THE ISSUE

In *Expression and the Inner*, Finkelstein explores the peculiarities of self-knowledge as opposed to other sorts of knowledge that an agent might acquire; as it is commonly assumed, ‘self-knowledge’ does not refer here to the mere knowledge of one or another aspect of oneself, but to a *kind* of knowledge about one’s own features that no one else can possess. The question about the peculiarities of self-knowledge is thereby transformed into an inquiry about the asymmetries between first-person and third-person access to certain features of an agent.² Thus, Finkelstein initiates his book with an example where one such asymmetry is emphasized:

Sarah knows Max *very* well. If you wanted to find out what size shirt he wears or how long he goes between haircuts, you’d do better to ask her than him. Nonetheless, it doesn’t even occur to you to think that Max, rather than Sarah, might be mistaken about which ticket he intends to use. It doesn’t occur to you to ask Max for evidence supporting his assertion that he intends to see Dylan. (And if you *were* to ask for evidence, he would think you were joking). Indeed, it is difficult to imagine how Max could be mistaken about which concert he means to attend. This isn’t to say that he’s never wrong about what he intends. But it’s hard to see how he could be wrong in *this* case, and, as a rule, if you want to know what Max intends, he’s the best person to ask. He is, we might say, the best *authority* concerning his intentions. And not only his intentions; Max speaks with what seems to be a similar sort of authority about his own hopes, fears, desires, beliefs, moods, emotions, sensations, and passing thoughts [Finkelstein (2003), p. 1].

There seems to be a clear asymmetry between Max and his wife Sarah concerning their respective knowledge of which concert Max intends to attend, but such that it does not apply to knowledge of ‘what size shirt he wears or how long he goes between haircuts’, since Sarah *may* know better than Max himself the answer to such questions. These asymmetries are apparently as-

sociated with the rather disparate roles that *evidence* plays in each case. Whereas Sarah claims to know *better than* Max himself about certain habits of his and this is assumed to occur because she (being quite faithful to her gender stereotype) pays more attention to those details than her manly husband and, as a result, is in possession of better evidence to ground her views on such matters; Max has, on the contrary, a rather privileged access to some intentions of his to the point that asking for evidence in such cases could only be interpreted as *a joke*. Thus, Finkelstein concludes that Max "... is, we might say, the best *authority* concerning his intentions" [Finkelstein (2003), p. 1]³ and, thus, characterizes the phenomenon of first-person authority as follows:

Both in Chapter I and in the beginning of this chapter, I characterized the phenomenon of first-person authority in terms of these two facts. (1) If you want to know my psychological condition, I'm usually the best person to ask and (2) there's no need for me to consider behavioral evidence in order for me to say what I'm thinking or feeling [Finkelstein (2003), p. 124].

Max's best (even though not *infallible*) *authority* on certain intentions of his is, hence, associated with the unintelligibility of a demand to provide evidence,⁴ whereby the sort of authority being stressed is *primarily epistemic*. And this holds even though one may turn out to conclude – as Finkelstein himself would do – that such an authority may ultimately derive from a different sort of authority. Finkelstein takes, though, a further step:

Not only his intentions; Max speaks with what seems to be a similar sort of authority about his own hopes, fears, desires, beliefs, moods, emotions, sensations, and passing thoughts [Finkelstein (2003), p. 1].

whereby Finkelstein commits himself to quite a substantial thesis, namely: what is true about intentions concerning which concert to attend, also *applies unrestrictedly to hopes, fears, desires, beliefs, moods, emotions, sensations, and passing thoughts*. To defend this claim is surely one of the major challenges in his book. I will argue, however, that the conceptual tools Finkelstein develops to account for Max' intentions regarding Dylan's concert are only applicable to other, more complex, cases on the basis of *an ambiguity* which I will try to unveil by emphasizing the rather disparate role that *evidence* plays in *trivial* (say, those in the same vein as Max's authority about his final decision to attend Dylan's concert) cases as opposed to *more complex* ones to be specified, like psychoanalytic cases as well some interesting intermediate ones. I will, more specifically, argue (1) that *Max' authority about some trivial, short-term, intentions of his does not extend to other more complex states*, and also (2) that *the authority that is missing in the latter cases is not of the same kind*

as the authority that Max possesses with regard to trivial, short-term, intentions. I will, as a result, conclude (3) that the phenomenon of first-person authority involves, at least, a certain articulation of two kinds of authority, namely: an *epistemic* (insofar as evidence is at issue here, even if it is from the viewpoint of its irrelevance) and a *practical* (insofar as the capacity to shape one's own psychological and behavioral dispositions is the central concern) *kind of authority*; and (4) defend the view that gathering *evidence* plays a crucial role regarding an agent's ability to preserve (or cultivate) her practical authority upon herself. Separate from this is the matter (not to be discussed in this paper) of how that search for evidence should be conceived of and, in particular, whether *the model of a pure detached observer* would really make sense in this context.⁵ Let me now sketch Finkelstein's account of trivial cases of first-person authority and also how it may apply to more complex ones. This will take sections 2 and 3, whereas, in the sections after, I will try to uncover the ambiguity that makes such an application plausible and, as a result, motivate claims (1)-(4).

II. EXPRESSING AND CONTEXTUALIZING: THE TRIVIAL CASE

There is certainly something puzzling about Max's authority; for it is a case where epistemic authority, far from being diminished by lack of evidence, is enhanced by the inappropriateness of a provision of it. To shed some light on this perplexity, Finkelstein seeks to account for

- (a) the *conditions* under which a self-ascription of a mental state possesses (*epistemic*) *authority* despite the inappropriateness of *evidence*

in the light of

- (b) the *conditions* under which a self-ascription of a mental state *contextualizes* (and not just interprets) a previous expression of it;⁶

which, in turn, are claimed to be equivalent to

- (c) the *conditions* under which a self-ascription of a mental state contributes to fixing the *unit of intelligibility* within which the content of such mental state is to be determined;⁷

and also to

- (d) the *conditions* under which a mental state is *expressed* by being self-ascribed.⁸

Central to Finkelstein's line of reasoning is the distinction between *contextualizing* and *interpreting*,⁹ which he introduces in the light of some rather trivial examples in the hope that it should illuminate some other, more complex, cases. Suppose Richard tells his mother,

- 'I met Mary's daughter the other day. She is quite nice and friendly.'
- Which daughter are you talking about? She has two daughters.
- Oh, I meant the one who studies at Paris.
- Hence, you meant her eldest daughter, Teresa. Yes, she is really charming.

It's clear that Richard and his mother relate to the question 'Which daughter of Mary is Richard referring to in his first remark?' in quite disparate ways. Whereas his mother must ask Richard for clarification or else rely on some further evidence to make a guess; there is no one else to whom Richard might reasonably appeal in order to answer the very same question and, indeed, he needn't gather any evidence. We may thus say that her mother was *interpreting* Richard's initial remark in the light of his clarification, whereas Richard was proceeding otherwise: he wasn't interpreting himself, but *completing* his initial remark or, in Finkelstein's own terms, *contextualizing* it. He needn't look for further evidence to determine what he meant, just because he was providing the context in which the first remark was to be interpreted. We may, then, see that Richard has an authority to answer the question as to whom he was referring to that his mother doesn't possess, and Finkelstein's analysis is such that a special authority derives from the fact that, in answering that question, Richard was contextualizing (and not just interpreting) his previous remarks. This seems to hold for bodily expressions and the corresponding self-ascriptions as well:

Franny groans audibly, whereupon Zoey asks: 'What did you mean? Did you groan because your head hurts, or didn't you like my joke?' Franny answers unhesitatingly, decisively, and apparently without epistemic grounds, 'Neither. I groaned because of how much I detest this coffee' [Finkelstein (2003), p. 102].

Whereas Zoey was surely *interpreting* Franny's groan, the latter's relation to it was quite different. We might say that she was *contextualizing* it for Zoey. And it is also clear that her groaning *expressed* her distaste for her coffee. Hence, Franny's self-ascription of that distaste should not be regarded as an interpretation of that expressive behavior, but as a continuation of it, as an attempt to complete *the unit of intelligibility* that had been initiated with

her groaning. So, Finkelstein concludes with regard to a slightly different conversation still concerning Franny and Zooey:

But her [Franny's] interpretation isn't a *mere* interpretation; it works *with* the action to express her desire for cream. She speaks with authority (not because she has the best view of her own behavior, but) because her interpretation contextualizes, in this way, the very action that it's an interpretation of [Finkelstein (2003), p. 110].

As we see, Finkelstein regards *contextualizing as a kind of interpretation*, while, so far, I have rather been opposing *interpreting to contextualizing*. I will, nevertheless, stick to my wording for the sake of simplicity, and also because the divergence between mere interpretation and an interpretation that contextualizes is so significant to the issue that it may be misleading to treat the disparity as merely adjectival; nothing of relevance seems to hang, though, on that terminological preference. Finkelstein takes, in any case, the notion of contextualizing inspired in trivial cases like Franny's as a guide to propose an expressivist account of expectations:

An avowal of expectation bears a relation to a person's psychological condition that is, in this respect, like the relation that Franny's gloss on her groan bears to the groan itself [Finkelstein (2003), p. 111].

And this promises to shed some light on what is peculiar about psychoanalytic and some other more complex cases. I will argue, however, that, even if some insight may be derived from Finkelstein's distinction, it would be rather misleading to assimilate the sort of first-person authority that trivial cases *display* with the kind of first-person authority that is *missing* in those more complex cases. A consequence of this will be that the phenomenon of first-person authority that should be accounted for (as well as the role that evidence may play within it) has been misleadingly identified, although this is not to deny that a certain expressivist view about self-knowledge may still be in order.

III. PSYCHOANALYTIC AND INTERMEDIATE CASES

In his *Introductory Lectures to Psychoanalysis*, Freud begins his presentation of a general theory of neurosis with the case of a high-class married lady (let's call her 'Frau Bruggen'), whose neurotic symptoms he regards as a displacement of a monstrous passion: her being in love with her son-in-law. As Freud himself puts it:

She herself was intensely in love with a young man, with the same son-in-law who had persuaded her to come to me as a patient. She herself knew nothing, or perhaps only a very little, of this love; in the family relationship that existed between them it was easy for this passionate liking to disguise itself as innocent affection. After all our experiences elsewhere, it is not hard for us to feel our way into the mental life of this upright wife and worthy mother, of the age of fifty-three. Being in love like this, as a monstrous and impossible thing, could not become conscious; but it remained in existence and, even though it was unconscious, it exercised a severe pressure. Something had to become of it, some relief had to be looked for; and the easiest mitigation was offered, no doubt, by the mechanism of displacement which plays a part so regularly in the generating of delusional jealousy. If not only were she, the old woman, in love with a young man, but if also her old husband were having a love affair with a young girl, then her conscience would be relieved of the weight of her unfaithfulness. The phantasy of her husband's unfaithfulness thus acted as a cooling compress on her burning wound [Freud (1973), p. 291].

In dispute with new detectivists (whom, in contrast with the old Cartesian one, stipulate the existence of an inner organ of detection which, despite its *reliability*, no longer appears as *infallible*),¹⁰ Finkelstein inquires about the specific sense in which Frau Bruggen's attraction for her son-in-law is to be construed as *unconscious*. It might have been unconscious in the rather trivial sense that she had no real inkling of it to the effect that she might have sincerely replied to an inquiry in that direction with a most robust 'no'. Yet, once Freud brings that possibility to her consideration and shows how it might account for a significant portion of her neurotic behavior, she may end up accepting his interpretation and, in this particular sense, get to know that she was in love with her son-in-law. It seems, however, that this sense of knowing is consistent with the mental state being still unconscious in some other, more relevant, sense. In fact, psychoanalytic therapy is far from being over once the patient becomes *conscious of* her unconscious motivations; the most difficult steps are still to be taken. A different kind of awareness of her monstrous desire seems to be required for Frau Bruggen to recover her psychic health. She may need to reach the stage of *being consciously* in love with her son-in-law and see which course of action may follow from it:

It's one thing to be *consciously* angry or jealous or believing that such-and-such and quite another to be *conscious of* one's anger, jealousy, or belief. We can think of this fact as providing us with a constraint on an adequate account of the distinction between conscious and unconscious mentality [Finkelstein (2003), p. 116; my emphasis].

Leaving aside why new detectivists may have trouble accounting for this distinction,¹¹ Finkelstein resorts to the notion of *expression* to account for the

distinction between the case where Frau Bruggen's self-ascriptions of her love for her son-in-law should count as her being consciously in love with him, and those that only manifest her as being just conscious of it. Finkelstein's view is, needless to say, that only in the former case would her self-ascription express her state:

Here, Harry expresses his opinion that he has a particular unconscious belief, but he does not express the unconscious belief; he doesn't express the belief that he is unlovable. (Indeed, he expresses the opposite opinion)

The point may be put as follows: *Someone's mental state is conscious if he has the ability to express it merely by self-ascribing it. If he lacks such an ability which respect to one of his mental states, it is unconscious* [Finkelstein (2003), p. 120].

And I take it that here 'expression' should be construed in the light of (b)-(d), that is, Frau Bruggen self-ascription of her monstrous desire would count as an expression of it if and only if her self-ascription does not appear as a mere interpretation of her neurotic behavior, but as an attempt to complete the unit of intelligibility, that is, as a *contextualization* of her desire and other expressions of it.¹² And, needless to say, Frau Bruggen would only be endowed with first-person authority with regard to those self-ascriptions of her that are expressive and not merely reports about certain mental states she happens to be merely conscious of.

Finkelstein stresses, though, that *first-person authority is a matter of degree*, whereby he should construe the distinction between *conscious of* and *consciously* as two ends of a continuum, rather than as two exclusive and clear-cut attitudes.¹³ Consider, to this purpose, the following case:

Helen has a new boyfriend. After she's involved with him for a couple of months, a friend asks her if she *loves* him. She replies: 'Well, I feel comfortable with him, and I'm really attracted to him. On the other hand, I don't always like his politics, and he talks too much about his therapy sessions. Still, he's considerate, not just with me but with everybody -with waiters and salespeople. I admire that. And I like the way he looks and smells. Oh, and you know how, usually, I can't stand being around people when they're sick? When Harry had the flu, I stopped in almost every evening after work to bring him food and check up on him. So, yes, I suppose I love him' [Finkelstein (2003), p. 123].

Helen carefully examines some pieces of evidence in order to conclude that she, after all, does love Harry. It is at least unclear that we should thereby say that she is *merely conscious of* such an attitude of hers. For her last sentence appears to go beyond a report and may quite naturally be construed as an expression of love; as Finkelstein himself puts it "we might say that her avowal *leans*, rather than rests squarely, on the evidence" [Finkelstein (2003), p. 125].

And, according to him, this leaning may diminish her first-person authority, but does not really cancel it:

In §5.1-5.3, I claimed that the authority we accord to mental state avowals should be understood as a matter of their expressing the very states that they are avowals of

.....

... I said in §5.4 that a person's statements about her own unconscious mental states are only as good as the evidence she has to back them up. This isn't true of Helen's statement about loving Harry. To a certain extent, it transcends the evidential considerations that lead up to it. We might say that her avowal *leans*, rather than rests squarely, on the evidence. Thus, I *do* find myself wanting to say that Helen speaks with partial, or a little bit of, first-person authority [Finkelstein (2003), p. 124-5; other than italics, my emphasis].

It's unclear to me, however, whether Finkelstein can really make room for these intermediate cases, since the phenomenon of first-person authority was tightly associated with the *impertinence of asking for evidence* and accounted for in terms of an agent's ability to contextualize her own mental states and behavior; whereby it is uncertain whether Helen's self-ascription should count, properly speaking, as a case with respect to which Finkelstein should concede that she has even a diminished kind of first-person authority and, consequently, as a case where she is actually contextualizing. To add to this perplexity, the previous quotation leads to a surprising remark:

If her relationship with Harry flourishes, then perhaps in time she'll speak with more of this kind of authority when she avows her love for him [Finkelstein (2003), p. 125].

But, how on earth is the flourishing of Helen's relationship with Harry connected to first-authority and the irrelevance of evidence? To explore these perplexities, let us address first a slightly different question: whether what is missing in Frau Bruggen's case is the kind of first-person authority that Max and Franny do possess with regard to the trivial cases at hand.

IV. HAVING AUTHORITY UPON ONESELF

Frau Bruggen's predicament is, as we have seen, that she might become conscious of the fact that she is in love with her son-in-law and also that her husband hasn't betrayed her, and yet her obsessive behavior persists. A kind of behavior of which the best explanation appears to be that, despite all evi-

dence to the contrary, she still *unconsciously* believes that her husband is unfaithful to her; this belief being, in turn, motivated by her *unconscious* desire (her obsessive behavior being interpreted as both a displacement and an unconscious denial of it) for her son-in-law. And we will judge the latter to remain unconscious and any self-ascription of it inevitable inexpressive, inasmuch as her obsessive symptoms should not vanish or, at least, significantly decrease. So, the inability of her self-ascription to form a pattern with some other aspects of her behavior stands in the way of her transition from an unconsciously to a consciously believing or desiring. Yet, we are now convinced that such symptoms would not merely disappear by contemplation of some truth in the light of evidence, but by her capacity to express in one or another way her monstrous desire. Thus, we may see Frau Bruggen as being trapped within the following dilemma: either she should yield to her temptation and cultivate her desire, whereby she would feel utterly immoral and be haunted by a strong sense of guilt; or else behave like a most faithful wife and mother, but remain neurotic unless her monstrous desire might at some point fade away.

So, it seems that the ability to express one's unconscious desires may be quite a difficult and uncertain affair, not at all as trivial as Max' and Franny's capacity to contextualize their respective remarks or gestures. What seems to be *missing* in Frau Bruggen's case is a certain kind of *practical authority*, namely, the capacity to shape her psychological and behavioral dispositions in the light of a certain belief that she endorses, namely, that her husband has been most faithful to her. The lack of such practical authority is to be explained by a powerful desire whose pressure is partly channeled through her obsession. There is, of course, the question as to how a certain kind of self-awareness may help us to recover that practical authority. And it is clear that *merely becoming conscious of* such a desire appears more as a manifestation of her inability to recover such an authority than as a step towards its recovery; whereas, in Finkelstein's terms, *consciously* self-ascribing such a desire should amount to a restoration of the authority at stake. This is not, however, the kind of authority that is at play in Max' and Franny's trivial cases; for it is easy to show that Frau Bruggen does possess that kind of authority.

In the same sense in which Franny may claim that she groaned because she disliked her coffee, Frau Bruggen may claim that she does believe her husband to be faithful to her. If Franny had first-person authority because she contextualized her groaning with the corresponding *sincere* self-ascription, so Frau Bruggen could sincerely self-ascribe that belief without looking for evidence about herself.¹⁴ And it is on the basis of this ability and its mismatch with her behavioral dispositions that we may reasonably claim that she was dispossessed of another kind of authority, namely, *a practical authority upon her psychological and behavioral dispositions*. The monstrous desire for her son-in-law is, in fact, stipulated to account for such a mismatch. Yet, with re-

gard to this desire, we must also grant Frau Bruggen the same trivial ability that was ascribed to Franny and Max. She would sincerely claim that it is a most monstrous desire and still her plight would be that she is unable to impose her authority upon such a desire, which far from extinguishing as a result of Frau Bruggen's view about its monstrous character, keeps on pressing; its pressure being partly released through her obsessive behavior. So, it seems that a condition for Frau Bruggen's predicament is (a) that there are some beliefs and desires with regard to which she is in possession of the trivial kind of first-person authority which Franny's and Max' cases exemplify, but (b) she is unable to impose her practical authority with regard to the psychological and behavioral dispositions that are relevant to such beliefs and desires. This, in turn, sheds some light on what is at stake in the transition from her being merely conscious of her monstrous desire to her consciously self-ascribing it. The latter requires not only that (a*) she endorses a certain desire as worth-having, but (b*) that her psychological and behavioral dispositions are sufficiently permeable to that endorsement.¹⁵

This is not to say that Finkelstein's distinction between contextualizing and interpreting is of no avail with regard to psychoanalytic cases; for Frau Bruggen's plight might also be characterized as her incapacity to behaviorally express whatever beliefs or desires she might endorse, or else as her incapacity to express by self-ascription whatever beliefs and desires her behavioral dispositions manifest. Any such self-ascription would, thereby, fail as an attempt to contextualize such behavioral dispositions. A consequence of this will be that, with regard to complex attitudes like jealousy, anger, love, and so on, one may possess a certain degree of practical authority, but there is little epistemic first-person authority with regard to the fact that one is actually contextualizing, instead of just falling prey to wishful thinking.

To expand on this point, we may resume Helen's love for Harry and what is at stake in her *leaning* rather than resting on evidence. She concluded 'So, yes, I suppose I love him', but she might also have concluded otherwise, 'Yes, but I don't really love him'. The story could have intelligibly ended both ways and this suggests that the force of 'so' in her conclusion is not that of empirical induction, but should count as the *expression of a commitment*¹⁶ regarding the kind of attitude towards Harry that she will hereafter cultivate. And, nevertheless, she may fall into wishful thinking no matter what she might decide at that point. Her endorsement of her love for Harry may turn out into a bleak relationship, whereas her rejection of that love might have a rather positive effect on her life. Then again, she may be lucky enough and her 'so' be followed by a flourishing of her relationship with Harry and also of her life.

Now we can see how first-person authority may be involved in such matters. The flourishing itself suggests that she had, to begin with, *practical authority* upon her psychological and behavioral dispositions, so that the lat-

ter were sufficiently permeable to her endorsement of her love for Harry, at least in the circumstances that their relationship was actually confronted with. And, despite all the epistemic uncertainties that are necessarily present in any such endorsement, we may still claim that his practical authority is strictly first-personal, since it is only Helen who can have that kind of authority with regard to her psychological and behavioral dispositions.¹⁷

Moreover, Helen's authority is not diminished, but facilitated by her ability to check her behavior and gestures in order to determine whether she feels really attracted to Harry; for, otherwise, she might easily fall prey to fantasy. And, in this respect, the most emphatic (and sincere) declaration of love wouldn't do, since, quite often, it would come up as an unconscious effort to counterbalance a sensed tendency to take a distance. So, it seems that, if there is something that deserves to be called first-person authority with regard to complex intentions, desires or commitments, this cannot hang on the fact that gathering evidence is irrelevant or even inappropriate. But there is indeed first-person authority involved here, as it becomes obvious as one may attempt to identify what is wrong with Frau Bruggen's situation: what is missing there is not the epistemic authority that Franny does possess, but the practical kind of authority that Helen would enjoy if her relationship with Harry would flourish.

V. SINCERITY AND FIRST-PERSON AUTHORITY

Once the ambiguity in Finkelstein's (and most people's) approach to first-person authority has been discerned, we may have a hint at what is actually *trivial* about Max and Franny's cases. And it may have to do with the connection between *sincerity* and *first-person (epistemic) authority*. As we know, Franny replied to Zooney's inquiry as to the meaning of her groaning that she was expressing her distaste for her coffee. And, unless we doubted her sincerity, we should concede her claim without any provision of evidence making sense in that context. But suppose Franny had been groaning now at the soup, then at the steak, and so on. Zooney might reasonably begin to think that Franny is not in a good mood, that, after all, she didn't really want to join him for dinner and that's the motivation behind her continuous groaning. Franny may be quite unaware of such a dislike, since, after all, she cherishes her self-image of a most caring person and Zooney, one of her best friends, is in trouble and needs her comfort, whereby she does not even allow herself to notice that today she didn't feel like having dinner with Zooney. Yet, the presence of this unconscious reluctance does not challenge the authority of her remark about her distaste or the inappropriateness of backing it up with evidence. And this seems to be so because this sort of first-person authority is closely connected to the very idea of sincerity. Calling into question such an

authority in the light of her successive groans amounts to giving up the idea that Franny may be sincere about her dislikes and, still, mistaken. We may then say that there is a notion of sincerity with regard to which the idea of oneself looking for evidence makes no sense and such that it is constitutively associated with what I have identified as epistemic first-person authority.¹⁸ One's relation to one's own complex attitudes builds up on this notion of sincerity and appear as a mismatch between what one sincerely endorses and one's own psychological and behavioral dispositions. It is with regard to this mismatch that one's practical authority upon oneself emerges as the most significant issue, whereby the need to distinguish between two kinds of first-person authority and also the claim that what is missing in complex cases is not the same kind of authority that we do possess with regard to trivial ones, seem to have been reasonably motivated.

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NOTES

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² What kind of features are those? It is often assumed that such features only concern the agent's mind, leaving aside her bodily behavior; but, if a certain version of expressivism turns out to be true, this assumption must be false. Commenting upon Franny's and Zoocy's story to be sketched later on, Finkelstein, who certainly defends an expressivist view, concludes: "This story illustrates that we speak with a kind of first-person authority not only about our mental states, but also about our behavior" [Finkelstein (2003), p. 102].

³ The fact that Max is the *best* authority in this case does not mean that he is *infallible* in this respect, as Finkelstein himself emphasizes: "This isn't to say that he's never wrong about what he intends" [Finkelstein (2003), p. 1].

⁴ "There's an asymmetry between speaking about someone else's anger and speaking about one's own. I am able to ascribe mental states to myself responsibly without being able to cite *evidence* in support of the ascriptions. This is a central feature of first-person authority" [Finkelstein (2003), p. 21; my emphasis].

⁵ See Corbí (2010) (and also Corbí & Prades (2000)) for a more detailed discussion on why I think the model of the detached observer may be deeply misleading;

since it may force us to leave out of the picture some attitudes towards oneself that may be required to make sense of the notion of practical authority.

⁶ “Here Franny interprets her own action -her reaching across the table. But her interpretation isn’t a *mere* interpretation; it works *with* the action to express her desire for cream. She speaks with authority (not because she has the best view of her own behavior, but) because her interpretation contextualizes, in this way, the very action that it’s an interpretation of” [Finkelstein (2003), p. 110].

Just as Franny’s interpretation of her own behavior contextualizes that which it interprets and so isn’t a mere interpretation, our psychological self-ascriptions contextualize that which they ascribe and so aren’t mere ascriptions. When someone ascribes, e.g., an expectation to himself, the ascription is a part of the situation in which the expectation participates and from which it, as it were, draws its life. An avowal of expectation bears a relation to a person’s psychological condition that is, in this respect, like the relation that Franny’s gloss on her groan bears to the groan itself [Finkelstein (2003), p. 111].

⁷ “The man’s expectation is ‘embedded in a situation’ in something like the way that a word’s meaning is embedded in the context of a sentence or paragraph ... Thus, whether I am (1) avowing a pain aloud, (2) ascribing a pain to myself in thought, or (3) stating that some gesture or grimace of mine was an expression of pain, my self-ascription (or interpretation) is not a *mere* ascription (or interpretation); it contextualizes that which it ascribes (or interprets)” [Finkelstein (2003), p. 113].

⁸ “In §5.1-5.3, I claimed that the authority we accord to mental state avowals should be understood as a matter of their expressing the very states that they are avowals of...” [Finkelstein (2003), p. 124].

⁹ Strictly speaking, Finkelstein distinguishes between contextualizing and *mere* interpreting, whereby he seems to assume that contextualizing always involves some sort of interpretation. A few paragraphs later I will explain what motivates my choice of words.

¹⁰ “Most new detectivists take our awareness of our own states of mind to be roughly on a par with our access to external states and events that we learn about perceptually. They claim that we find out about our own mental states via a kind of inward observation or perception — a very different *sort* of inward observation or perception, however, from that invoked by old detectivists. Recall that according to old detectivism, we learn about our own states of mind by a process that can be called ‘perceptual’ only in an extended or metaphorical sense. An old detectivist’s inner sense is a supernaturally reliable detection mechanism that provides a person with a kind of access to mental states that is more direct and certain than the sort of access that seeing or hearing could ever provide. New detectivists typically seek to domesticate this story -to render it less Cartesian and more naturalistic- by construing our awareness of our own mental states as involving a species of ordinary, garden-variety perception” [Finkelstein (2003), p. 17].

¹¹ Finkelstein stresses that new detectivists are unable to account for the obverse of Moore’s paradox which is thereby called ‘Eroom’s paradox’: “I unconsciously believe that no one could ever fall in love with me; moreover, no one could ever fall in love with me” [Finkelstein (2003), p. 117]. It is a consequence of my approach that such a statement is not necessarily paradoxical, since the speaker may confess that, as a matter of fact, the belief that she endorses on such an issue and her

behavioral dispositions do, as a matter of fact, go hand in hand and be, nevertheless, aware that the psychological dispositions that express her belief are so deeply ingrained within herself that they would not be permeable to any contrary belief that she might at any time endorse. To put it another way, such a statement might easily be construed as an attempt to withdraw judgment as to one's own authority upon the corresponding psychological dispositions. And it is precisely the lack of this kind of authority what seems to render the corresponding belief unconscious. And, in the light of this, Finkelstein's account of what is paradoxical about the statement in question sounds quite problematic: "What would be strange about such an utterance is that anyone who is in a position to assert sincerely that no one could ever love him should be able to express his belief that no one could love him by self-ascribing it. Thus, given the account of consciousness that I have set out, we should expect Eroom-paradoxical utterances to be problematic" [Finkelstein (2003), p. 121].

¹² As Finkelstein points out in a footnote, 'merely' in the quotation is only meant to exclude that one's unconscious state were expressed by the particular tone of voice in which the corresponding self-ascription is made: "... The sort of ability at issue is one that enables a person to express his state of mind in a self-ascription of it, where what matters -what carries the expressive force- isn't his tone of voice (or whether he is tapping his foot, or what he is wearing, or to whom he happens to be speaking), but simply the fact that he is giving voice to his sincere judgment about his own state of mind" [Finkelstein (2003), p. 120]. Yet, it is clear that, for a self-ascription to be expressive, it must form a part of a wider pattern such that several other elements within it must be regarded as expressing the state of mind that the agent may, at some stage, express by self-ascription. Hence, 'merely' shouldn't be construed as ruling out these other expressive elements; only the fact that the expressiveness of the self-ascription doesn't *merely* rests on the expressiveness of those other elements, but on the ability of the self-ascription to contextualize them.

¹³ The distinction between the theoretical and the deliberative attitudes is central to Richard Moran's approach to self-knowledge. And, in the light of such a distinction, he seeks to account for the kind of goal that psychoanalytic treatment may pursue. There's, however, no room in his approach for an intermediate kind of self-awareness. I doubt that Moran could succeed in his project unless such an intermediate attitude is allowed, but this would force him to severely revise his initial distinction [cf. Corbí (2010)]. More specifically, I will argue that we can only make sense of first-person authority as a matter of degree if Finkelstein's notion of contextualizing and the way he initially identified the phenomenon of first-person authority is significantly modified and complemented.

¹⁴ Although, indeed, there is some evidence to be considered, namely, the kind of evidence that may be relevant to answer the question: 'Is my husband being faithful to me?' The point is that no specific evidence is needed to go from this question to an inquiry about the question: 'Do I believe that my husband is being faithful to me?' To this purpose, see Edgley (1969), Evans (1982), and Moran (2001), ch. 2.

¹⁵ The notion of permeability introduced here plays a central role in Moran's approach to self-knowledge: "And so to speak of a person's role in forming his attitudes is not to invoke a kind of willful or wishful capacity for self-creation. A person adopts this role insofar as he can answer questions of the sort 'What am I to believe here?' and thereby come to believe something, or answer a question of the form 'Is

this what I really want?' in terms of considerations of what is worth wanting, and thereby come to clarify the structure of his actual desires. The fact that we do have this capacity should not be controversial, for it amounts to the idea that part of what it is to be a rational agent is to be able to subject one's attitudes to review in a way that makes a difference to what one's attitude is. One is agent with respect to one's attitudes insofar as one orients oneself toward the question of one's beliefs by reflecting on what's true, or orients oneself toward the question of one's desires by reflecting on what's worthwhile or diverting or satisfying. This is not the only possible stance one may take toward one's beliefs or other attitudes, but it is an essential one. And it is hardly the same thing as the free or arbitrary adoption of beliefs for reasons of convenience, fear, or fashion" [Moran (2003), p. 63-4].

¹⁶ Bernard Williams explores the notion of acknowledgment in an attempt to articulate a reasonable view about what may count as an authentic life: "A relevant notion here is *acknowledgement*. Someone may come to acknowledge a certain affiliation as an *identity*, and this is neither a mere *discovery* nor, certainly, a mere *decision*. It is as though *he were forced* to recognize the authority of this identity as giving a structure and a focus to his life and his outlook. There are circumstances in which what was earlier a *mere recognition of fact* may come to compel acknowledgement, as when many assimilationist Jews in the 1930s came to acknowledge a Jewish and perhaps a Zionist identity under the thought that there was no way in which without evasion they could go on as though it made no difference that they were Jewish people" [Williams (2002), p. 203; my emphasis]. I regard this notion as quite appropriate to express the kind of commitment Helen's last sentence may be interpreted to involve. For further elaboration of this notion of acknowledgment, see Corbí (2010), part II.

¹⁷ For a discussion on a closely related issue, see Corbí (2010), sec. 7.

¹⁸ A further question I will not dwell upon is how this notion of sincerity should be elaborated in more detail and whether the pitfalls of Cartesianism could reasonably be avoided.

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RESUMEN

En el presente trabajo, discuto la tesis de David Finkelstein de que la evidencia no incrementa la autoridad de la primera persona. En primer lugar, defiendo que el fenómeno de la primera persona involucra la articulación de dos tipos de autoridad, a saber: la autoridad *epistémica* (respecto a la cual se suscita la pregunta acerca del papel de la evidencia) y la autoridad *práctica* (que concierne a la capacidad de modificar las propias disposiciones psicológicas a partir de las propias decisiones o intenciones). Y, en segundo término, trato de mostrar que recabar información o *evidencia* desempeña un papel crucial a la hora de conservar (o cultivar) la autoridad práctica sobre uno mismo.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *auto-conocimiento, autoridad, evidencia, psicoanálisis, expresivismo.*

ABSTRACT

In this paper, I challenge David Finkelstein's claim that evidence does not contribute to first-person authority. To this end, I first argue that the phenomenon of first-person authority involves *a certain combination of two kinds of authority*, namely: *an epistemic* (insofar as evidence is at issue here) and *a practical* (insofar as the capacity to shape one's own psychological and dispositions is the central concern) *kind of authority*. Secondly, I defend the view that gathering *evidence* plays a crucial role regarding an agent's ability to preserve (or cultivate) her practical authority upon herself.

KEYWORDS: *Self-Knowledge, Authority, Evidence, Psychoanalysis, Expressivism.*