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Ontology and Pragmatic Paradox
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Source: *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, New Series, Vol. 92 (1992), pp. 293–313
Published by: Wiley on behalf of The Aristotelian Society
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/4545158
Accessed: 23/04/2014 12:30

XIV*—ONTOLOGY AND PRAGMATIC PARADOX

by Sally Haslanger

I

Introduction. One important tradition in the history of metaphysics takes it to be a study of principles which, in some sense, set the grounds and limits of our theorizing. No doubt this tradition has suffered from many failings; philosophers engaged in such projects have often miscalculated the powers of 'pure reason', and advances in empirical science have all too often shown their efforts to be untenable or irrelevant. So we may all agree that there have been assumptions and strategies within this tradition which we would be wise to avoid. Yet there is a recurring theme of caution which runs throughout even the boldest of those engaged in the traditional effort; a theme which invites us to inquire into the assumptions of our theoretical endeavours, and to guard against the violation of these assumptions on pain of self-defeat. The worry is that theorizers who are not self-conscious of their own starting points, more specifically, theorizers who are not sensitive to the grounds which make their own inquiry possible, may welcome results which in fact undercut those grounds.

This cautionary insight suggests a corresponding positive strategy: consider what there is (must be) in a world which includes beings who are engaged in rational inquiry and deliberation, and who are capable of systematic understanding. Since our own inquiries testify to the fact that ours is such a world, we have reason to accept this ontology of inquiry as included in the actual ontology. In short, as rational inquirers we have reason to believe that there are those things which make our inquiry possible. One might go even further to claim that employing this strategy we are in a position to draw contingent *a priori* conclusions about what there is: it is a contingent fact that the actual world includes the resources

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required for inquiry, but that it does so is not something which we can ever reasonably deny.

Broadly speaking, my purpose in this paper is to determine whether and to what extent we can use the compelling cautionary insight as a solid basis for positive results. More specifically, I want to explore the strategy of seeking ontological results through the injunction to avoid pragmatic paradox (or self-defeat). So in the first part of the paper I will sketch out a proposal about how such arguments work. In the second part of the paper, I will consider an example of the strategy specifically aimed at the conclusion that there are actual enduring things: things which are wholly present at different times. To be frank, what I'd like to argue is that it is self-defeating to deny that there are enduring things, and so we are in a position to conclude (*a priori*) that some things endure. And with some significant qualifications, this is what I will argue. But the argument for endurance is troublesome and the qualifications will matter. The broad upshot of the discussion will be that self-defeat arguments have important dialectical limits, and much of what follows will be an effort to situate the argument for endurance within those limits.

II

The Context of Inquiry. Self-defeat arguments (like all arguments?), are addressed to inquirers who at least take themselves to be engaged in a project of systematic understanding through rational dialogue. Although ultimately we seek truths, our commitment is to conduct this search for truths through determining what is reasonable to believe, agreeing that what is reasonable to believe is discovered in a context of critical dialectic. This is not to say that there is a *guarantee* that what we discover in this way to be reasonable is true; whether or not we have this guarantee is itself a topic for critical dialogue. But it is to allow that there is nothing more we can do to discover whether something we believe is 'really' true beyond exposing it to critical reflection and debate.

Locating the discussion within this context is not trivial. Substantive assumptions about this dialectical context play an important role in making the charge that a particular position is self-defeating: in charging my interlocutor with self-defeat, I

contend that their proffered position is at odds with the facts of their participation in the debate. That we are participating together in debate is not up for challenge; and I rely on our background commitment to the practice of critical dialogue as common ground we can use to resolve our differences.

But how much are we entitled to assume as a background to the discussion? One might object that an argument is only successful if it compels assent from its staunchest opposition; and the most extreme opposition will seemingly come from those who doubt or deny that we engage in rational inquiry at all. Does the assumption that our world includes rational inquirers beg the question against a legitimate sceptic? Are we entitled to this assumption in determining what there is? Although this too is a topic for discussion, surely we may grant here that argument must start from something. An argument can only be expected to convince those who are committed to adjusting their beliefs in light of argumentation; an argument which fails to convince those who do not take themselves to be engaged in rational inquiry is not thereby a failed argument.

Nevertheless, granting that our inquiries must start somewhere, it doesn't follow that we must all start in the same place. Yet if we are going to rely on our joint commitment to rational inquiry to settle ontological disputes, we would seem to need the strong claim that we all must start with the same background assumptions concerning the context of inquiry. At least in the contemporary context, this seems naive. Our interlocutors may not be so radical as to deny outright our joint participation in rational inquiry, but may nevertheless disagree in how they represent their commitment, and what they take it to amount to. But then why should we expect that a broad commitment to rational inquiry can resolve debates over ontology?

We'll be in a better position to address this question towards the end of the paper. However, it is worth noting that traditionally those who have employed self-defeat arguments have done so with an acute awareness of their sceptical opposition; the familiar scenario is one in which the sceptic seems to be committed to some form of dialogue but refuses to accept the disputed ontology (or more broadly, the disputed principle). (Think of Descartes' cogito, or Aristotle's response to the Heraclitean in *Met*. IV:4.) In such cases, the strategy of self- defeat is employed to demonstrate to the sceptic

her commitment to a set of background assumptions, in spite of her denial. The most powerful of these arguments have a performative aspect where the sceptical interlocutor is invited to participate in inquiry, with the hope of drawing an acknowledgement of that participation and its consequences. If the sceptic does participate, even to the extent of presenting her challenge, then the argument uses this participation to show that her opposition is misguided.

This dialectical strategy is not an attempt to offer a proof that the conclusion holds.[1] (Because the conclusion concerns the preconditions of inquiry, the conclusion will be 'more basic' than the premises, and so the argument will not satisfy the traditional demand that in a genuine proof the premises must be prior to the conclusion.) Rather, the point is to make the assumptions of inquiry evident to us. Such arguments are aimed to reveal to the sceptic who demands proof that the principles in question are not in need of proof; these principles state the conditions within which rational inquiry is conducted, and their 'proof' (here speaking loosely) lies in the fact that we do carry on. However, these arguments also, and perhaps more importantly, reveal to the convinced the nature of her conviction in such a way that she can understand the grounds and limits of her own inquiry.

III

Pragmatic Paradox. Let us now return to the initial cautionary insight which calls upon us to avoid taking positions which are self-defeating. I will first consider how we might develop this insight using the notion of pragmatic paradox. The question then arises how we might employ the notion in the context of refutation. What is wrong with a self-defeating theory? How do we determine whether a theory is self-defeating?

In the contemporary context, Paul Grice and George Myro have each employed arguments which charge that certain positions are rationally self-defeating.[2] Their underlying idea is that any theory

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1 On this issue see, e.g., Alan Code, 'Aristotle's Investigation of a Basic Logical Principle: Which Science Investigates the Principle of Non-Contradiction', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, vol.16, no.3, September 1986; and Jonathan Lear, *Aristotle and Logical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), Chapter 6.

2 See Paul Grice, 'Method in Philosophical Psychology: From the Banal to the Bizarre',

which is rationally acceptable must be compatible with its own rational acceptability; if a theory is incompatible with the resources, specifically with the ontology, required for it to be rationally acceptable, then the acceptance of that theory in the context of rational debate is unacceptable. Myro describes such a theory as 'epistemically self-defeating', emphasizing the epistemic value of rational acceptability; Grice employs this strategy more widely, reflecting a broader concern with the acceptance of beliefs which serve our rational ends.

As stated, the problem emerges for certain theories (or propositions) when we entertain whether to accept them; the problem is that if they were accepted they would be false. To give a simplistic example, if acceptability is primarily a matter of acceptability to an individual (a theorizer), then a theory which denies that there are theorizers cannot accommodate its own acceptance; if someone (a theorizer) accepts it, it is false. This puts one who accepts such a theory in an apparently paradoxical situation: her own acceptance defeats the theory she accepts, for her acceptance itself provides a telling counterexample.

We might regard this as an epistemic correlate of the kind of paradox which appears when one asserts a proposition which conflicts with the fact of its assertion, e.g.,

> X asserts: I am not making an assertion.

Here the proposition expressed is not self-contradictory, though we may generate a contradiction by conjoining the proposition asserted with a (true) proposition concerning the fact of its assertion. For example,

> I am not making an assertion and I am asserting that I am not making an assertion.

In general, 'pragmatic paradoxes' arise when there is an incompatibility between the fact that a particular propositional state or act occurs, and the propositional content of that state or act.[3]

APA Presidential Address, *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, 1975; and his 'Reply to Richards', in *Philosophical Grounds of Rationality*, ed. R. Grandy and R. Warner (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1986) pp. 45–106 (especially section B2); and George Myro, 'Aspects of Acceptability', *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 62, 1981.

3 I am proposing (roughly) that self-defeating states (or acts) are those in which there is

There are a broad variety of other interesting examples which suggest that such paradoxes are not confined to cases of assertion, e.g.,

> X says: I am unable to speak.
> X fears: I have no fears.
> X thinks: I don't exist.

More philosophically contentious examples include:

> X believes: There are no beliefs.
> X asserts: p and I don't believe that p.
> X says: I am the only thing that exists.
> X promises: I will keep none of my promises.
> X asserts: Every proposition is both true and false.
> X asserts: I am dreaming.
> X infers: Therefore, there are no objective norms of reasoning.

Thus, the charge of self-defeat, at least in the first instance, is not that the content of the propositional state is internally incoherent. Instead, the problem lies in the relation between the state and its content; the charge is that by conjoining the propositional content (or consequences of it), with certain further propositions concerning the propositional state itself, we can generate a contradiction.

IV

Strategies of Refutation: Epistemic Extension. Given this construal of pragmatic paradox, the problem with self-defeating propositional states is that they are, in an important sense, out of touch with reality; their propositional content is not compatible with the facts of the situation. There is an air of paradox because they are out of touch with a reality which is very close to home: in short, the self-defeating states don't take themselves into account. This suggests that the injunction that we avoid self-defeating theories is not a demand to avoid inconsistency; rather, it falls under the demand to avoid accepting (patently) false theories.

some proposition concerning the fact of one's being in the propositional state which is incompatible with the content of the state. Yet clearly more needs to be said in making this precise, and in capturing the force of pragmatic paradoxes. See Barry Stroud, 'Transcendental Arguments', in R. Walker, *Kant on Pure Reason*, pp. 126–7, for a variety of interesting examples which need further discussion.

However, the charge of self-defeat is compelling as a strategy of refutation because, unlike bluntly claiming that one's opponent's position is untrue, it seems that the resources to generate an inconsistency are in place. By conjoining the theory under scrutiny with further propositions concerning one's opponent's attitude towards her own theory, we get a new theory which is inconsistent. In the simple cases, we can hope that a moment's self-reflection on her part will reveal this (though of course, many of the cases are not simple and will require more than a moment's reflection). But even if our interlocutor fails to see the point, it is plausible to insist that her position, taken as a whole, is inconsistent.

In the face of inconsistency, there are usually a variety of different ways to adjust one's position; in the cases at hand, showing that one's opponent's 'augmented' position is inconsistent may not be sufficient to undermine the original proposition, for it might be open to her to revise the kind of attitude she holds towards it. If I say that I'm not speaking then I'm in trouble; but if I merely think it, then I avoid the trouble. But in the context of inquiry, there is a danger that withdrawing our epistemic engagement with a theory places it out of rational reach. This is where epistemic self-defeat is significant as a strategy of refutation. The telling cases are those in which the original theory is incompatible with its having the desired epistemic status, e.g., where the theory is incompatible with its own (rational) acceptability.

For example, consider the proposition that *nothing exists*, and suppose that an inquirer, Helen, believes it; so, Helen believes: nothing exists. Her doing so is self-defeating. Recognizing this, she might try to 'save' her theory that nothing exists by revising her attitudes towards it; but whatever attitude she takes towards it, her having the attitude will provide a telling counter-example. Determined not to be undone, ultimately she may altogether refrain from taking up an attitude towards the proposition. But in doing so she apparently opts out of any participation in inquiry; at this stage we shouldn't even describe her as having a view at all. In Aristotle's rather graphic terms, she is reduced to the state of a vegetable,[4] and we cannot carry on discussion with a vegetable.

4   Aristotle, *Metaphysics* IV, 1006a16.

Clearly in these circumstances our interlocutor is not rationally 'compelled' to silence, since she could alternatively reject the original proposition, in the case at hand, the proposition that nothing exists. But it is more significant to note that a theory which can only be 'saved' by such mental erasure is not a theory which is (or could be) rationally warranted. To put the point bluntly, rational warrant applies primarily to our propositional states, and only derivatively to the propositions which are the objects of these states; if we forgo the states, we must forgo warrant for our theories as well. Whatever the virtues of clearing the mind of all content, it cannot be that one's view is thereby reasonable or warranted, for one has no view.

Here it helps to recall the assumption that in the course of rational inquiry we are committed to determining what is true by determining what we have reason to believe, and where determining this is undertaken through critical dialectic. In this context, the theories we accept are ones which we have reflectively considered and which have sustained critical challenge. If a theory has as a consequence that the actual world does not sustain such dialectic, e.g., perhaps the theory has as a consequence that there is no language, or no communication, or no theorizers, then this theory is acceptable only if false; its acceptance within the context of inquiry is self-defeating. So, returning to the issue of refutation, given a candidate theory, if our only way to avoid inconsistency is either to reject it or to withhold our acceptance from it, then we can conclude that the theory is not acceptable, and so has failed to survive critical scrutiny.

Let me suggest one way of developing these ideas, highlighting the attitude of rational belief.[5] Because judging what propositions are reasonable is a matter of judging what propositions it is reasonable to believe (accept, assert, etc.), then it should be a condition of adequacy on such judgements that we can without inconsistency conjoin the proposition under review with another acknowledging the proposed attitude towards it. For example,

5 I choose rational *belief* simply as an example. Whether inquiry requires that we have beliefs is of course a heated topic of debate, and although my comments here may suggest a line of response to the eliminativist, I am not arguing the point here. For discussion of the issue in terms similar to those I employ, see Lynne Rudder Baker, *Saving Belief: A Critique of Physicalism*, (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1987), esp. Ch. 7.

within the context of inquiry, propositions which are incompatible with their being reasonably believed should be rejected as candidates for belief. So it is reasonable *for me to believe*:

It is raining

only if that proposition is compatible with:

I believe that it is raining.[6]

More generally:

EX) It is reasonable to believe that p, only if p is compatible with the proposition that someone believes that p.

(And likewise for acceptance, assertion, etc. It is reasonable to assert that p, only if p is compatible with the proposition: someone asserts that p.)

In sum, since our means of arriving at truths is to judge the reasonableness of our beliefs in light of critical reflection and dialogue, we should be willing to conjoin the propositions we believe (assert, etc.) with ones attributing to them that epistemic status we grant them. In cases where our attitudes are self-defeating, this condition is not met. Because the charge of inconsistency is more powerful dialectically than the brute charge of falsehood, this seems to enrich our resources for refutation. However, as we'll explore below, controversy over the analysis of the epistemic terms which allegedly constitute the conditions of inquiry will weaken the force of charging one's opponent with self-defeat.

V

Perdurance and Endurance. Let me now turn to an example of this strategy. The question I want to consider is whether we have reason to believe that there are actual enduring particulars, i.e., things which persist by being wholly present at different times. Rather than working through the argument for endurance in great detail, my main purpose here is to use it as a springboard to consider the strengths and weaknesses of the strategy just outlined.

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6 Another plausible alternative would be to require that the proposition is compatible with: I *reasonably* believe that it is raining.

Contemporary discussions of persistence through change allow that there are two different ways of persisting: an object may persist over a stretch of time by consisting of distinct short-lived stages which are present in succession through that time (call this *perduring*); or alternatively, an object may persist over a stretch of time by being wholly present at each time throughout the interval (call this *enduring*).[7] To see the difference, think of a ball rolling down a hill. It is natural to think that as the ball rolls, it moves through space and time; it is wholly present at the top of the hill, and later, at the bottom of the hill. As I've described the situation, the ball endures. However, some would suggest that the ball is a complex object extended over time (and space) by having distinct parts at different times (and spaces); the ball is not wholly present at the top of the hill, or at the bottom, but only has parts in these locations. On this description, the ball perdures. Allowing 'persistence' to be the neutral word, we may grant that both ways of persisting are possible; at least some worlds have perduring objects, and some enduring objects, and some presumably have both. The question is, which sort of world is ours?

In response to this question, David Lewis (and others) have defended what I shall call the 'metaphysic of temporal parts' (MTP), or sometimes the 'perdurance theory'.[8] The MTP claims that:

> (a) There are no enduring particulars; and

> (b) There are actual particulars which persist by perduring.

In opposition to the MTP, others (including myself) have defended an ontology of actual enduring things, thus denying thesis (a) of the MTP.[9] This view, call it the 'endurance theory', allows that there may actually be both enduring and perduring particulars; it opposes the MTP on the question of whether there are enduring particulars.

7 I am following Lewis in terminology. See David Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 202.

8 See, e.g., David Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds*, Chapter 4; and 'Survival and Identity', and 'Postscript B to Survival and Identity', in his *Philosophical Papers, vol. I.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 1983.

9 See my, 'Persistence, Change, and Explanation', *Philosophical Studies*, vol.56, 1989; and my 'Endurance and Temporary Intrinsics', *Analysis*, vol.49, no.3, 1989.

Given this much, we can articulate a claim in terms shared by both sides, which one asserts and the other denies. Consider the following claim which is true iff there is at least one enduring thing:

E) There are distinct times t and t′, and there is an x such that x is wholly present at t and x is wholly present at t′.

The endurance and perdurance theorists disagree about whether (E) is true. But which view is correct? How might we go about deciding? From our discussion above, it seems that a first step is to determine whether the following conjunction is consistent:

MTP+) Not-E, and someone (a rational inquirer) accepts not-E.

VI

Having Reasons. In arguing for endurance I will concentrate on showing that rational inquirers endure. An inquirer is one who holds attitudes for, or on the basis of, reasons; it need not be that all of her beliefs or desires are based on reasons, but one who is incapable of drawing conclusions from reasons would not count as an inquirer. The focus of the argument is whether inferring, i.e., drawing a conclusion *based on* reasons, should be explicated in terms of perdurance or endurance. On my view, in order to draw an inference, an inquirer's acceptance of the conclusion must depend on *her own* earlier attitudes, not simply with the earlier attitudes of something very much like her. Inquiry is a process of self-change or self-governance, where the subject of the states responsible for the change is also the subject of the states which result.[10] The challenge is to cast this point in a way that is telling against the MTP.

Although rationality is clearly concerned with issues of consistency—consistency in belief and in action—it is also concerned with issues of agency and autonomy. My view is that if we give up endurance, then we lose the idea of agency which is crucial to understanding what it is to be rational, a rational inquirer, a rational agent. We lay significant moral and political weight on the notion of an autonomous agent: agents who at least in a minimal

10 There is historical precedent for this idea in Plato, see e.g., *Laws* X 894b ff. and 895c–896a; and in Aristotle, see e.g., *Physics* VIII, 257a32–b15.

sense are guided in their activities by their own beliefs, commitments, intentions, and desires. Obviously the lines here are not easy to draw, but I think it is not a trivial mistake to blur the differences between agency and, to put it crudely, regular patterns in the distribution of attitudes across regions of space-time.

In looking at the issue of rational acceptance or rational belief, my concern will be with such attitudes just insofar as they are taken up on the basis of reasons. Admittedly, in evaluating an inquirer's acceptance of a theory, we will typically want to determine whether the reasons offered are 'good' or 'adequate' reasons, and we will need an epistemic (or moral?) standard to serve as a basis for evaluation. But such evaluation is appropriate only if we already assume that the inquirer accepts the theory for some reason or other. Thus we can ask, in a general way, what is it to accept a proposition for reasons, without settling on what standard of evaluation to employ.[11]

The task now is to show that rational inquiry requires endurance. Clearly we bring about changes in ourselves when we come to new beliefs by drawing conclusions from what we already believe, when we form an intention to pursue a line of thought, when we decide to abandon a project. And if we allow that inquiring activity engages us beyond our internal reflections, it appears that inquiry involves a range of actions which are self-initiated and self-regulating, e.g., talking, reading, writing. But in engaging in these activities do we endure?

If an agent accepts a proposition or a theory for reasons, then her acceptance is *based on* other attitudes which provide her reasons.[12] The 'based on' relation is notoriously difficult to explicate. It is widely thought that the relation holds between our attitudes— primarily cognitive attitudes—and that it requires a causal connection between the reasons and the conclusion. The causal connection is introduced because it is possible to have beliefs which 'rationalize' one's conclusion, without one's conclusion being

11 This claim may be overly naive. On interconnections between conditions on rational agency and normative standards of evaluation, see A. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), esp. Ch. VII.

12 It should be clear that I am following a broadly Davidsonian approach to reasons as attitudes. See e.g., D. Davidson, 'Actions, Reasons, and Causes', in his *Essays on Actions and Events* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1980).

based on those beliefs.[13] The causal connection is offered, as often is the case, to provide the missing contingent link.[14]

For our purposes here, we need not get into the debate over whether in drawing an inference, the attitudes which are our reasons are causally responsible for our drawing the conclusion. Instead our focus should be on whether in coming to accept a proposition for reasons there need be a single individual wholly present both at the time of acceptance and prior to it (i.e., during the deliberation). There are two points at issue: first, in drawing an inference is there (or must there be) a *prior* attitude which is responsible for the conclusion, i.e., one held prior to drawing the conclusion? Second, in drawing an inference is there a single individual who is both the subject of the relevant prior attitude and the conclusion?

In considering the first question of inference taking time, my comments will be brief. I propose that at least in the central cases of inference it must, for otherwise our conclusions would never be based on attitudes held prior to drawing that conclusion, and we would never have reasons to come to accept propositions which we don't already accept. But this would violate a core element in the concept of having reasons for our beliefs, viz., that inference *extends* our knowledge from the knowledge we already have.

The second point is more difficult; here I will only attempt to cast some doubt on whether the MTP can provide an adequate account of inference with the hope of indicating what's at stake for the endurance theorist. For simplicity, let's just consider inferences which concern beliefs drawn on the basis of another belief, and let's concentrate on the central cases in which the inference is to a 'new' belief. To begin, recall that on the MTP there is no reason to deny that inquirers are persisting things; an inquirer who deliberates may exist at different times, e.g., before and after drawing the conclusion. Yet such a persisting inquirer would not be *wholly present* at any point in time; she exists at different times by having parts which are wholly present at those times.

13 See e.g., Barry Stroud, 'Inference, Belief, and Understanding', *Mind*, vol.88, April 1979.

14 Although I believe that causation, quite generally, depends on endurance, the argument here will go through even if one resists the link between causation and endurance, e.g., even assuming only a simple regularity view of causation. Thus, my argument here does not depend on the argument for endurance I discuss in 'Persistence, Change, and Explanation', *Philosophical Studies*, vol. 56, June 1989.

Suppose we are considering deliberation which results in the acceptance of a proposition p. We will want to say that the inquirer has different attitudes at different times: early in her deliberation she does not accept p, and later she comes to accept p. But how do we cash out this idea? The MTP offers a *general* strategy for handling cases of change: to say that a single subject both accepts and does not accept the conclusion yields a contradiction; so, attribute the properties at issue in the change to different subjects, i.e., to distinct temporal parts or stages united as a perduring thing. Note that employing this strategy, the MTP theorist is not in a position to claim that there is one subject, strictly speaking, who accepts the proposition p that earlier she did not accept, for the MTP must say that the subject who accepts the conclusion of the reasoning is a distinct subject from the prior subject who does not. Admittedly, there may be relations of spatio-temporal continuity and causal dependence between these subjects; they may be as intimately connected as any two things which don't temporally overlap. But the MTP must say that the subjects are distinct.

So the MTP candidates for a rational inquirer seem to be (i) a stage which accepts the conclusion but is not present during the deliberation; (ii) a stage which is present during deliberation, but doesn't accept the conclusion; and (iii) a perduring thing which, although it consists of the two stages which respectively doubt and accept, but is not itself (strictly speaking) either the subject of the former doubt or later conviction. None of these three looks like a good candidate for a rational inquirer, i.e., one who in deliberation draws inferences from her beliefs to new beliefs.

The MTP theorist has a quick response: there are two ways of 'having' a belief: momentary things (short-lived things or stages) have beliefs *directly*; perduring things have beliefs *indirectly*, i.e., by having temporal parts which have the beliefs directly. So the MTP theorist could offer the following:

IP: A perduring thing X draws an inference from r to p, just in case:

i) there are two distinct things alpha and beta, (alpha is wholly present prior to beta),

ii) alpha and beta are (spatio-temporal) parts of X,

iii) alpha *directly* believes r and beta *directly* believes p, and

iv) alpha's believing *r* is (at least partly) responsible for beta's
believing *p*.

Is this even roughly adequate in order to draw an inference? I think
not. Although there are a variety of issues one might raise, I submit
that IP fails to locate the 'proper subject' of the beliefs and so fails
to locate the rational inquirer.

Perduring things are, from the ordinary point of view, much more
like particular extended *events* than like objects. A play or a
conversation or a trip to the zoo seem to have temporal parts. For
example, considering a particular performance of a play, the first
act is followed by the second; the first act is over when the second
begins; the play is not 'wholly present' in the first act, or in the
second, but includes both as parts. Similarly for conversations,
though we don't normally divide them into 'acts', they too seem to
be constituted by a sequence of conversational episodes. I grant that
we sometimes speak of a play unfolding rationally; and a
conversation may follow a logical progression or derail. But plays
and conversations are not agents, they do not properly draw
inferences by virtue of the relations between their parts.

However, if IP captures a sufficient condition for inferring, then
the rationality of inquirers should be understood on analogy with
plays and conversations. But this seems misguided. In order for
something to draw an inference it must be the proper subject of both
the reasons and the conclusion; it is not sufficient for it to have
distinct spatio-temporal parts which are the proper subjects of the
relevant attitudes. In place of IP, I propose:

IE: If X draws an inference from *r* to *p*, then

i) X *directly* believes *r*, and

ii) X *directly* believes *p*, and

iii) X believes *r* prior to X's believing *p*, and

iv) X's believing *r* is (at least partly) responsible for X's
believing *p*.

At least in those cases in which *p* is a new belief, there is a time
when X does not believe *p* (prior to drawing the inference, X
believes *r* but not *p*), and there is a time when X believes *p* (after
the inference X believes both *r* and *p*). The MTP cannot handle this
if the beliefs are held directly, for in the face of any appearance of

direct alteration (in this case, change in belief), the MTP will
attribute the attitudes to distinct subjects. The endurance theorist,
in contrast, will maintain a single subject, but will e.g., temporally
qualify the having of the beliefs by that subject.

If in directly having a belief at a time one is wholly present at
that time,[15] then there must be two times at which one and the same
inquirer is wholly present. If so, then there is a subject which
endures. In short, a (causal) continuity in beliefs across space-time
is not sufficient for there to be inferences, i.e., for inquirers to draw
conclusions based on reasons. The MTP offers us an impoverished
ontology which cannot accommodate agency, and more
importantly for our purposes, it cannot accommodate the inquiring
activity by virtue of which a rational inquirer deliberates, reasons,
and ultimately accepts or rejects theories.

VII

Return to Self-Defeat: Whose Ontology of Inquiry? Of course there
are many ways for the MTP to block the analogy between plays and
persons. So although it appears that the MTP cannot accommodate
the demands on rational acceptance as I have explicated them, it is
natural to ask why these demands must be met. Perhaps there is a
conception of rational agency which requires a strong condition of
self-change; but perhaps we could do just as well with a revised
conception which does not require endurance. We might call this
revised conception per-rationality (for perdurance rationality).
Per-rational inquirers do not strictly satisfy the conditions I've
sketched in (IE), but they satisfy an MTP reconstrual of those
conditions sketched in (IP).

At this point the perdurance and endurance theorists can agree
that there are two workable concepts; to be fair we might call them
en-rationality and *per-rationality*. The question concerns ontology:
which concept actually applies to us? The endurance theorist insists
that *we* are *en-rational* inquirers; our inquiring activities are

15 I'm not wholly confident of this premise. My thought is that on Lewis's view there are
   two options: one indirectly has a belief 'at t' by having a t-part which directly has the
   belief (in which case one is partly present at t); or one directly has the belief 'at t' in which
   case one is a t-part which directly has the belief (in which case one is wholly present).

counter-examples to the MTP; for us to accept the MTP would be to demonstrate its failure. But to the committed defender of the MTP, the insistence that *we* are *en-rational* is unconvincing. She will respond that we are not en-rational, we are per-rational; we don't en-rationally accept theories, we per-rationally accept them. And if it is our per-rational inquiry which leads us to per-accept the MTP, then the threat of pragmatic self-defeat disappears. It may even be that there are other important concepts which must be elucidated more carefully once we recognize that the MTP commits us to per-rationality, e.g., we may find ourselves working with concepts such as per-responsibility, per-autonomy, etc. But according to the MTP there is nothing to block these revisions. The possibility of such systematic redescriptions is the significant challenge of the MTP.

This breakdown in the debate suggests that the strategy of self-defeat outlined above is more limited than we might have hoped. As I sketched the strategy, the crucial move was to extend the theory targeted for refutation to include the condition that it be acceptable by rational inquirers; the idea was that one could then show that the position—taken as a whole—is inconsistent. But now we can see that this strategy can be deflected if one's interlocutor represents the facts concerning the context of inquiry in her own terms.

It is worth laying out the steps which have led to this impasse. At this point we may assume that both parties agree that a rational inquirer is one who is capable of accepting positions on the basis of reasons; in short, that rational acceptance is possible only if one reasons, and in doing so draws inferences. So in the case of the MTP, the extended theory is:

MTP+) Not-E, and someone (a rational inquirer) accepts not-E.

But the endurance theorist maintains that one draws inferences only if one endures. That is,

R) If someone (a rational inquirer) accepts (any) p, then E.

But the conjunction of (MTP+) and (R) is inconsistent. And if the epistemic extension of the MTP leads to inconsistency, then we should not accept the MTP. But the MTP response is that this

construal of the situation begs the question by assuming that the
correct extension of the MTP must be cashed out in terms of en-
rationality rather than per-rationality.

Let us recall the motivation for the injunction that theories
accommodate their own rational acceptance was that theories
whose acceptance is self-defeating are false. In effect, the demand
to evaluate (MTP+) rather than simply the MTP, is that we want to
assure ourselves that the MTP doesn't leave out the facts involved
in its acceptance. If we consider the case in which:

> X (rationally) accepts: not-E,

determining whether this acceptance is self-defeating depends
crucially on what X is really doing in accepting not-E, i.e., on what
the actual facts are. In other words, an epistemic extension to a given
theory will guard against self-defeat (and will be well-motivated by
that concern), only if it captures the facts. But as a result, any
substantive interpretation of such an extension will plausibly carry
with it our ontological commitments concerning how the facts are.
If we already disagree in these commitments, raising the issue of
epistemic self-defeat will highlight some of our disagreements, but
it offers little ground for resolving substantive debates over what
there is. So in the debate over endurance, the endurance theorist
interprets the epistemic extension in her terms, and the perdurance
theorist in his. The two can agree that we should avoid self-defeating
theories; but the problem is, which ones are self-defeating?

VIII

Conclusion: Rational revisability. Where do we now stand?
Although I recognize the MTP response to the argument, I remain
convinced that there are enduring things, that I am an enduring thing,
and you are too. I believe that my recognition of the MTP response,
the fact that I draw inferences as I follow the argument, testifies to
my endurance. I believe that if I were to reject endurance, my
rejection would be self-defeating. Because I believe that reasoning
requires endurance, then by my own lights, it would not be rational
for me to revise my commitment to endurance. At any point in the
process of inquiry when I feel tempted to draw the conclusion that
I don't endure, my having reasoned to this conclusion simply
reconfirms my own confidence in endurance. In the context of

inquiry, my commitment to endurance survives sceptical challenge; no reasoning can undermine this commitment, for I take it to be a precondition of those activities constitutive of my inquiry.

It seems clear, however, that the argument I've offered for endurance won't convince a staunch perdurance theorist. But then is my conviction that there are enduring things pure dogmatism? Within the context of inquiry, is my position unreasonable? I want to say that it isn't dogmatism; by my own conception of what counts as reasonable, a commitment to endurance is the only reasonable option. Moreover, it is not a commitment I hold in the face of critical reflection, but test repeatedly against sustained challenge. This is not to say that I am certain that there are enduring things, or that I will never revise it, or (heaven forbid) that I'm infallible. If I were to alter my conception of reasoning (through insight or influence), then by my new lights I could have reason to reject enduring things, and could do so without the threat of inconsistency.

How might we make sense of this situation? Two questions are pressing: first, what, if anything, have we established about endurance? Second, what have we learned about self-defeat arguments? Returning to the opening questions: can the cautionary insight that we should aim to avoid self-defeat serve as a basis for contingent *a priori* conclusions about endurance? What I take the argument about endurance to show is that *given* a certain conception of rationality, it is reasonable to believe that there are enduring things, and further that this belief in endurance is not rationally revisable. In other words, I take the argument to show that a belief in endurance is (at least) contextually *a priori*. Of course, one might challenge the conception of rationality offered, and certainly the issue of what counts as the right conception of rationality has not been settled. But here Putnam's observations on the *a priori* are significant:

> The question, "*Are there any a priori truths?*" is a question *within* the theory of rationality; as long as we accept the theory, or the prospect of such a theory, we cannot justify rejecting or accepting any particular answer by the consideration that the theory of rationality itself may need recasting. What we are trying to answer by our lights (and by who else's lights should we try to answer it? —a question Quine is fond of asking) is whether an ideal theory of rationality would have certain features: we can speculate about this

> just as physicists speculate about whether an ideal physical theory
> would have certain features, while recognizing, just as they do, that
> our answer is itself a provisional one and that the true shape of
> future theory will be different in many unforeseen ways, from what
> we now envisage.[16]

Within the context of inquiry we seek what is reasonable to believe;
specifically in doing ontology we seek what it is reasonable to
believe there is. Some of us within this context will endorse the
conception of rationality (or en-rationality) which requires
endurance, and others will not. And likewise, in reflecting on the
argument some of us will find that our commitment to endurance
is not rationally revisable; while others are unmoved. So to this
extent what we've accomplished should be viewed against the
backdrop of other commitments.

But this leaves it sounding as if self-defeat arguments can only
speak to the converted and serve no other useful purpose, as if they
make no real contribution to the debate between the perdurance and
endurance theorists. But this sells them short. It may be that only the
converted will feel the pressure of paradox should they resist the
conclusion, However, we should not suppose that such an argument
immediately collapses just because one's interlocutor refuses to
acknowledge an inconsistency in her position. Unfortunately, the
rhetoric of self-defeat casts the issue in such a way that the argument
appears effective only if one's opposition is *silenced*, the goal seems
to be to reduce one's opponent to a vegetable. But we may also make
progress in achieving something less than this.

In charging you with self-defeat I represent your position (taken
as a whole) as inconsistent; I suggest that your actions belie your
words, that you cannot coherently carry on. But if you deny this,
and suggest an alternative conception of rationality compatible with
your ontological commitments, then the issue becomes: who has
the better account of rationality (or more broadly: who has the better
account of the context of inquiry)? It may no longer be dialectically
effective to cast the argument in terms of self-defeat because we
disagree in our interpretation of the facts of inquiry; nevertheless

16 Hilary Putnam, 'Analyticity and Apriority: Beyond Wittgenstein and Quine', in his
Realism and Reason: Philosophical Papers, vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University
Press, 1983) p. 130.

the argument can be recast as a direct argument for the conclusion, i.e., an argument which draws on a proposed account of rationality. So let me recast it: in the case at hand, I propose that we are capable of reasoning, of drawing inferences, only if we endure, and from this we should conclude that there are enduring things.

In summary, I have argued that a position should be taken as a reasonable candidate for consideration within a context of inquiry only if it can be consistently conjoined with an epistemic extension which acknowledges its acceptance in that context. The broad point is that theories are epistemically accountable; as inquirers we are responsible for evaluating the compatibility of our theories with our attitudes and our practices; one's ontological commitments must be compatible with one's epistemic commitments. Self-defeat arguments help us explore the relation between our ontology and epistemology with an eye to tracking down any incompatibility, and in doing so they also bring to light those of our commitments which are (at least contextually) unrevisable. Rhetorically, strategies of self-defeat may be best used in a process of self-understanding, allowing that this 'self' may be a broad community of inquirers.

However, the strategy of employing self-defeat arguments is not an all-purpose dialectical tool; with some audiences, representing the issue in terms of self-defeat will not further the debate, for we disagree about the conditions of our inquiry. But it is not the case that when facing such interlocutors we have nothing to say, or that we're forced to retract our conclusions. Rather, we carry on, understanding that a commitment to the context of inquiry carries with it a willingness to rethink and re-evaluate the very conceptions of rationality which frame our ongoing dialogue.[17]

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