4.7 Hard cases: Autrecourt, Buridan, Reid, Ramsey

Nicholas of Autrecourt (c. 1295–1369) famously argued that the scope of the "evident" is restricted to what cannot logically be false: analytical claims and maybe a restricted class of impressions.[79] His arguments are consistent with a Classical Infallibilist account of the "evident". However, he appeared to have also held that knowledge extends beyond the "evident" to the "probable".[80] In doing so, he appears to reject Classical Infallibilism. He would thus be a counterexample to the bold hypothesis. It is worth noting, however, that his views were widely taken to entail skepticism, because it was widely assumed that knowledge required "evidentness". That is consistent with the hypothesis that most of his contemporaries endorsed Classical Infallibilism.

John Buridan (c. 1295–1363) was one of those who thought that Autrecourt's arguments would lead to scepticism. However his own epistemology has a fallibilist flavour too.[81] There are two reasons for this. First, he allows a standard of "evidentness" that is not truth-entailing but sufficient for moral conduct. His example is that of a magistrate who, after diligent investigation, "acts well and meritoriously" in hanging an innocent. The notion prefigures that of "moral certainty" and the legal standard of "beyond reasonable doubt".[82] Unfortunately, it is not clear whether he counts that type of "evidentness" as a "certainty" and as sufficient for knowledge.[83] He may be a Probabilistic Scep-

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[79]On Autrecourt's epistemology see Zupko (1993, 193–5), Thijssen (2000) and Grellard (2005, 2010). In his *First Letter to Bernard of Arezzo* he argues that *if*, as Arezzo contains, impressions are distinct from their objects, then "every impression we have of the existence of objects outside of our minds can be false" (3, Klima, 2007, 134). However in his *Exigit ordo* he claims that "apparences (in the strict sense) are not [false]" and he takes wakeful appearances to be "different in kind" from ones in dreams (see Grellard, 2010, 130-1). So his claim that every impression can be false may have been conditional on premises he rejected.

[80]See Grellard (2010, 132–6).

[81]See Zupko (1993), Klima (2009, 237–45), Pasnau (2010a, 30–7), Karger (2010, 221–3). Buridan's discussion is framed in terms of *scientia* but it covers ordinary knowledge, *e.g.* knowing that Socrates is running or that the sun is bright (*Summulae de Dialectica*, bk. 8, ch. 4, sec. 4, Klima, 2007, 146).

[82]*Quaestiones in Aristotelis Metaphysicam*, Bk. 2 q. 1, trans. Klima (2007, 146): "there is an even weaker kind of evidentness that suffices for acting morally well, namely, when someone, having seen and investigated all relevant facts and circumstances that man can diligently investigate, makes a judgement in accordance with these circumstances, then his judgement will be evident with the sort of evidentness that suffices for acting morally well, even if the judgement is false, because of some insurmountable ignorance of some circumstance. For example, it would be possible for a magistrate to act well and meritoriously in hanging a holy man because from testimonies and other legal evidence it sufficiently appeared to him concerning this good man that he was an evil murderer." See (Pasnau, 2010a, 33 and n12) on the legacy of the notion.

[83]Pasnau (2010a, 36) argues that the question would be irrelevant to Buridan and scholastic philosophers: "the question of whether it is certain enough to count as knowledge is not the scholastic question. For them, as I have been stressing, epistemic states occur along a continuum without sharp breaks, and there is accordingly little point in worrying about whether a given context is now so far from the ideal that it should no longer count as *scientia*." I agree with much of Pasnau's picture (see below) but not with that part. Buridan's scale of epistemic states is not a continuum. It has well-defined cut-off points: the supernaturally unfalsifiable, the naturally unfalsifiable, the naturally falsifiable. He also takes seriously the question how far *scientia* applies: he