Agrippa's trilemma: scepticism and contemporary epistemology

Aaran Steven Burns

PhD Philosophy

March 2020

Keele University

Word Count: 74970

Acknowledgements

I must at least try (and fail) to express the deserved amount of gratitude by giving thanks to those who have aided me over the last four years – and perhaps even the last 7. My mother and grandmother have given constant support, particularly over the last year, allowing me to stay with them while finishing things up. My partner, Kathryn Hayward has offered more support than I likely deserved and shown more patience than I could reasonably expect, not to mention the more direct efforts she made in reading drafts of my work. In the early stages of my research I had a number of email exchanges with both Richard Fumerton and Laurence BonJour, who were both immeasurably helpful in helping me to understand these issues more clearly. BonJour in particular has left an almost embarrassingly large mark on my work. Although our email exchange was short, the amount which I gained was vast, and only multiplied from the subsequent reading of his work. I have, as is usual, cited his works where I have explicitly relied on them, but you should not think that just because his name is not cited in a particular passage, that his ideas have had no influence on it. I have also had several challenging conversations with Thomas Uebel about Scepticism, and these were tremendously helpful, especially as concerns the relation between Scepticism and ordinary language. His comments were always appreciated. Prof. Sorin Baiasu has been my supervisor for the last five years. I am not sure that there is any logically possible world in which Sorin is a poor supervisor. He was always available for insightful conversations both directly relevant to Scepticism and further afield. Though we have not always agreed (He may still hold, pace my efforts to convince, that the sceptical argument I discuss here is not the most serious one in the writings of Sextus), he has always been supportive, and his criticisms were often a stimulus for important further reflection and refinement of my ideas. He has given me many more opportunities in philosophy than I would otherwise have and, crucially, he is a good friend.

Table of Contents

Abstract

Take any belief of yours – even one about which you feel supremely confident. The Sceptic will ask: why do you think it is true? You might take yourself to have a very good reason to believe what you do. But the sceptic will also want to know why you think that this second thing is true as well. You might offer yet a third reason for believing *that*, but the sceptic won't stop. He will want, again, to know why you believe that third thing. How will you choose to answer the sceptic's constant questioning? You might just keep going on, offering yet more and more reasons every time the sceptic questions you. Or you might argue in a circle, so that you defend your original belief by an argument which eventually appeals again to that very belief. Or you might argue that your original belief can eventually be defended by appeal to a set of assumptions for which you do not have any further reasons. But are any of those options really acceptable, or should you give up your original belief? If the latter, then since the sceptic could question any of your beliefs in this way, does that mean that you should give up all of your beliefs? Are you open to blame and criticism just for believing anything at all?

The Pyrrhonian sceptic tries to convince us that the answers to these questions are “yes”. In this work, I explicate the sceptical strategy in detail and consider philosophical attempts to evade its dire conclusion. My development of Scepticism draws on the ideas of Sextus and three of his scholars, Barnes, Bailey and Machuca, as well as BonJour and Oakley.

A number of philosophers have criticized Scepticism on the grounds that it presupposes a non-ordinary definition of “knowledge”. The sceptic tries to show that our common-sense belief that we know all sorts of things about the world is really a giant error, but the only way he manages to do it, according to these philosophers, is by starting with a definition of “knowledge” vastly removed from our usual one. This strategy is the dominant way of criticizing Scepticism in contemporary epistemology. It is deployed by John Greco, Alvin Goldman, Mark Kaplan and many others. Against these philosophers, I urge that the sceptic's using the word “know” in a non-ordinary way does not harm the substance of his arguments at all.

A number of philosophers have argued that the sceptic's standards for right or justified belief should be rejected. I argue that the standard which the Pyrrhonian lays down is not at all ridiculous. All he asks of us is that we have some reason, no matter how weak, for believing that P rather than -P – a reason which might convince someone who did not already believe that P. And so the sceptic lays down a standard which it may be very difficult to give up. What's more, I argue, by discussing the views of Michael Williams and Michael Huemer, that it is far from clear that there is anything in the neighbourhood that is particularly plausible as an ethics of belief.

These two broad anti-sceptical gambits are the currently dominant ones. In showing them to be unsatisfactory, I show that the sceptic still has us firmly in his net.

Introduction

1. The Basic Idea

Take any belief of yours – even one about which you feel supremely confident. The Sceptic will ask: why do you think it is true? You might take yourself to have a very good reason to believe what you do. But the sceptic will also want to know why you think that this second thing is true as well. You might offer yet a third reason for believing *that*, but the sceptic won't stop. He will want, again, to know why you believe that third thing. How will you choose to answer the sceptic's constant questioning? You might just keep going on, offering yet more and more reasons every time the sceptic questions you. Or you might argue in a circle, so that you defend your original belief by an argument which eventually appeals again to that very belief. Or you might argue that your original belief can eventually be defended by appeal to a set of assumptions for which you do not have any further reasons. But are any of those options really acceptable, or should you give up your original belief? If the latter, then since the sceptic could question any of your beliefs in this way, does that mean that you should give up all of your beliefs? Are you open to blame and criticism just for believing anything at all?

Sextus Empiricus presents that line of thought – the Modes of Agrippa – as a dialectical strategy for convincing others that they have, ultimately, no reason to believe anything at all, and that they should suspend judgement about any issue whatsoever. He tries to convince us that we are wrong to hold our beliefs. In this work, I defend that strategy against various responses to it. I therefore defend the initially absurd view that there is, ultimately, no reason to believe anything at all and that, as a result, we should not believe anything. I defend it in the usual philosophical way: by defending it against objections and arguing against opposing ideas. My purpose in defending it is *not* to show that Scepticism is true, or that Sextus' strategy should be utterly convincing to all of us. My purpose is just to show that certain responses to Sextus' strategy are unsatisfactory, with the hope that this increases our understanding of Scepticism. To the extent that the reader agrees that those responses are unsatisfactory, to that extent I succeed.

The first response I will discuss has to do with the word, “knowledge”. Scepticism is quite often associated with the phrase “nobody knows anything”, and the arguments for Scepticism are often

reconstructed – by dogmatists – as having that as their conclusion. This way of understanding Scepticism leads to the often made complaint that the sceptic uses the word “know” in a non-ordinary way. His standards for knowledge, the critic will say, are far more stringent than our ordinary ones. This way of criticizing Scepticism is incredibly popular in present epistemological writings. A large amount of effort has been spent on providing 'analyses' of (allegedly) ordinary epistemic concepts like “knowledge”. Most philosophers who have developed these theories have been keen to present them as opposed to Scepticism, and it is quite often championed as a virtue of a theory that it undermines, criticizes or at least avoids Scepticism. For various reasons which I will explain, I do not think that it is a significant criticism of Scepticism to say that sceptics use the word “know” in a non-ordinary way.

The second and third responses both have to do with the ethics of belief. The sceptic, in using his dialectical strategy, hopes to convince the dogmatist that he *ought* to give up his beliefs. In doing that, he presupposes that you should believe only what there is some reason to believe. For a long time, I took that view to be obvious, but recent philosophy has shown that it isn't *that* obvious. It is probably fair to say that it is now a minority view and that various less stringent standards for belief are currently much more popular. The second and third responses to Scepticism that I will discuss both involve adopting some such more liberal ethic of belief.

According to versions of Conservatism, you are entitled to hold a belief (at least to some degree), by the mere fact that you believe it or that it seems to you to be true. For reasons which I will explain, I deny that any version of Conservatism is a plausible ethic of belief, and so I deny that this wasyof avoiding the sceptic's trap is a satisfying one.

According to Contextualism, you may be entitled to hold a belief for no reason at all, so long as you are in the right context. Thus, so long as you are in the right context, the sceptic's dialectical strategy is, allegedly, of no force. For reasons which I will explain, I deny that Contextualism is a plausible response to Scepticism as well.

My defence of Scepticism is obviously limited. There are all sorts of other ways that anti-sceptical philosophers (call them dogmatists, like Sextus Empiricus does) have responded to Scepticism, and I don't have something to say about all of them here. For example, there are dogmatists who accept the Agrippan standards for right belief but say flatly that the sceptic is just wrong that there is no reason to believe anything – though by now the number of philosophers sticking their heads up to

defend this is countable on one hand. There are also dogmatists who hold that Scepticism is completely meaningless or incoherent – though again, their aren't too many people prepared to defend the view in print these days. There are also those dogmatists who hold that Scepticism is unliveable or psychologically impossible and so must be rejected on those grounds. I don't have anything to say about those issues here. That is not because I don't take the issues to be important. On the contrary, I take them to be the most important, and I am even inclined to think that there is some truth in at least the first and third options, but that is not how the majority of dogmatist philosophers see things. As they see it, the issues I discuss here are the important ones, and so those are the ones I opt to discuss. I content myself with showing that those responses to Scepticism are unsatisfactory. Whether any other response is better, I suspend judgement.

This introduction has a number of other sections. The next section distinguishes some different forms of Scepticism. Section 3 is a general overview of the entire work. Section 4 is about the epistemic “ought”; section 5 clears up some smaller issues, and section 6 gives thanks to those who have helped me.

2. Various forms of Scepticism

I follow tradition in understanding by a sceptical argument one which argues that we do not know, ought not to believe or have no reason at all to believe something which most people take foregranted. At the present time philosophical writings are filled with a large number of different sceptical arguments.

Cartesian sceptical arguments deny some positive epistemic status to beliefs about the physical world. So the Cartesian sceptic will typically say that I do not know, ought not to believe or have no reason at all to believe that there is a physical world – a world which is not a part of my mind in the way that pain and other mental states are part of my mind. Sceptical arguments for this conclusion usually make appeal to sceptical scenarios. For example, the hypothesis that while it looks to me at the moment just like I am sitting in my bedroom, I am in fact asleep having the dream that I am sitting in my bed room; or again the hypothesis that while it looks to me at the moment just like I am sitting in my bedroom, I am in fact having a hallucination produced by an evil demon bent on tricking me into getting things wrong.

Cartesian sceptical arguments work on the idea that in some sense I cannot tell whether or not a sceptical scenario obtains. There are two Cartesian sceptical arguments that are widely discussed: the Closure Argument and the Underdetermination Argument. The Closure argument is as follows. I can know that I am sitting in my bedroom only if I can know that I am not in a sceptical scenario. But I cannot know that I am not in a sceptical scenario, and therefore cannot know that I am in my bedroom. Yet, plausibly, if I know anything at all about the physical world then I know right at this moment that I am sitting in my bedroom, and so it turns out that I cannot know anything about the physical world. That argument is due to Nozick:

> You think you are seeing these words, but could you not be hallucinating or dreaming or having your brain stimulated to give you the experience of seeing these marks on paper although no such thing is before you? More extremely, could you not be floating in a tank whil super-psychologists stimulate your brain electrochemically to produce the whole sequence of experiences you have had in your lifetime thus fat? If one of these other things was happening, your experience would be exactly the same as it now is. So how can you know none of them is happening? Yet if you do not know these possibilities don't hold, how can you know you are reading this book now? If you do not know you haven't always been floating in the tank at the mercy of the psychologists, how can you know anything – what your name is, who your parents were, where you come from? (Nozick, 1981, 167).

Another variation on the same idea is as follows. The only way we know that there is a physical world is by experience. That we see the physical world is how we know that it is there. But all of the evidence yielded by sense perception is compatible with the truth of a sceptical hypothesis. The existence of the physical world is *indistinguishable* from the truth of, for example, the hypothesis that the physical world does not exist and I am being deceived by an evil demon. So I cannot know that the physical world exists on the basis of sense perception alone. But it is plausible that there is no other way at all that I could know that the physical world exists. It follows that I cannot know that the physical world exists at all. This way of spelling out the Cartesian argument is due to Vogel:

> Suppose you see a tree. You take your sensory experience at that time to be caused by a tree. But if you have just as much reason to think that something else is the cause of your experience, your belief that there is a tree in front of you is arrived at arbitrarily and doesn’t amount to knowledge. Skeptical arguments, as I understand them, are meant to establish that

> every one of our perceptual beliefs faces competition from an equally good alternative. It would follow that we are never in a position to know anything about the world around us (Vogel, 2004, 427).

In addition to Scepticism about the physical world there are myriad others. There is, for example, Scepticism which grants the existence of the physical world whilst it is being perceived, but doubts whether it exists when unperceived. I have myself tried to reconstruct an argument for this kind of Scepticism out of the philosophical writings of W.T Stace (1934; Burns, 2018). The argument is this. I can only know about the sensible world by perceiving it or by inferring it from what I do perceive. I cannot know, for example, how many pieces of paper are in my drawer without looking (or at the very least without somebody else looking and telling me) or inferring the answer from what I already know about the contents of my room. Yet I cannot perceive that something exists unperceived, because that is a contradiction, and there is no serious inference from anything I do know to the conclusion that anything exists unperceived. Therefore I cannot know whether anything at all exists when unperceived. If I place a piece of paper in the drawer and close it, I cannot know whether the paper continues to exist after I have closed the drawer (Burns, 2018; Stace, 1934).

All of these same arguments can be reconstructed in basically the same way for conclusions about our reasons for the beliefs in question – that there is no reason to believe in the physical world or no reason to believe that anything exists unperceived. It is also possible, if we introduce a normative principle about when belief is and is not appropriate, to construe them as arguments for the conclusion that we ought not believe these things.

There are of course many other kinds of Scepticism as well: Scepticism about other minds; about the past; about the future; a priori Scepticism; Moral Scepticism and so on.

My focus in this work is none of the above versions of Scepticism or the associated arguments. My focus is Pyhrronian Scepticism. Pyrrhonian Scepticism is, according to Paul Moser (2000), "*the most powerful skeptical challenge*" and according to Laurence BonJour (2008), it is "*the central question in epistemology*". There are a number of Pyrrhonian themes but the main one is a development of the five modes presented in Sextus Empiricus' (2000) *Outlines*[1]. It goes by the name "the Modes of Agrippa" and may be characterized in the way that I suggested at the start. It tries to

1 It is worth noting that Sextus also offered a number of other arguments. For more on this, see Reed (2007) and Barnes (2007).

convince us that we are wrong, blameworthy or open to reproach just for believing anything at all.

3. An Overview

The work is divided into eleven chapters, excluding this introduction, a concluding section and an appendix. Chapter 1 explains what Pyrrhonian Scepticism is in detail, and lays out Agrippa's Trilemma. Chapter 2 discusses the charge that Scepticism presupposes a non-ordinary definition of "knowledge". I take a careful look at what exactly the charge of using a non-ordinary definition of "knowledge" really amounts to, drawing on its articulation by Greco and Kaplan. I argue that it doesn't amount to anything. There is no significant criticism that can be made of the charge, even if we grant that there is such a thing as the ordinary meaning of "knowledge".

Chapter 3 explicates Phenomenal Conservatism – the view that you ought to believe, at least to some extent and absent defeaters, what seems to you to be true. Huemer, like Williams, also sees the sceptic as trying to lure us into suspension of judgement through an unnatural and unattractive standard for reasonable belief. If we replace the sceptic's standards with Phenomenal Conservatism, the sceptic's argument unravels. Chapter 4 argues that there are no such things as 'seemings' – the mental state which does all the heavy lifting in the theory. Chapter 5 discusses Michael Huemer's Self-defeat argument for Phenomenal Conservatism. He claims that the denial of Phenomenal Conservatism is in a sense self-defeating. I deny that it is, and show the argument to be fallacious. Chapter 6 discusses a different way of using Phenomenal Conservatism to criticize Scepticism, and I argue that this too fails. Chapter 7 sweeps Phenomenal Conservatism aside to consider its cousin, Doxastic Conservatism. I argue that Doxastic Conservatism is implausibly permissive.

Chapter 8 is about Michael Williams' Contextualist reply to Scepticism. Williams rejects the sceptic's standards for right belief and develops an alternative. Chapter 9 criticizes Williams' claim that his Contextualism is in line with "our epistemic practices". I argue in Chapter 10 that Williams avoids the sceptic's lure to suspension only at the high cost of embracing a kind of Relativism about reasonable belief, and that even having done so his theory is compatible with the heart of Scepticism.

The sceptic's dialectical strategy presupposes that the dogmatist will accept a certain policy for forming and evaluating beliefs, or, if you like, an ethics of belief. That policy is what I call Extreme Evidentialism. Most philosophers will take it to be a seriously implausible view, but I defend it from objections and highlight what makes it attractive in the final chapter.

4. Epistemic Oughts and “Justification”

Plenty of people often enough wonder what they ought to believe. Should I believe that there is a God? Or should I believe that the material world is all there is? When the matter is of immanent importance, the question only presses itself harder. Should I believe that my friends' wife is being unfaithful, or should I trust her? Should I believe that my ship is seaworthy, or should I check it over once more before I let the passengers on board? Sometimes it makes sense to say to another person, “you should not have believed that! That was too hasty!”, “you shouldn't have jumped to conclusions” or “you shouldn't just assume these things”. All of this is to say that plenty of us presuppose at least implicitly that there are rights and wrongs in belief; that we have obligations and duty's with respect to belief, and that people can be properly blamed and criticized for having the wrong beliefs. I assume here that this is correct[2].

Some philosophers say that a belief is “justified” when it is blameless or does not violate our epistemic obligations (Ginet, 1985). I am tempted by this usage. The language of “justification” however, is not only used in this way. Other philosophers use it to mean very different things, and it is sometimes very difficult to tell how a given author means to be using the word at all. This semantic issue has created a severe amount of confusion in epistemology.

First, the basic question raised by Agrippa's Trilemma is: what reason do I have to believe anything at all? A reason is an indication that a belief is true. As we have said, the reasons in question are supposed to answer the sceptic's question, “why believe that?”. It is absolutely crucial that the reasons in question are ones that I have, in the sense that those reasons are more or less readily available to me on reflection so that I might actually appeal to them to answer the sceptic's “why” question. It is common for philosophers who call themselves “Internalists” to use the word “justification” to refer to the possession of reasons of this kind, saying that to have a reason to believe something is to have some justification for believing it (BonJour, 2003). I will not use the language of justification for that purpose. I will just speak directly of “reasons”.

2 See Ryan (2003) for a defence.

There is also a fundamental divide between “Internalist” and “Externalist” epistemologists. Ginet (1985) helpfully distinguishes three ways of understanding Externalism.

4.An Externalist account of the ordinary meaning of “justification”.

5.An Externalist account of the ordinary meaning of “knowledge”.

6.An Externalist account of the 'fourth condition' of the ordinary meaning of “knowledge”.

Externalists who offer (4) deny that the internalist conception of justification is what is ordinarily meant by “justification”. Externalists will say that to have a justification for a belief means to have a belief which stands in some causal or modal relation to the world. The most straightforward example is a crude version of Goldman's (1995) definition, on which a belief is justified if and only if it is produced by a reliable process. The priests' belief that God exists may be justified if it is produced by the reliable functioning of the holy spirit within him, even if he has no reason – internally available to him – to believe either that God exists or that the holy spirit is functioning reliably within him. And the same will apply to more mundane beliefs and processes, such as my belief that I have hands and the sensory processes which produce it.

Externalists who offer (5) will deny that the internalist conception of justification is necessary for “knowledge” in the ordinary sense. Almost all philosophers agree that “knowledge” means at least “true belief”. A debate between internalists and externalists arises over what else must be added to complete the definition. Externalists, in denying that internalist justification is necessary for knowledge will typically insert some other condition, of which there are now various. Externalists typically define “knowledge” in terms of a complex causal or modal relation between the subject's beliefs and the world – a relation which may entirely escape the subject's grasp. The paradigm example of these is, again, Goldman's idea of a reliable process.

Externalists who offer (6) may concede that the internalist conception of justification – that of an accessible reason for the belief – is necessary for knowledge in addition to true belief but insist that some fourth condition is needed. The fourth condition may, again, be spelt out by reference to

reliable processes or something similar of which the subject may be entirely unaware. These, then, are three debates which arise between philosophers who call themselves “Externalists” and “Internalists”.

To avoid all of these wrangles I will try to avoid use of the word “justified” entirely. One of our topics here is whether we are wrong to believe as we do – whether we should hold our beliefs or instead give them up. I will use explicitly deontological language in this connection. I will speak of a belief being right, acceptable, blameless or properly beyond criticism (Huemer, 2001, 10; Nottleman, 2013).

The question is then one of when belief is acceptable and when it isn't. I will say that a general rule for when we should accept beliefs or when we should reject them is a “policy” of belief. For instance, the rule, “if someone you respect disagrees with you about whether or not P, you should reduce your confidence that P”, is a policy for belief. So too is “you should believe what your evidence supports, and nothing else”. The question of what our epistemic duties are is then the question of which policies are correct.

Many other authors use the language of “justification”, and I will try to explain what they mean by using it where necessary. If I have used the word “Justified” somewhere in this work, I mean to use it in the deontological sense; and I do not mean to assert that this is the “ordinary meaning” of the phrase, nor do I take any view on that issue here[3]. I can only hope that the astute reader can follow my path through the linguistic maze.

In my terminology, the sceptic is trying to convince us, first that there is ultimately no reason to believe anything at all, and second, that we should not believe anything at all.

5. Other Issues

3 Although, I am sympathetic to Swinburne's (2001) view about the ordinary concept of justification, and I defend a similar view about “knowledge” in chapter 3.

What follows is my attempt to anticipate some questions and criticisms the reader may have about my project as I have so far described it and to answer them ahead of time.

(a) "You do not discuss the most powerful criticisms of Scepticism here. Why do you not discuss Philosopher X's response to Scepticism?"

In my discussion of Scepticism, I have opted to deal only with criticisms which seem to me to dominate the epistemological field at present. I will not, therefore, have anything to say about, to take examples, Kant, Heidegger or Hilary Putnam's views on Scepticism. The justification for making this restriction is that Scepticism is regarded by most philosophers as an epistemological topic, and so, one might think, if anyone has a cogent criticism of Scepticism (or a solution to the problem of Scepticism), it will be philosophers who specialize in epistemology at the cutting edge of the field. A great number of those specialists have developed criticisms of the kind which I discuss here. It might be that it is wrong to assume that epistemologists will have the most insight into Scepticism, and that Kant, Heidegger, Putnam and the rest of Philosophy have more insight on the matter than the epistemologists but it remains true that the latter are the sensible place to start.

(b) "So your thesis is wholly negative? You are just going to criticize other people's theories the whole time? You should really try to construct your own theory as well if you want your thesis to be really valuable. It is very easy to tear down other people's work, and not so easy to make something yourself."

Given that very few philosophers are sceptics of any sort the probability that the reader is not at all sympathetic to Scepticism is high. Most philosophers have almost always seen Scepticism as a bad thing; as an enemy, threat, opponent, paradox, or absurdity. This way of speaking can create an unacceptable bias against Scepticism. I have discussed my research with many philosophers who hold this attitude and explained to them that my aim is to defend Scepticism against the criticisms of (some) contemporary epistemologists. On hearing this, they have quite often said something critical, like (b). I anticipate that there will be readers who have this same criticism in mind. But the criticism is ill-founded. What I will do in this work is defend Scepticism from criticism. There is no reason to think of this project as "wholly negative" or as not offering anything constructive. It is no less constructive than is defending Naturalism, Utilitarianism, Platonism or any other philosophical position. Of course, it doesn't offer anything constructive to philosophers who oppose Scepticism, but the only reason to infer from this that the project is "wholly negative" is the assumption that Scepticism is the super villain, to be defeated at all costs by philosophical theory, and this is nothing

more than an unjustifiable bias against Scepticism.

(c) "There is already a vast literature on Scepticism. What can you possibly hope to say of any originality?"

Although there are some influential books about Cartesian Scepticism and its responses – Barry Stroud's (2008) being the most obvious – I can find no equivalent for Pyrrhonian Scepticism. There is Fogelin's (1994) but it is over twenty years old and although it is insightful, it is showing its age insofar as it does not discuss any of the more recent reactions to Pyrrhonian Scepticism which I include here. So, my first hope is that I can provide a single treatise written in a single voice which discusses some of the major reactions to Pyrrhonian Scepticism which have developed in recent years, as opposed to the scattered writings which presently exist.

In my discussions of contemporary epistemological theories, I also hope to have constructed a number of novel arguments and criticisms, and to have developed arguments which have been made by others into something stronger. Even if I fail to be convincing in my negative assessment of epistemological theorizing, perhaps I will nevertheless have done enough in these other ways to provoke discussion.

(c) Who Cares about your research? Or why should they?

I discuss directly a number of authors who have criticized Scepticism. Chiefly John Greco, Mark Kaplan, Michael Williams and Michael Huemer. Those philosophers should be interested in what I have to say here because if I am right then their criticisms of Scepticism fail.

But my work has a wider audience than that. The most prominent and popular responses to Scepticism in the literature today are of the three kinds that I discuss here. If I am right in my negative assessments of those responses, then contemporary epistemologists have wasted a large amount of their resources pursuing an anti-sceptical strategy which fails.

(d) Why don't you discuss Reliabilism or Epistemological Externalism?

I do discuss it! In chapter 2 I discuss the charge that the sceptic uses the word "know" in a non-ordinary sense. That is what prominent Externalist philosophers, like Alvin Goldman, John Greco and David Armstrong, have said about Scepticism. They have analysed the ordinary meaning of "know" in Externalist terms, and then said that the sceptic does not use the word in the ordinary

way.

So I discuss Externalism as a semantic theory. I don't discuss it as a proposed epistemic duty. Why not? I have just never found Externalism, understood that way, even a little bit plausible, for this reason: it is quite sensible to answer the question “how should I maintain my beliefs?” by saying “use reliable methods”, but that alone is not the Externalist answer to the question. The answer is “use reliable methods, *even if you aren't aware that they are reliable*”. The Externalist will urge that we should criticize a person for holding a belief by taking into consideration things of which they weren't aware, nor perhaps even could be aware of with some reflection, but how on earth can I be sensibly blamed for doing something even when I was not aware that I was doing it? I cannot be blamed for using an unreliable method for forming my belief if I was not aware that the method was unreliable, and that is just what a typical Externalist theory will imply. That point is due to Ginet (1990). Most Externalists reply by denying outright that beliefs are subject to obligations at all, because, they say, beliefs are not under voluntary control. That response, however, is not a defence of an Externalist answer to questions about what we ought to believe – it is a repudiation of the questions entirely, usually followed up the entirely different issue of providing an Externalist analysis of the English words “justified” and “knows”.

As I said, that argument against Externalism is a thirty year old one, due to Ginet, and nothing else I would have to say about Externalism is any more original[4]. What I would do in a chapter on Externalism is nothing more than trot out the objections to it which most philosophers already know: BonJour's clairvoyance counter-examples, the generality problem, the new evil demon problem, bootstrapping and epistemic circularity, etc, before returning to make the fundamental point made by Ginet. For this reason, I opt just not to discuss Externalism, except as a semantic theory, and to let readers discover the literature about it at their leisure.

Chapter 1: Agrippa's Trilemma Explicated

1. The Beginning

The sceptic, as I shall understand him here, is a person who practices total suspension of judgement about everything. He is, also, someone who tries to convince other people to join him. He tries to

4 The distinction between saying that my beliefs are subject to evaluations of praise and blame in accordance with an ethics of belief, and saying that the ordinary word “justified” means “praiseworthy” or “blameworthy” seems like a very obvious distinction, but I didn't even think of that myself! See Nottleman (2013).

convince the dogmatist that he has no reason for his belief and, the sceptic hopes that the dogmatist will thereupon give up his belief.

To pull off the rhetorical feat, the sceptic has a certain strategy. In this chapter, I say what that strategy is. Sections 2 is about Sextus Empiricus and the Modes of Agrippa. Section 3 is on Oakley's use of the modes. Section 4 is on Fogelin's use of them. Section 5 summarizes the modes as resting on the thought that it is unacceptable to hold a belief on the basis of assumption, circular argument or infinite regress. Section 6 explains what is wrong with assumption. Section 7 explains what is wrong with circularity. Section 8 explains what is wrong with infinite regress. are devoted to that purpose. Section 9 summarizes puts it all together, and Section 10 discusses the charge that Scepticism is self-refuting.

2. Sextus and The Modes of Agrippa

An argument is a set of sentences in which one sentence is claimed to follow logically from the rest. When contemporary philosophers think about versions of Scepticism they typically think about what arguments there are for them. The sceptic is said to put forward various sentences which we are supposed to find plausible, and then to claim that his sceptical views follow logically from them. That is not how Sextus Empiricus presents Pyrrhonian Scepticism, and it is not how he presents the five Modes of Agrippa either.

Sextus presents the modes most clearly in this passage:

> The later Skeptics hand down Five Modes leading to suspension, namely these: the first based on discrepancy, the second on the regress ad infinitum, the third on relativity, the fourth on hypothesis, the fifth on circular reasoning. That based on discrepancy leads us to find that with regard to the object presented there has arisen both amongst ordinary people and amongst the philosophers an interminable conflict because of which we are unable either to choose a thing or reject it, and so fall back on suspension. The Mode based upon regress ad infinitum is that whereby we assert that the thing adduced as a proof of the matter proposed needs a further proof, and this again another, and so on ad infinitum, so that the consequence is suspension [of assent], as we possess no starting-point for our argument. The Mode based upon relativity . . . is that whereby the object has such or such an appearance in relation to the subject judging and to the concomitant percepts, but as to its real nature we

> suspend judgment. We have the Mode based upon hypothesis when the Dogmatists, being forced to recede ad infinitum, take as their starting-point something which they do not establish but claim to assume as granted simply and without demonstration. The Mode of circular reasoning is the form used when the proof itself which ought to establish the matter of inquiry requires confirmation derived from the matter; in this case, being unable to assume either in order to establish the other, we suspend judgement about both. (Sextus Empiricus, 2000 164-69).

The five modes are presented as dialectical strategies "leading" to suspension. The sceptic and the dogmatist are engaged in a discussion about some issue. The dogmatist judges that his view is correct. The sceptic tries to convince the dogmatist to suspend judgement using these strategies. In the mode of discrepancy, the sceptic points out that there are lots of people who disagree with the dogmatist. In the mode of relativity, the sceptic points out that the dogmatists' judgements are only how things appear *to him* and that there is a plain difference between how things seem to you and how things really are. In the mode of regress, the sceptic demands an argument for the dogmatists' claim, and an argument for the premises of the first argument, and an argument for the premises of the second argument, and so on ad infinitum. In the mode of circularity, the dogmatist is accused of arguing in a circle, and in the mode of hypothesis he is accused of making an assumption there is no reason to believe.

Sextus sometimes uses each of the modes alone against dogmatist views, but he more often uses several of them together (Barnes, 1990, 113). There are various ways of deploying the modes systematically, some of which Sextus seems to have used and some of which are just ways in which they could be used. Barnes (1990) surveys the way in which Sextus could use each mode alone to try and lead dogmatists to suspension, and also the ways in which the modes could be used in tandem. For my purposes, I focus on a particular systematization of the modes – what Barnes calls "the System of Three Modes".

Suppose that the dogmatist judges something to be true, say, P. The sceptic will ask "why believe that P?". Either (1) the dogmatist merely judges it to be true for no reason, or (2) he supports his judgement with some reason, R1. If (1), then the sceptic accuses the dogmatist of making an assumption for no reason (the mode of hypothesis). If (2), then either (3) R1 is a claim we have seen before or else (4) it is a new claim. If (3) then the sceptic accuses the dogmatist of arguing in a circle (the mode of circular reasoning). If (4) then either (5) the dogmatist merely judges R1 for no

reason or (6) he supports his judgement with some reason, R2. If (5) then the mode of hypothesis applies again. And so on, until the sceptic accuses the dogmatist of an infinite regress (Barnes, 1990, 119).

The three modes work together to "*weave the web that will trap those who endeavor to justify any belief using different strategies*" (Machuca, 2015, 25). In arguing this way, the sceptic hopes to convince the dogmatist to suspend judgement about P. The dogmatist will only be lead to suspension, however, if he thinks that his defences of P are insufficient. For instance, when the sceptic accuses the dogmatist of making an arbitrary assumption, the dogmatist will only suspend if he takes arbitrary assumption to be unacceptable. So too with the other modes. The dogmatist will only suspend judgement when accused of arguing in a circle or a regress if he takes those ways of defending his belief to be unacceptable. Sextus thus presupposes that the dogmatist will have certain standards for right belief in the forgoing strategy. He assumes that the dogmatist will find hypothesis, circularity and regress all unacceptable[5].

3. Oakley's Three Modes

As I have noted, Sextus' use of the modes is very different from what is usually called a sceptical argument in contemporary philosophy. Sextus' strategies for inducing suspension are dialectical moves, designed to persuade the dogmatist to suspend. They are not much like sceptical arguments in the sense of sentences from which sceptical conclusions follow logically.

There are ways, however, to present the modes as a sceptical argument. I.T Oakley begins his 1976 paper with "*I shall argue that no beliefs are justified... even to the most minimal degree*" (Oakley, 1976, 221). He goes on to argue in this way:

> Someone claiming A to be justified in p must accept that p is either: (1) itself basic, or else dependent on one or more basic beliefs' or (2) a member of a series of an infinite number of different beliefs, justifedness in each of which is dependent upon the justifiedness in its successorts in the series; or (3) p is a member of a series of a finite number of different beliefs justifiedness in at least one member of which depends at least partially upon itself. In traditional terms, we must choose between a sort of foundationalism, an infinite regress, or a

5 Note that Sextus need not himself accept those standards. It is sufficient that the dogmatist accepts them.

> coherence account of justfieidness. The chain of beliefs upon which p depends for its justifiedness either stops, is infinite, or loops back on itself. In what follows I shall argue against each of the three possibilities concluding that the chain does not in fact start. P is not justified. (Oakley, 1976, 221).

Oakley goes on in the paper to argue against the three options he canvasses, eventually concluding that "*no beliefs are justified*".

There is obviously a clear parallel between the way Sextus deploys his dialectical strategies and Oakley's argument. The modes of hypothesis, circularity and regress all make their appearance, and are all found to be objectionable. On the assumption that there are no other ways in which a dogmatist might defend his judgement that P, Oakley draws his sceptical conclusion.

We should pause for a moment to examine that conclusion, however. One might be inclined to think that Oakley's conclusion parallels the one Sextus tries to get his dogmatist opponents to draw. On that interpretation of Oakley, he would be arguing that we ought to suspend judgement about everything – that our beliefs fall short of standards which we should hold them to. That interpretation of Oakley is certainly supported by the way he speaks at the beginning of the paper, saying that as he is using the word "justified", it is equivalent to "reasonable" or "rational" (Oakley, 1976, 221).

Yet, in another paper, interpreting him this way makes his view quite puzzling:

> The sceptic can easily accept the sensibleness of holding beliefs relative to local or short range aims; it may be sensible to hold a belief relative to the immediate goal of the elaboration of a pre-existing belief system. The very same belief may be unjustified, in the sceptic's view, relative to the aim of holding a belief which is not merely derivable from other unquestioned beliefs but from other justified beliefs, or from a set of beliefs which may be regarded as in some way better than any possible alternative set (Oakley, 1988, 278).

Oakley goes on:

> [the sceptic] uses purely those contextualist senses of 'justified', where justifiedness is a matter of reasonableness given the essentially local epistemic aim of having a belief that fits

in with the currently accepted system (Oakley, 1988, 279).

If we take Oakley to be saying that our beliefs fall short of the proper ethics of belief, it is hard to understand what could be meant by saying that our beliefs are justified relative to the aim of extending our belief system and yet unjustified relative to the aim of having a belief or set of beliefs that is better than any other. Either a belief meets the standards of acceptable belief or it doesn't. If my belief that there are aliens does not meet the proper standards, then it does not meet them period, even if my aim is to extend my belief system.

Perhaps what Oakley means is this. My belief may be acceptable relative to the aim of extending my belief system in the sense that, given that my belief system is itself acceptable and this new belief follows from it, it too is acceptable. Oakley's sceptic will not deny a conditional claim of this sort. What the sceptic will deny, however, is that any belief (and so any belief system) is acceptable in the first place. This puts Oakley's conclusion back in tune with the one Sextus wants his dogmatist opponents to draw, and Oakley draws it.

4. Fogelin's Modes

Robert Fogelin has defended what he calls “Neo-Pyrrhonian Scepticism”. He says that the Agrippan modes presuppose W.K Clifford's Evidentialist principle that "*It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence*" (Clifford, 1877). Once that principle is accepted, he says:

> The task of the remaining three modes-those based on regress ad infinitum, circularity, and (arbitrary) hypothesis-is to show that it is impossible to complete this reason-giving process in a satisfactory way. If the Pyrrhonists are right, no argument, once started, can avoid falling into one of the traps of circularity, infinite regress, or arbitrary assumption (Fogelin, 1994, 116) .

He then argues at some length that no contemporary “*theory of justification has come close*” (Fogelin, 1994, 119) to solving the problem and avoiding the sceptical result that we ought to suspend judgement about everything.

In another paper, he sums the Pyrrhonian strategy up succinctly:

> The central concern of the Pyrrhonists was the claimed capacity of their dogmatic opponents to present adequate reasons in behalf of their dogmas as, following their own standards, they pretended to do. The central maneuver of Pyrrhonists was to challenge the dogmatists to produce such reasons (Fogelin, 2004, 170).
>
> And again:
>
> Both the foundationalists and the coherentists undertook the task of showing that some suitably large and important region of our knowledge claims is capable of validation. They both thought that these knowledge claims could be defended by presenting reasons establishing their legitimacy. If that is what theory of knowledge is supposed to do, then, as it seems to me, the five Agrippan modes involving discrepancy, infinite regress, relativity, hypothesis (or arbitrary assumption), and circularity show that this cannot be done (Fogelin, 2004, 162).

5. Outlines of Pyrrhonian Scepticism

The dogmatist claims that P. The sceptic asks him why he believes that P. Any answer that the dogmatist gives to the sceptic looks to involve one of three possibilities:

Assumption: An argument from arbitrary assumptions.
Circularity: A circular argument.
Regress: An infinitely long argument.

The dogmatist is supposed to find all of these unacceptable, and is, for that reason, supposed to suspend judgement. Why might he find them unacceptable?

6. What is Wrong with Assumption?

Reasoning from an assumption involves producing as reasons for accepting P some other belief Q for which no further reason can be given. The most obvious thing to say about why such reasoning is unsatisfactory is that reasoning from assumption amounts simply to giving up on answering a given request for reasons, for it involves, by definition, accepting a proposition for no reason.

Any belief can be supported by an argument from an arbitrary assumption. An advocate of Norse mythology could support his belief that the earth is made of the corpse of the giant Ymir by arguing from an arbitrary assumption. Odin and his brothers killed Ymir and made the earth from his corpse. Therefore the earth is made from Ymir's corpse. Here is a valid argument for the earth's being made from Ymir's corpse[6], but the argument starts from a premise which the advocate of Norse mythology cannot give us any reason to believe. There is simply no reason to believe that Odin and his brothers fought and killed Ymir in the first place. Thus, anything at all may be proven from arbitrary assumptions.

What's worse, any proposition P *and its negation* may be proven from arbitrary assumptions. Take any proposition, P supported by an argument from arbitrary assumptions. Now consider this argument: God says that -P and God does not lie. Therefore -P. There is no reason to believe the premises of this argument anymore than the argument for P and vice-versa. Both arguments are of equal force in this sense. They cancel each other out, leaving us with no reason at all to favour P or -P. As Barnes puts it:

> If it is acceptable for a Dogmatist to hypothesize that P then it must be equally acceptable for a sceptic to hypothesize -P. But if -P is no less acceptable than P, we cannot accept P just because the Dogmatist chooses it (Barnes, 2007, 100)[7].

If, in trying to answer the question, "why believe that P?", you give such an argument, you do not really answer the question at all, because your answer is of such a kind that could just as well be given for -P.

7. What is Wrong with Circular Reasoning?

Circular reasoning is reasoning for a conclusion, P, in which P features as a premise. Many writers on this issue are unacceptably brief. Klein writes of circular reasoning that its' unacceptability is "*an obvious presupposition of good reasoning*" (Klein, 1999, 298), but he never says what is actually wrong. BonJour complains that:

6 These fascinating myths are retold by Gaiman (2017).
7 Barnes attributes the argument to Sextus Empiricus. See also Oakley (1976).

> A justificational structure whose branches all terminate in this way again seems to provide no reason for thinking that any of the component non-conditional beliefs are true (BonJour, 2003, 12).

Again, BonJour asserts that circular reasoning cannot provide a reason for thinking that beliefs in the circle are true, but does not say why not. Williams offers a brief argument:

> Reasoning in a circle is a paradigmatically poor sort of reasoning: how can a statement support itself? Supposing that it could embodies a kind of pragmatic inconsistency, treating the same statement as needing support... and as already in order (Williams, 2001,62).

If we spell out the "pragmatic inconsistency" involved, however, I think you will see that Williams has not really offered any explanation of what is wrong with circular reasoning. The idea here is that in arguing in a circle from P to Q to R and back to P I treat P as already acceptable (in the beginning) and yet also in need of argument (in the conclusion), and this is inconsistent on my part. If P is already acceptable then there is no need for an argument for it, and if P is not acceptable then an argument which uses P as a premise cannot legitimately be invoked.

Yet, why is it the case that if P is not acceptable then an argument using P as a premise cannot be *legitimately* invoked? Williams has not answered this question, and it is, to my mind, the very same question as "what is wrong with circular reasoning?"

Barnes explains well what is wrong with circular reasoning in the present context.

> Take any circle or web of beliefs, W. Let it be as complex as you like. Now construct a different web, W*, in the following fashion. Replace the constituent beliefs, all or some of them, by different and incompatible beliefs. (Replace 'Honey is sweet' and 'Naples is in Italy' by, say, 'Honey is sour' and 'Naples is in Greece'.) Rope up the new beliefs in the same sort of way as you roped up the old – the ropings follow the same rules and exhibit the same complexity as before.
>
> Now compare W and W*. In W we shall find a belief, P, which does not appear in W*. Instead, W* will contain some belief P*, which is incompatible with P. Now P was

> supposedly justified by its position in W – we were allegedly justified in believing that P by the fact that P was tied to or supported by numerous other propositions which were themselves tied and supported in turn. But W* has just the same structure, in all relevant respects, as W. Hence if P was justified by its position in W, P* will be justified by its position in W*. But we know that P and P* are incompatible with one another. Hence we cannot be justified in holding both of them. Hence we are justified in holding neither of them (Barnes, 2007, 87-88).

The point of offering the circular reasoning is to find some reason to prefer a belief, P, to its negation, -P. Yet it is always possible to produce circular reasoning both for P and -P. Take any circular argument for any proposition, P, which you might be inclined to accept. I can always argue, for example, that -P is true because Thor said so, and I know that everything Thor says is true because Thor has said -P, and -P is true. If circular reasoning is supposed to give me some reason to believe P over -P, it is to say the least unclear how it can do so when formally identical circular reasoning may be produced on both sides. Again, the question "why believe P?" goes unanswered if we offer the sceptic a circular argument, since a formally identical argument may be produced for believing differently.

8. What is Wrong with Infinite Regress?

An infinite regress of reasons is a chain of reasoning for a conclusion, P, where Q is the reason for P, R the reason for Q, S the reason for R, and so on ad infinitum. It is common to lodge an objection to infinite regresses of reasons called "the Finite Minds Objection". Williams presents the objection:

> The [proposed] regress of justification of S's belief that p would certainly require that he holds an infinite number of beliefs. This is psychologically, if not logically, impossible. If a man can believe an infinite number of things, then there seems to be no reason why he cannot know an infinite number of things. Both possibilities contradict the common intuition that the human mind is finite. Only God could entertain an infinite number of beliefs. But surely God is not the only justified believer (Williams, 1981,85)

The reason why Williams seems to think that it is impossible to have an infinite number of beliefs is this. Every belief is either conscious or unconscious. It is psychologically impossible for anyone to

have an infinite number of conscious beliefs because having a conscious belief requires considering a proposition, and no mortal has enough time to consider an infinite number of propositions. It is also impossible for anyone to have an infinite number of unconscious beliefs because, according to Williams, it would require having a belief the content of which was too complex for me to understand, let alone believe. He gives the following example. Williams unconsciously believes that he is within 100 miles from Boston. He also believes that he is within 200 miles from Boston and that he is within 300 miles from Boston... ad infinitum (Williams, 1981, 85-86). He points out, however, that I could not really believe the entire infinite series of propositions in this set, because to believe a proposition I must at least understand it, and eventually a proposition in this set will be The proposition "I am within n miles from Boston", where n is a number so large that I cannot understand what number it is.

In response, Klein (1999, 307) points out that although it is true that we cannot have an infinite number of consciously formed beliefs, we can have an infinite number of unconscious beliefs. Concerning Williams' example, Klein rightly notes that the fact that a particular set of infinite propositions contains a proposition too complex for me to believe, it does not follow that any set of infinite propositions will be the same. Suppose, for example, that there were an infinite number of round objects. I could believe, of each object, that it is round and so have an infinite number of unconscious beliefs (Klein, 1999, 307)[8]. It is, therefore, false that we cannot have an infinite number of beliefs.

We may grant that it is psychologically possible for me to have an infinite number of beliefs, but there still seems to be a problem. It is not only necessary that I have an infinite number of beliefs but that I have an infinite number of *reasons.* That is, I must have an infinite number of beliefs capable of standing in premise-conclusion relations to one another, and that I have any such chain of beliefs as that to support even one belief of mine seems doubtful. What does the infinite chain of reasons look like, for example, for my belief that I am in my apartment? I do not know. That is to say, if the sceptic presses me endlessly for why I believe that P and then for why I believe my reasons for P, and for why I believe those reasons... etc, I am doubtful that I really could continually answer his questions at every stage.

8 Klein's exact position is that, in the case where there are an infinite number of round objects, we have a disposition to form the disposition to think of each object that it is round. He prefers talk of dispositions to think various things rather than talk of "unconscious beliefs". I stick with "unconscious beliefs" in the text because that is Williams' language.

Klein seems to be open-minded as to whether an infinite number of reasons is available for anything that we believe. He seems to think that, whenever we are pressed to give reasons for what we believe, it might yet turn out that we can think of them, ad infinitum (Klein, 1999, 216). This optimism is surely unwarranted. Take any belief that philosophers have traditionally thought to be difficult to find reasons for – belief that there is a physical world. We might be able to find a good reason to believe that there is a physical world – perhaps by arguing that the existence of such a world is the best explanation of our sensory experiences. But the sceptic will want to know why we believe that we have certain sensory experiences and why we believe that criteria of best explanation are truth-conductive. Maybe – just maybe – we can find reasons for those things, but the sceptic will only rear his head again, and, speaking for myself, my own ingenuity is starting to wear thin. I am not sure I could continue the reasoning back even one more round, never mind an infinite number of rounds, even supposing my reasoning to that point is cogent – which many philosophers would likely deny.

Furthermore, it should be of no surprise to be told that no philosopher has ever seriously attempted providing an infinite chain of arguments for any proposition at all, never-mind for propositions which are typically the victims of sceptical criticism. There are no papers, for example, which purport to be capable of even so much as schematically gesturing as to how an infinite chain of arguments might be produced for the belief that there is a physical world, or that other human bodies have minds, or that the world has existed for more than five minutes. The idea of an infinite chain of arguments sufficient to meet the sceptic's questioning is only an empty theoretical possibility. This, all by itself, shows that the dogmatist has no hope of answering the question, “why believe that P?”, by an infinitely long argument. He just can't think of any such argument.

Suppose, however, that I really am able to think of a argument for P, and an argument for the premises of the first argument, and an argument for that, ad infinitum. Would the infinite chain of arguments genuinely give me a reason for believing P as opposed to -P? I do not think that it would, given that it is easy to create infinite sequences of inferences for anything at all. Suppose that I do have an infinite string of arguments for P. It is all too easy to create a formally identical infinite string of arguments for -P (Barnes, 2007, 53-54). I might say that I believe that -P because Thor said so, and Odin assures me that Thor is truthful, and Loki assures me that Odin is truthful, and... n assures me that n-1 is truthful ad infinitum. Since infinite strings of argument may be produced on both sides of any issue, it is difficult to see how such strings are supposed to provide a reason to favour one particular side.

Here, then, is the problem with an infinite chain of reasons; one can be produced for any side of any issue, meaning that such a chain never yields a decisive consideration in favour of either side of a debate. The sceptic's question, “why believe P?”, has not been answered.

9. Running Out of Reasons

The dogmatist claims that P. The sceptic asks him why he believes that P. The dogmatist has either an argument from assumption, a circular argument or an infinitely long argument. In any such case, the sceptic urges the dogmatist to think that his belief is unacceptable. The belief is supposed to be unacceptable because for any pair of propositions P and -P, one can produce an argument from arbitrary assumption, a circular argument and an infinitely long argument on both sides; at which point, the sceptic's question returns: why believe one side and not the other? The dogmatist is thus unable to provide what Paul Moser (2000, 209) calls “*non-question begging warrant for [his] beliefs”*[9]. If the sceptic continues to ask “why?” for long enough, no belief will survive. The dogmatist will always run out of answers[10][11].

It is important not to read too much into the fact that the sceptic and the dogmatist are being imagined here as two different people engaged in a debate. It might be tempting to think that the dogmatists' failure to answer the sceptic's “why” questions is “merely” a dialectical point with no further import, but this is too quick in two places. First, the sceptic is trying to convince you

9As Fumerton puts it:

> The [sceptic]…wants to know why we can legitimately conclude that a certain way of forming a belief is legitimate, and the [sceptic's] philosophical curiosity isn’t going to be satisfied by being told *at any stage of the game* that it just is. (Fumerton 2006, 184)

10 The argument might nevertheless be useful for some purposes. An argument which depends on an arbitrary assumption might be quite effective dialectically if the assumptions are such that the audience accepts them. Plantinga describes natural theology in this way, as the attempt to “*show that some of the central beliefs of theism follow deductively or inductively from propositions that are... accepted by nearly every sane man*”. (Plantinga, 1967, 4).

11From a common-sense standpoint, this result seems absurd. It seems quite obvious that we have excellent reasons for holding various empirical beliefs. I believe at this moment that I am sitting on my bed, and it seems so obvious as to be hardly worth stating that I have very good reason for believing this to be so, at least at this very moment. Yet, the attempt to state exactly what my reasons are is fraught with difficulties well-known to philosophers. The difficulties are so great as to have convinced some philosophers that there is no account available of why we believe anything at all about the world. According to Barry Stroud, “*... the philosophical problem of the justification of our beliefs in general cannot be solved”* (Stroud, 2004, 176).

precisely that it does have further import; that it shows that you ought not to hold the beliefs, and so to plant one's feet and stubbornly insist without further ado that it has no such import is just to ignore the sceptic's gambit all together. What one needs to do is develop some principled account of *why* it has no such import. More importantly, imagining the sceptic and the dogmatist as two different people is just a useful way of framing the issue. The dogmatist could run through all of the "why?" questions about his own beliefs, just by rehearsing the issue in his mind. It would be, surely, quite alarming to ask yourself "why believe that I have hands?", and to find yourself completely drawing a blank; with no answer *whatsoever* to the question, and so, ultimately, no reason to believe it.

The dogmatist, then, is supposed to find his belief unacceptable once he finds himself in this absurd position.

10. Is Scepticism Self-Refuting?

The sceptic's gambit involves two ideas:

(S) I have, ultimately, no reason to believe anything at all.
(S*) We ought to suspend judgement about everything.

The sceptic's dialectical strategy is designed to convince me first of (S) and then consequently of (S*), but, some dogmatists have supposed that (S), (S*) or both are self-refuting, and concluded on that basis that Scepticism itself is self-refuting.

In order to determine whether or not Scepticism really is self-refuting, the notion of self-refutation must be made more precise. In the most obvious sense, a proposition, p, is self-refuting if and only if it implies something which contradicts it (Gallios, 1993). Say that a thesis which is self-refuting in this sense is *self-contradictory*. I cannot find any argument for the conclusion that (S) is self-contradictory.

In another sense, a thesis is self-refuting if and only if believing it entails that it is false. This sort of self-refutation is found in Descartes' Cogito. It is self refuting for me to believe that I do not exist.

There is nothing impossible about my not existing, but my believing that I do not exist entails that I do. Following Gallios (1993), let's say that a thesis which could be true but could not be truly believed is *self-falsifying*. Scepticism would be self-falsifying only if my believing it entailed that there were at least some complete reasons to believe at least one proposition. There does not seem to be any argument on this front either. Clearly my believing that there is no complete reason to believe anything at all is compatible with it being true, or at least, there is no obvious argument to the contrary.

In a third sense, a thesis is self-refuting only if, given that it is true, there is no reason to believe that it is. Let's say that a thesis like this is self-defeating. Scepticism certainly is self-defeating. If it is true that there is no complete reason to believe anything at all, it follows that there is no complete reason to believe Scepticism itself. But what is problematic about self-defeat? A self-defeating thesis could still be true, so why does it matter that Scepticism is self-defeating? It matters because the *person* who asserts a self-defeating thesis cannot coherently take themselves to have complete reason to believe it. They in effect must assert “p, but there is no complete reason to think that p”. The sceptic, in order to maintain coherence, must deny that he has any complete reason to believe his Scepticism.

There is still no serious problem in the vicinity for the sceptic. So long as he does not claim to have complete reasons for his Scepticism, he seems to be on solid ground. True, the things the sceptic says might, at this point, sound a bit unusual. It is unusual to say “P but there is no reason to believe that P”, but it is hardly an objection to his position that it sounds odd, and even if it were, that is a far weaker objection than the initially very threatening charge of “self-refutation”.

I conclude that (S) is not self-refuting.

(S*) is more problematic. If the sceptic believes that (S*), then he believes that he ought not to believe anything. A kind of self-refutation immediately threatens. If (S*) is true, no one – including the sceptic – should believe that it is.

The sceptic's escape from this trap involves distinguishing between the mere psychological inclination to believe something and the voluntary act of judging that it is more credible than its negation. I might, as a matter of psychological fact, be inclined to believe that there is a God because of the way I was raised. Nevertheless, although that proposition is attractive for me, I might

choose not to actively judge that there is a God in the sense that, if someone were to ask me "Is there a God?", I would neither say "yes" or "no". I would not regard the proposition "God exists" as any more credible than its opposite.

Most often philosophers are associated with certain theses just because they accept them. So Theists are associated with the idea that there is a God because they judge it to be true; and Naturalists are associated with Naturalism for the same reason. But the sceptic is not associated with sceptical theses because he actively judges them to be true. In fact, on the strongest interpretation of his position, he does not judge that the sceptical thesis is true. The sceptic does not judge anything to be true at all. The defining characteristic of the sceptic is his distinctive outlook – that of universal suspension of judgement[12].

The sceptic is, nevertheless like everyone else. He is naturally inclined to believe various things as a result of his upbringing and cultural background. The sceptic passively "goes along" with those inclinations, never judging them to be true or false (Machuca, 2009, 116-118)[13].

This account of the sceptic's mental life paints him as distancing himself from his own psychological conviction. One way to think about that distancing is like this. Suppose that I say to you "there are ghosts in my back garden!". You come to the garden to investigate and I swear to you that I saw them last night, even though you do not see them at the moment. Suppose that as a result you do not believe me. Despite you not judging that there are ghosts in the garden, you can appreciate that I am quite convinced that there are. The sceptic takes that very stance towards his own beliefs. He finds himself with all sorts of inclinations to believe things – perhaps even very strong ones. He passively goes along with them as far as he needs to for practical purposes[14]. But he never consciously judges them to be true or more credible than alternatives. The latter is just the sort of thing which (S*) says that we ought not to do.

The view that we ought to suspend judgement about everything is, therefore, not one which the

12 Bailey (2007, 142) interprets Sextus as having been lead, psychologically, to total suspension of judgement by Agrippa's Trilemma. The trilemma causes Sextus to suspend about everything, including the premises and conclusion of the trilemma itself. Sextus then uses the trilemma to try and lure others into suspension of judgement as well, even though he no longer finds the argument persuasive. I do not have much to say about the sceptic's own suspension of judgement here. For the full account, see Bailey (2007).

13 The distinction is Sextus' (2000).

14 It should be noted here that the sceptic need not go along with *all* of his inclinations. He needs only to yield to those that allow him to live a happy and fruitful life. How exactly the sceptic should make the distinction is unclear to me.

sceptic judges to be the truth, but merely one of his psychological inclinations[15]. No self-refutation is in the offing.

Chapter 2: The Ordinary Language Critique of Scepticism

1. Linguistic Criticisms of Scepticism

Everyday we judge ourselves and others as knowing things. I take it that I know that it is Thursday. I say that my friend knows what time it is. You judge that I know some things about Philosophy. We take ourselves to know established scientific theories to be true. All of this is common-place.

Sceptics deny all of this, or so we are told by some contemporary epistemologists. In epistemology, the standard sceptical argument has the following form. "*You can know that P only if you meet condition C. But condition C cannot be met. So you cannot know that P*". In offering his argument, the sceptic tries to convince us that even though we say that we know things all of the time, we are always saying something false.

Many philosophers concur with this understanding of Scepticism. Here are some samples:

> All knowledge, says the skeptic, must be grounded in good reasons. But not any reason is a good reason--one must have reasons for believing that one's reasons are true. But this, in turn, ensures that any attempt to ground knowledge in good reasons must be inadequate. For either (a) one's reasons will go on in an infinite regress, (b) they will come back in a circle, or (c) they will end arbitrarily. But none of these outcomes is satisfactory-none provides

15 If that is how the sceptic sees his Scepticism, why does he bother offering an argument for it at all? The answer is given by Sextus:

> The Skeptic, because he is philanthropist, wishes to cure by argument, as far as he can, the conceit and the rashness of the Dogmatists (Sextus, 2000).

knowledge with grounding in *good* reasons. And therefore, the skeptic concludes, knowledge is impossible (Greco, 2006, 9).

The only way a skeptical philosopher can hope to move her audience, after all, is by appealing to things that seem unremarkable and ordinary to say about the nature and extent of our knowledge, and showing how from these things it follows that we have much less knowledge than we are wont to say we have (Kaplan, 2018).

"we want a response to [the sceptical] paradox that preserves our belief that we know things" (Cohen, 2000, 100).

For skeptical arguments... threaten to show, not only that we fail to meet very high requirements for knowledge of interest only to misguided philosophers seeking absolute certainty, but that we don't meet even the truth conditions of ordinary, out-on-the-street knowledge attributions. They thus threaten to establish the startling result that we never, or almost never, truthfully ascribe knowledge to ourselves or to other mere mortals (DeRose, 1995, 4).

The philosopher who understands Scepticism this way has a pretty simple and devastating critique to offer. Here again are some samples:

knowledge is true belief resulting from a reliable process... The picture of knowledge that results is foundationalist in structure: A foundation of non-inferential knowledge, produced by non-inferential but reliable processes, provides the basis for further knowledge, produced by reliable inferences from the foundations. On this account, the skeptic is just wrong to think that all knowledge must be grounded in good reasons. Put another way, the skeptic is just wrong to think that all knowledge producing processes are reasoning processes(Greco, 2006, 10)[16].

Externalist Theories [of the ordinary meaning of "knowledge"] are regularly developed as theories of the nature of knowledge generally and not simply as

16 Greco is not a straightforward Reliabilist, contra what this quotation might suggest. For his more detailed analysis, see Greco (2007).

theories of non-inferential knowledge. But they still have a peculiar importance in the case of non-inferential knowledge *because they serve to solve the problem of the infinite regress* [my italics] (Armstrong, 1973, 157)[17].

according to contextualists, the skeptic, in presenting her argument, manipulates the semantic standards for knowledge, thereby creating a context in which she can truthfully say that we know nothing or very little. Once the standards have been so raised, we correctly sense that we only could falsely claim to know such things as that we have hands. Why then are we puzzled? Why don't we simply accept the skeptic's conclusion and henceforth refrain from ascribing such knowledge to ourselves or others? Be cause, the contextualist continues, we also realize this: As soon as we find ourselves in more ordinary conversational contexts, it will not only be true for us to claim to know the very things that the skeptic now denies we know, but it will also be wrong for us to deny that we know these things. But then, isn't the skeptic's present denial equally false? And wouldn't it be equally true for us now, in the skeptic's presence, to claim to know? What we fail to realize, according to the contextualist solution, is that the skeptic's present denials that we know various things are perfectly compatible with our ordinary claims to know those very propositions. Once we realize this, we can see how both the skeptic's denials of knowledge and our ordinary attributions of knowledge can be correct (DeRose, 1995, 4-5).

it seemed that the point of the argument was (a) to display a set of claims about the extent and nature of our knowledge to which we recognize ourselves to be committed and (b) to show that these claims jointly lead to disaster...Austin's response shows that the argument, at least to this extent, fails to accomplish the first of its two objectives: a crucial premise of the argument [the one about the meaning of "knowledge"!]... does not seem to be among our commitments, if ordinary practice is any guide (Kaplan, 2011, 353).

Despite the lengthy expositions, the criticism is quite simple. The sceptic does not understand the way that the word "know" is ordinarily used (Hill, 1999; Goldman,

17 My emphasis.

1995; Bergman, 2011; Greco, 2011; 2000; Kaplan, 2000; 2011; Cohen, 2000; DeRose, 1995). For Externalist philosophers [Greco, Armstrong, Hill, Goldman, Bergman], the sceptic just flatly defines knowledge in a non-ordinary way. For Contextualists [Cohen and DeRose], the sceptic fails to recognize that the standards for correctly saying "I know that P" change with context. On either view, the sceptic fails to show that ordinary assertions like "I know that P" are false, so Scepticism is undermined[18]. Break out the champaign.

2. Scepticism Defeated?

Has the Sceptic been unravelled? One place we might have questions is with the critic's starting conception of Scepticism. According to the critic, Scepticism is the denial of knowledge-attributions, but is that right? The critics I have mentioned almost never quote sceptics who have explicitly said (never-mind argued) that knowledge attributions are false. Typically, the denial of knowledge-attributions is just ham-fisted into the sceptic's mouth for the critic to begin his discussion. It seems dubious to me, however, that sceptics really have meant to deny ordinary knowledge attributions. It is hard to find passages in, for example, Sextus Empiricus or Hume where they say anything like "when ordinary people say that they know things, what they are saying is false". In fact, Sextus would no doubt reject outright Greco's interpretation of the modes of Agrippa in the passage above.

These are, of course, historical claims on my part, and they are not claims which I propose to defend presently. Still, whether or not sceptic's have meant to defend the views attributed to them above, I hold that the knowledge-attribution conception of Scepticism and the associated criticisms of it are both confused, not because sceptic's have not historically denied knowledge-attributions, but because there is a far stronger and more interesting way for the sceptic to develop his position than in the direction of denying knowledge attributions.

In what follows I will explore that way of developing the sceptic's position. Section 3

18 For lucidity, I will continue to speak of this criticism as the idea that "the sceptic presupposes a non-ordinary definition of knowledge". That isn't quite an accurate characterization of Contextualist approaches to Scepticism, but those approaches do share the basic idea which I want to discuss.

makes an analogy between the critics above and a similar critic of debates about the existence of God. Section 4 concerns the critic's argument that there is no philosophically significant alternative version of Scepticism to the knowledge-attribution conception of Scepticism. The sections which follow show that argument to be of no force whatsoever, and develop an alternative conception of Scepticism.

3. An Analogy: Theism and The Problem of Evil

Suppose that Richard and Graham argue about whether or not there is a God[19]. They argue in the usual ways – Graham with the argument from evil; Richard with the fine-tuning argument. Now suppose I walk in and I tell Richard and Graham that the truth conditions of ordinary statements like "God exists" are just these: (i) religious practices and beliefs make a lot of people happy and (ii) lots of people believe very confidently that something created the universe. Suppose that I manage to convince Richard and Graham that that's what "God exists" *means*. I think if I interrupted the debate in this way, neither Richard nor Graham would have any idea what I was trying to do. They might come to agree with me that "God exists" means what I say that it does, for most ordinary English speakers, but they would surely insist that the point is of no significance at all for their debate. Moreover, Graham, even though he says things like "God does not exist" in his debate with Richard, would laugh at the suggestion that his view was false or his arguments unsound because of my quibbles about the *words* "God exists". Graham and Richard would unite in explaining to me:

> "we have already agreed that we will mean by 'God exists' that there is some thing which is all good, all powerful, all knowing and created the universe. Never mind what other people mean. Don't get us wrong, its very interesting that other people mean something different, but it doesn't have anything to do with our debate".

Graham and Richard can properly lecture me in this way because their views are not about the *words* "God exists" as used in ordinary English. Richard is not saying that when ordinary people say "God exists", what they are saying is true, and Graham is not saying that when ordinary people say "God exists", what they are saying is false. Their views are about whether there is in reality a certain entity, defined in a specific way. Moreover, the interesting and philosophically significant positions that Graham and Richard could take are those about whether there is in reality an entity

19 Richard and Graham are of course Swinburne (1999) and Oppy (2006).

which meets their definitions. The parallel positions about whether ordinary people are speaking truly in saying “God exists” are just besides the point.

These same ideas are applicable in discussions of Scepticism. When faced with the criticisms of Goldman, Greco, etc, the sceptic will surely reply:

> “What I mean by 'knowledge', never-mind what anyone else means, is belief that meets such-and-such conditions. I am interested in convincing you that you do not know anything, in my sense of that word. Don't get me wrong, its very interesting that other people mean something different, but it doesn't have anything to do with what I am trying to do”.

4. Is Scepticism Significant?

Let's say that Semantic Scepticism is the view that ordinary knowledge attributions are false. If the sceptic responds to his critics in the way I paint him as responding in the last section, then he cannot be a Semantic Sceptic. He must agree that when people say things like “I know that P”, what they are saying is true. His only qualification will be that he wants to convince the dogmatist that he does not know anything, *in the sceptic's sense of “knows”*. But then, the critics will say, that conclusion is of no significance whatsoever.

To illustrate, suppose that someone claims that there are no doctors in London. This will at first sound completely absurd, and if he manages to produce a seemingly cogent argument for this conclusion, we will be astonished – astonished because we all thought that there were doctors in London, and the critic has shown otherwise. But suppose that when we press the critic and ask him what he means by 'doctor' he replies that he means a person who can cure any logically possible illness. At this point we will cease to be alarmed by the critic's conclusions. What he says is *true*. There are no doctors in the sense that he has in mind, but this need not alarm or worry us because we never thought there were in the first place. Our cause for concern came from the fact that we took the critic to be arguing that there are no doctors in *the ordinary sense* of the word, and that is just what we believe there are – doctors in the ordinary sense. And the critic has done nothing to show that our belief is false[20]. The critic's

20 This way of fleshing out the critic's position is due to Stroud (2008, 40-41) and, begins with Austin (1946). See also

argument is unsound if concerning the ordinary sense of doctor, and uninteresting otherwise.

That is just what the sceptic's argument is like, says the critic. We find the sceptic's conclusion absurd, but then once he explains what he means to say, we find his conclusion boring because it does not contradict anything that we believe.

5. Does the Sceptic Contradict What I Believe?

I find this way of thinking somewhat baffling. It isn't as though a necessary condition for something being interesting for me is that it contradict some belief of mine or use words in the same way as me. Interesting things can be framed in new concepts and concern things about which I currently have no opinion at all. Moreover, what makes the doctor argument uninteresting isn't either that it fails to contradict something which we believe or that it uses the word “doctor” in a non-ordinary way. What makes it uninteresting is just that we already knew very well that there were no people who can cure every logically possible illness, and so its no surprise to be told so.

Even setting that aside, it is far from clear that usual sceptical arguments do not contradict anything that I ordinarily believe. The critic's reply hinges crucially on the claim that if the sceptic does not contradict our belief that we have knowledge of the world, then he does not contradict *anything* that we believe. This is a clear non-sequitur. It does not follow from the fact that the sceptic does not contradict one belief of mine, that he does not contradict any belief of mine.

Consider the sceptic who says that nobody knows anything about the physical world. It is logically possible that the sceptic's conclusion, although it does not contradict our belief that we know about the world, nevertheless contradicts *something else* that we ordinarily believe. Let X stand for the stipulated meaning of the sceptic's word “know”, whatever that meaning is. When the sceptic says we cannot know about the world around us, he says:

Kaplan's (2008) treatment of Austin's argument. Although many philosophers are prepared to assert in conversation that the sceptic's conclusions are of no significance whatsoever if compatible with ordinary knowledge attributions, few seem prepared to argue for it in print. Thomas Uebel, for example, once remarked to me that such a Scepticism is “for the birds”, but he gave no argument for it.

(4) We cannot X about the world around us.

Now, it is logically possible that I possess both of these distinct beliefs:

(5) I do know about the world around me.
(6) I do X about the world around me.

We may suppose that the sense of "know" in (5) is the ordinary sense and that the sceptic's X is not that ordinary meaning. Then, although my belief which I would express by (5) does not contradict (4), I might have a different belief, (6), which *does* contradict (4). Furthermore, my belief that contradicts (5) need not be so explicit as (6). Suppose that I have another concept, "schnowledge" which is such that X is a necessary condition for "schnowing" something. Then I might hold both (5) and:

(7) I do schnow about the world around me.

And (7) does contradict (4). Thus it is not true that if the sceptic's definition of "knowledge" is not the ordinary one, then his conclusion does not contradict anything that we ordinarily believe.

This is how the matter stands with respect to logic. An anonymous referee responded to this point claiming that, while it is correct, it makes no difference. Sure, the reply goes, we might have all sorts of beliefs which contradict (4), but the only relevant point is that (4) does not contradict our belief that we have knowledge.

I do not see why this must be the only relevant point at all. If the sceptic has a sound argument for a conclusion which contradicts something that we believe, I do not see why the fact that the contradicting belief is not the belief that we have knowledge should somehow undercut the significance of the sceptic's conclusion. After all, he would still refute something which we believe.

Certainly, if we are thinking of the sceptic as someone who aims *solely* to refute our belief that we have knowledge, the fact that his conclusion does not contradict that belief would be the only relevant point, but we are currently exploring whether there is any *other way* for the sceptic to develop his views, and so to insist that the only relevant point is whether the sceptic contradicts my belief that I have knowledge is to beg the question.

The sceptic might, for example, aim to refute our belief that our evidence favours ordinary beliefs about the world over the dream hypothesis, and if we really do have that belief, he will succeed in contradicting something that we believe. If he is the Pyrrhonian, he might aim to refute our belief that we have any reason at all to hold any belief whatsoever, and if we really do have that belief, he will succeed in contradicting us. If the critique is to provide a solution to the problem of Scepticism, it must really be a solution to the problem. It won't do for the critique to show merely that Scepticism is not in conflict with beliefs about knowledge while conceding that it is in conflict with various other beliefs of ours. Such a "solution" is so in name only. It must be claimed that Scepticism does not contradict *any* belief of ours[21].

It might be countered, however, that we simply do not have the belief that our evidence favours ordinary beliefs about the world over the dream hypothesis, nor the belief that we have good reasons for at least some belief or other. It might even be added that once I realize that my belief, (5), does not involve a sense of "know" a necessary condition for which is X, I will be able to see that I never really believed that I could do what the sceptic says I cannot. Once we clear aside the confusions which arise when we frame the issue in terms of "knowledge", perhaps it is just obvious that I never did believe that I could tell whether or not I was dreaming. Perhaps it is plain that I never did believe that there were good reasons to hold my own system of beliefs over any other. Perhaps, it might be said, I was only tempted to think that I did believe these things because the sceptic tricked me into accepting a necessary condition for knowledge which is not one of my ordinary conditions.

This last argument is incredibly presumptuous about what I do and do not believe, and more generally what most people do and do not believe. It presumes, in the Cartesian case, that nobody really ever believed that their evidence favoured that they are sitting at their desks over the hypothesis that they are dreaming, and that they were only tempted to suppose that they believed it because they got confused by the sceptic's use of the concept of "knowledge". I can only speak for myself in saying that I really think that I did believe, prior to considering the sceptic's argument, that my evidence favoured the view that I was not dreaming. This is why when I considered what

21 You could combine the ordinary language critique with something else to obtain a full solution. You could argue, for example, that the ordinary language critique takes care of Scepticism about knowledge whilst something else takes care of Scepticism of another sort. But this is never what proponents of the critique do. Their papers and books argue that the sceptic uses a mistaken definition of "knowledge" and that is the full extent of the criticism.

Descartes had to say about there being no marks by which to tell whether or not one was awake or asleep, I was every bit as astonished as he was. If this is right, then the sceptic's conclusion does contradict something that I believe. Equally, I am sure that I really do believe that I have good reasons for at least most of what I believe – reasons which make those beliefs superior to alternative beliefs I might have held instead. I leave the reader to determine whether they too have these beliefs.

6. Substantive Scepticism

The sceptic's conclusions might well be interesting and significant even if they are compatible with ordinary knowledge attributions and *even if they do not contradict something that we believe*. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that the ordinary meaning of knowledge turned out to be merely "belief held very confidently". Of course, the sceptic will not deny that there are such beliefs. If it were true, would it follow that there is no interesting way for the sceptic to develop his position? Surely not. Surely he could argue that although ordinary knowledge attributions are true (because many people believe things confidently), there is still no reason to believe anything at all, and nobody ought to believe anything either. He could add, moreover, that because of these two points, nobody knows anything *in his sense of the word,* and, that what is ordinarily called "knowledge" is really quite pathetic. It is a mere charade of little to no value. This, at any rate, would be the pessimistic assessment that he tries to convince us to make.

Call this pessimistic assessment of ordinary human knowledge, "Substantive Scepticism", to contrast it with Semantic Scepticism. The sceptic then tries to lead us into Substantive Scepticism. It seems to me that Substantive Scepticism would be an interesting and significant sceptical position, even if the sceptic conceded that ordinary knowledge attributions are true and that Substantive Scepticism might well not contradict any of our pre-theoretical opinions – perhaps we just never stopped to think about any of these things before.

7. Jackson and Ordinary Concepts

Despite my insistence that Substantive Scepticism is a philosophically significant view, some philosophers will demur. Frank Jackson, discussing conceptual analysis, writes:

> If I say that what I mean—never mind what others mean—by a free action is one such that the agent would have done otherwise if he or she had chosen to, then the existence of free actions so conceived will be secured, and so will the compatibility of free action with determinism. If I say that what I mean—never mind what others mean—by 'belief' is any information-carrying state that causes subjects to utter sentences like 'I believe that snow is white', the existence of beliefs so conceived will be safe from the eliminativists' arguments. But in neither case will I have much of an audience. I have turned interesting philosophical debates into easy exercises in deductions from stipulative definitions together with accepted facts. What then are the interesting philosophical questions that we are seeking to address when we debate the existence of free action and its compatibility with determinism, or about eliminativism concerning intentional psychology? What we are seeking to address is whether free action according to our ordinary conception, or something suitably close to our ordinary conception, exists and is compatible with determinism, and whether intentional states according to our ordinary conception, or something suitably close to it, will survive what cognitive science reveals about the operations of our brains (Jackson, 2008, 31).

According to Jackson, the interesting philosophical questions are questions couched in terms of our ordinary concepts. Presumably what he says about "free action" and "belief" is the same sort of thing he would say about "knowledge". So, Jackson would argue that the interesting question about knowledge is whether or not we have "knowledge" in our ordinary sense of "knowledge". Thus, if the sceptic has an argument that we do not know anything, but his concept of knowledge is non-ordinary, his conclusion will not be that interesting. Why not? Jackson makes two points. The first is that using non-ordinary concepts in philosophical discussion turns interesting philosophical debates into 'easy exercises in deductions from stipulative definitions together with accepted facts'. The second is that if I frame my discussions using non-ordinary concepts I will not have much of an audience.

Consider Jackson's first point. A lot depends on whether the sceptic's argument is an "easy deduction", and that obviously depends on which argument is at stake. If the argument up for discussion is Agrippa's Trilemma, its far from clear to me that the three options Sextus gives us – regress, circularity and hypothesis – are really the only three logically possible options. If that's right, there might be other options worth exploring. Certainly at least some philosophers have thought that there are – perhaps a view on which there are self-evident or indubitable truths from

which other things can be inferred. Similar reflections hold with Cartesian sceptical arguments that depend on the assumption that I cannot tell – just by looking – that I am sitting at my desk and not deceived by an evil demon or having a grand hallucination. At least some philosophers have thought that I really can tell, or that if I can't, I can at least argue the claim that I am sitting at my desk from some more secure starting point. Now, I am not saying that any of these options will be in the end satisfactory, but to take it that none of these accounts is viable and assume that if we grant the sceptic his definition of "knowledge", his Scepticism follows as an "easy deduction", is to take quite a controversial position without much – if any – argument.

Yet, let us grant that the sceptic's argument is an easy deduction from stipulated definitions. I am not sure what relevance this has to the question of whether or not the sceptic's argument is interesting, since there is no reason to suppose that an interesting argument must be very complex. I am inclined to think that a simple argument for an independently interesting conclusion is more interesting than a complex argument for the same, because a simpler argument seems less likely to contain a mistake.

Turn now to Jackson's second point that a sceptical argument would not have much of an audience if it deploys non-ordinary concepts. Is it true that people are generally not interested in concepts which are different to their own? Many people are interested in scientific theories, even though the concepts used in science are very different to the concepts used in everyday life. What strikes at least some people as interesting about philosophy is precisely that it gives one the opportunity to consider radically different ways of viewing the world. There is no reason to suppose that using non-ordinary concepts makes people less likely to take an interest in sceptical arguments.

8. Too High Standards

I suspect that behind all of the insistence that Substantive Scepticism is not philosophically significant and the insistence that Semantic Scepticism is the only kind worth discussing is the old thought that the sceptic presupposes absurdly high standards for knowledge. The idea is, not merely that the standards of the sceptic are non-ordinary, but that they are just unnecessarily high; so high that it doesn't really matter if we can't meet them. The sceptic, according to the old critic, is just whining that our beliefs don't meet some very intense set of standards that only a philosopher like Descartes would fantasize about. That this does lie in the background is quite clear in the passage

from DeRose quoted earlier:

> For skeptical arguments... threaten to show, not only that we fail to meet *very high requirements for knowledge of interest only to misguided philosophers seeking absolute certainty*, but that we don't meet even the truth conditions of ordinary, out-on-the-street knowledge attributions. They thus threaten to establish the startling result that we never, or almost never, truthfully ascribe knowledge to ourselves or to other mere mortals (DeRose, 1995, 4)[22].

DeRose writes here as though there are only two options for the sceptic. Either he whines about our inability to reach absolute certainty, or he denies "out-on-the-street" knowledge attributions. If he takes the former line, we can object that absolute certainty is a ludicrously high demand of interest "only to misguided philosophers" and settle for lower standards. If he takes the latter line, he must use the word "knowledge" in its "out-on-the-street" sense and show that knowledge attributions are false. This is a false dilemma. The sceptic could set fairly modest standards for "knowledge", far short of absolute certainty, and yet take no interest at all in "out-on-the-street" knowledge attributions. That option is made quite attractive by the fact that contemporary arguments for Scepticism don't presuppose absolutely certain standards for knowledge. Their requirements are in fact fairly modest. I won't go into what exactly those standards are now – though I think they are *far* more humble than generally assumed. I'll just point out that the standards aren't ones of absolute certainty.

A number of pressing sceptical arguments work given the empiricist assumption that the only ways that humans have of knowing things about the world are sense perception and inferences from things learnt by sense perception.

There is the contemporary Cartesian Sceptical argument (Vogel, 2004). Say that two things, x and y, are perceptually indistinguishable to you only if x and y effect your visual system (they produces the same retinal image, or the same pattern of activity in the optic nerve), in the same way (Vogel, 1997, 16). For example, Homer will be perceptually indistinguishable from a molecule for molecule replica of Homer just when the two would have the same effect on your visual system. The sceptic will maintain that if Homer is perceptually indistinguishable to you from his replica, then you do not know just by looking that who you are looking at is Homer, and the same for any x and y. Of

22 My emphasis.

course, my sitting at my desk (or any similar proposition about the physical world) is perceptually indistinguishable from classic sceptical hypotheses, like that I am a brain-in-a-vat having a massive hallucination. So I cannot know by perception that I am sitting at my desk. Or plainly, since I cannot tell just by looking that I am not in a sceptical scenario, I cannot know just by looking that I am sitting at my desk (Vogel, 1997). Combine that thought with the thought that, there is no good argument from anything I can know by sense perception to the claim that I am sitting at my desk, and we arrive at the conclusion that I cannot know that I am sitting there at all. The requirement for knowledge here isn't that, for any P, to know that P, S must be absolutely certain that P, but just that P can only be known either by perceptually distinguishing it from alternatives or by inferring it from things known by perception. The sceptic is free to say that any such inference could be merely probabilistic in character, so that his standards are a long way from a general requirement of certainty.

The idea that being able to perceptually distinguish x from y is a necessary condition for knowing by perception that x, will allow for the same sort of argument against our knowing that anyone else has feelings, emotions or thoughts. After all, a person with a mind has the same effect on my visual system as a mindless zombie who looks just like a person, and most philosophers think the usual arguments for the existence of other minds are painfully weak. Note again the requirement for "knowledge" here is not a general requirement of absolute certainty. The sceptic would be happy with either your being able to tell by perception that other people have minds, or with your giving an argument for it, and the argument need not be iron-clad; a good argument from analogy or inference to the best explanation would do the trick. Are there any other ways that humans can know things about the world beyond their own minds than by sense-perception and inferences from what we learn by perception? The dominant empiricist tradition in philosophy says otherwise, and no-one has yet defended any other source[23].

I have defended a sceptical argument against knowing that anything ever exists when we aren't looking (or otherwise perceiving) (Burns, 2017). I suspect that the argument can be run on most of the definitions of "knowledge" which contemporary philosophers favour, but it works given the currently popular sort of definition where knowledge means something like "true belief produced by a reliable process". The basic idea is this. I can know that something about the physical world is the case only by perception or inference from things I know by sense perception. But I cannot know that anything exists when I'm not perceiving it *by perception*, because that is a contradiction. On the

23 See Gomes (forthcoming) for more on this.

assumption that I cannot know by inference that things exist when I'm not looking – and no one has ever made the argument – then I cannot know it at all. The belief seems to be completely groundless in any sense you might care about. Lest you think that the belief that things exist when you aren't perceiving them is of little consequence, if I do not know such things, then I don't know that any of my friends or family exist when I'm not around, nor that my kitchen exists when I'm not in it, nor even that the wall behind me exists when I'm not looking at it!

There is, of course, also the Agrippan Trilemma, which only sets the standard for knowledge at having some non-question begging reason for the belief, no matter how weak the reason is. Yes the sceptic asks that you have such a reason for every belief, but that is still a long way short of a general insistence on certainty.

The point of Scepticism, as I am here thinking of it, is not that ordinary knowledge claims are false. It is, rather, that ordinary knowledge is *just not that impressive* – perhaps it is even downright pathetic. It might be that, in the ordinary sense of "knows", we know all sorts of things. But the sceptic, on the position I am here offering him, tries to convince us that our system of beliefs or "knowledge" is depressingly doubtful, fragile and insecure. Ordinary human knowledge is in this sense a charade of little to no value[24].

In the face of the sceptic's pessimism, its always open to the dogmatist to make the too high-standards objection whenever he feels under pressure. When the standards are set at certainty and the sceptic argues that nothing can meet them, the dogmatist complains of the sceptic's fantastically high standards, and lowers the standards to good but inconclusive reasons. When the sceptic argues that nothing can meet them either, the dogmatist complains again that the standards are pointlessly demanding, and abandons the demand for reasons all together, saying that its enough when a belief is just caused in a reliable way. When the sceptic argues that a lot of the dogmatists beliefs don't meet that standard either, the anti-sceptic might complain yet again, and retreat even further. How many of these moves are acceptable? When should we just admit that the sceptic's pessimistic attitude towards our belief system is a sensible one?

24Greco (2006, 31) writes in this context that "*even if there is some sense in which one does not really know without [meeting the sceptic's standards for knowledge], it does not follow... that knowledge in any ordinary sense requires that.*"

That is indisputably true, but the substantive sceptic is not claiming otherwise.

That is what the issue comes down to. Is the sceptic right to despair that we cannot meet his standards, or is he foolishly whining about our inability to meet fantastically high standards? The critic might say the latter, but if that is what is wrong with Scepticism, the problem *isn't* that his standards aren't the ordinary ones[25].

Chapter 3: Phenomenal Conservatism

1. Phenomenal Conservatism: An Initial Characterization

According to Chris Tucker (2013, 1), *"it is natural to think that many of our beliefs are rational because they are based on... the way things seem"*. He gives several examples. In the first, you believe that there is a paper document because "*it seems visually that way*" (Tucker, 2013, 1). In the second, I believe that I had cereal this morning because "*I seem to remember eating it*" (Tucker, 2013, 1). Whether or not this is a 'natural' view I do not know, but it is a philosophical view by the name of Phenomenal Conservatism, and it has gained a decent following. Huemer (2013) defines Phenomenal Conservatism in the following way:

> *(Phenomenal Conservatism)* For any subject S and any proposition P, in the absence of defeaters, if it seems to S that P, S thereby has at least some degree of justification for believing that P.

Huemer (2001, 22) says in one place that a justified belief is one that *should* be believed. In another place, he writes that unjustified beliefs are "*what one could be blamed for believing*" (Huemer, 2001, 97). So Huemer recommends Phenomenal Conservatism as a standard for acceptable belief. William Lycan explicitly puts it as a rule about how we ought to believe: "*Accept at the outset each of those things that seem to be true*" (Lycan, 1988, 165). He takes that rule to be the same as Phenomenal Conservatism (Lycan, 2013).

Various forms of Conservatism are defended in contemporary philosophy. One form is Conservatism simpliciter, which says that any seeming that P provides justification for believing that P; the source of the seemings is irrelevant. That position is defended by Huemer (2001; 2013). Some philosophers defend restricted forms of Conservatism, for instance, the claim that *perceptual*

25 For more on Semantic Scepticism and knowledge attributions, see Appendix A for a digression.

seemings confer justification (Pryor, 2000) or Mnemonic seemings (Pollock and Cruz, 1999), or Moral seemings (Huemer, 2005). These specific claims are compatible with Conservatism simpliciter. Pryor, for instance, claims that perceptual seemings are a source of justification, but he does not say that other seemings are not. But, there are also versions of Conservatism which say that *only* certain kinds of seeming confer justification, or what amounts to the same, that we should form beliefs guided by how things seem to us only in certain areas and not others (Brogaard, 2013; Markie, 2013).

Huemer proposes that Phenomenal Conservatism is a response to Pyrrhonian Scepticism (Huemer 2013, 349 ; Huemer, 2018). This chapter explains how. Section 2 takes a look at how Huemer, in the seminal formulation of the view, took Phenomenal Conservatism to bare on Scepticism. Huemer's discussion there is unfortunately muddled, but there is a much clearer way of using Phenomenal Conservatism to critique Scepticism, and I offer it to Huemer in section 3.

2. Huemer and Agrippa's Trilemma

What does Phenomenal Conservatism have to do with Pyrrhonian Scepticism? Although many of its advocates take it to provide a powerful anti-sceptical epistemology, the only person to have explicitly considered how this might be so is Michael Huemer.

In *Skepticism and the Veil of Perception* (2001), Huemer defines Scepticism as "*any philosophical theory that challenges a significant class of common sense beliefs*" (Huemer, 2001, 18). As examples of 'common-sense' Huemer lists these: I am a human being. I have two hands. I have spent my life at or near the surface of the earth. I have thoughts and feelings. There are other people in the world. They have bodies. They also have thoughts and feelings. The earth has existed for many years. It generally gets colder in the winter than it is in the summer. 2 is greater than 1. there is a table in front of me now (Huemer, 2001, 18). He says of these propositions that they are accepted by almost everyone regardless of culture or time period; that they tend to be taken fore-granted in ordinary life and that "*if a person believes contrary to one of these propositions, then it is a sign of insanity*" (Huemer, 2001, 18).

Huemer writes that a challenge to a proposition, P, is a claim that "*could not be rationally accepted in conjunction with P, in that it would be inherently self-defeating to do so*" (Huemer, 2001, 19). He

gives, again, several examples: It is raining, but I don't believe it. It is raining, but that's not true. It is raining, but I have no reason to think so. It is raining, but the reasons I have for believing that are false. It is raining, but I don't know whether it is or not (Huemer, 2001, 19). With this definition of Scepticism at hand, Huemer distinguishes between different sorts of Scepticism. First, there are sceptics who argue that some significant number of common sense beliefs are false. Second, there are sceptics who argue that common sense beliefs are not known to be true, and third, there are sceptics who argue that common sense beliefs are unjustified (Huemer, 2001, 20). Which common sense beliefs are challenged by the sceptic may vary, so that there are moral sceptics, inductive sceptics, external world sceptics, sceptics about the past, sceptics about common sense *tout court*, and so on.

Next, Huemer identifies the sort of Scepticism that he will confront as that which "*holds that (some significant class of) common sense beliefs are not at all justified, which is to say: there is no reason to believe that they are true*" (Huemer, 2001, 20). He identifies Agrippa's Trilemma as I characterized in Chapter 1 and puts the following argument in the sceptic's mouth (citing Sextus Empiricus and I.T Oakley):

Huemer's Trilemma

(6) In order to know something, I must have a good reason for believing it.

(7) Any chain of reasons must have one of the following structures: Either (a) It is an infinite series, (b) it is circular, or (c) it begins with a belief for which there are no further reasons.

(8) I cannot have an infinitely long chain of reasoning for any of my beliefs.

(9) Circular reasoning cannot produce knowledge.

(10) Nor can I gain knowledge by structure 2c, for (a) I would not know my starting beliefs to be true (from (1)) and (b) I cannot gain knowledge by deriving it from assumptions that I do not know to be true.

(11) Therefore, I cannot know anything.

Notice that because Huemer is concerned with the sceptic who says we have no reason to believe anything at all, the talk about knowledge is really superfluous. One could simply construe the conclusion as "I cannot have any reason to believe anything" and then eliminate the first premise all together, but for some reason this is not what Huemer does.

In any case, Huemer has several different responses to this form of Scepticism. His first is to argue

that Scepticism is self-defeating because if it is true then even the sceptic cannot have any reason to believe his own conclusions (Huemer, 2001, 27-31), an objection with which we have already dealt. He then defends the "G.E Moore shift". Following Moore, Huemer claims that it is 'more plausible' that one of the premises of the sceptical argument is false than that he cannot know, or even have any reason to believe, anything at all. I set these arguments aside for the moment, because we are looking for a response which deploys the principle of Phenomenal Conservatism specifically.

After having explicated Phenomenal Conservatism in some detail and replied to several objections, Huemer returns to the above sceptical argument. He tells us that there are two ways of interpreting the phrase "to have a reason for". On the first interpretation, the sceptic means to demand that for any belief, B, we have some other belief, N, from which B can be cogently inferred. If this is what the sceptic means, then, Huemer says, (6) is false, because we might know something by "*having a non-belief state of awareness that supports*" it – that is, we might know something by way of it seeming to us to be true (Huemer, 2001, 177). Another interpretation of 'have a reason for', says Huemer, is "*to have some sort of mental state that renders justified*" (Huemer, 2001, 177). If that is what the sceptic means, then according to Huemer (10) is false, because I can know something by inferring it from a belief for which there are no further reasons, so long as that belief seems to me to be true[26] (Huemer, 2001, 178).

This assessment is puzzling, because it seems to rely crucially on construing the sceptic as arguing that nobody knows anything, but Huemer's official target is the sceptic who says that we have no reason to believe anything, and that sceptic need not have any premise about knowledge as a part of his argument. The Pyrrhonian sceptic *could* just grant to Huemer that you can know something without having any reason to believe it. Perhaps you can even know something if it seems to you to be true, but, the Pyrrhonian will insist, this does not change the fact that there is no reason to believe anything at all – his main point. I do not see, therefore, how what Huemer says here is supposed to bare on Pyrrhonian Scepticism even as he himself originally understood it.

3. A Reconstruction

There is another way to take Phenomenal Conservatism so as to make a seemingly powerful response to Scepticism. Huemer and the other advocates of Phenomenal Conservatism mean to

26 This should not be understood as the thought that I can know that P by inferring it from Q, where Q seems to me to be true *but is in fact false*. Huemer's concept of knowledge has, like most philosophers, truth as a necessary condition.

defend it as an ethics of belief, and so perhaps that is a clue as to how the response to Scepticism should be taken.

The sceptic tries to lure the dogmatist into suspension of judgement. His strategy is just to repeatedly demand reasons for any and everything that the dogmatist believes. When the dogmatist runs out of reasons, the sceptic hopes he will suspend. The dogmatist will only suspend, however, if he thinks that, he ought to believe something only if he is capable of answering all of the sceptic's questions. The Phenomenal Conservative, however, will reject that last view. He will insist that it is appropriate (at least to some degree), to hold a belief just because it seems to you to be true. Of course, if the dogmatist says to the sceptic, “I believe that P because it seems to me that P”, the sceptic will say, “Why believe that how things seem to you is how things are?”, but the Phenomenal Conservative will here insist that dogmatist does not need to answer that last question. Dogmatist is entitled to believe that P just because it seems to him that P, even if he could not answer any further questions. If we become Phenomenal Conservatives, the sceptic cannot lure us into suspension.

The question we are left with is whether this is plausible. In the next chapter, I argue that it isn't.

Chapter 4: Do Seemings Exist?

In saying that we should accept, at least to some degree and absent defeaters, what seems to be true, Phenomenal Conservatives commit themselves to the existence of certain mental states. They commit themselves to what they call “seemings”, where these are the mental states we are allegedly in when we say things like “it seems to me that P”. I doubt, however, that there are any such states, and here I explain why.

Section 1 clarifies what exactly Phenomenal Conservatives are committed to. Section 2 points out that they have not given any literal characterization of what a seeming actually is, and so no clear articulation of their view. Sections 3 and 4 discuss the main arguments for the existence of seemings. I claim that neither argument is cogent.

1. What is meant by “Seems”?

In saying that something “seems” to be the case, Phenomenal Conservatives mean to say that they are having experiences with propositional content (Bealer 1999; Pryor 2000, 2004; Huemer 2001,

2007, Huemer 2013, Cullison 2010; Chudnoff 2010; Brogaard 2013, 10; Lycan 2013, Skene 2011 and Tucker 2010). When it “seems to me that P”, I am, supposedly, having an experience with the propositional content “P”. Seemings are sometimes described as having a distinctive phenomenology “*of ascertaining that a given proposition is true, or the feeling of being directly presented with the truth of a proposition*” (Moretti, 2015, 4). When it seems to me that an alarm clock is ringing, the proposition ‘an alarm clock is ringing’ has a certain feel of truth about it. It is claimed that these 'seemings' are sui generis; not reducible to any other mental states.

As I have said, seemings are supposed to be experiences with propositional content. As Huemer (2001, 71-73) expounds the view, these contents are “truth evaluable but non-conceptual”. That content represents things as being thus-and-so. To invoke Huemer's own metaphor, his position is that, for example, when it seems that there is a bent stick in water, the senses are telling you that there is a bent stick, as opposed to presenting you with meaningless qualia which you interpret as a bent stick (Huemer, 2001, 71). A seeming is an *assertive mental representation* (Tooley, 2013).

The Phenomenal Conservative view, then, is that when I have one of these experiences, I have some justification for believing the propositional content of that experience, absent defeaters.

2. Metaphors and Seemings

The concept of a seeming presupposed by Phenomenal Conservatism is rife with metaphor. The most obvious of these metaphors is the idea that seemings are assertive. The term 'assertive' is a term which ordinarily applies literally only to people. People may literally assert things, but seemings are not people and so it is not clear what can be meant by saying that the seeming 'asserts' something as true. Seemings do not say anything at all (Tooley, 2013). A similar metaphor comes out in Huemer's idea that in a perceptual seeming, the senses are telling us things about the world. Neither seemings nor senses have mouths and so cannot be literally telling us anything. Seemings could perhaps be understood as containing information, in the same way that a letter or an email contains information, but we cannot suppose that the seemings literally tell us this information, any more than it makes sense to suppose that the email literally tells us its contents. But, if the seeming does not literally tell us its contents, then unless I do the equivalent of reading the email, I cannot be aware of its content. Tooley (2013, 310-311) points out that there may be no way to replace this metaphorical talk with a more literal characterization.

Michael Huemer (2013, 328) replies to Tooley's frustration about the lack of a literal analysis of seemings. In a section labelled “Against Analysis” he writes:

> “Michael Tooley is noticably frustrated by my failure to analyze the notion of its seeming or appearing to one that P. One reason I have not tried to do so is that as far as I can tell, philosophical analysis has never succeeded... but if I offer no analysis of “seems”, won't readers be unable to understand what I mean by the term and hence unable to understand the principle of phenomenal conservatism? Fortunately there is little cause for fear... if, as I claim, there is a class of conscious mental states may be dubbed “seemings”, including states that occur during the normal operation of perception, memory, and intellectual reflection, then these states should be familiar to all normal individuals. I therefore need not provide a philosophical analysis of seemings. I need only say enough to draw readers attention to these familiar mental states” (Huemer, 2013 328-329).

The basic idea is simple. Huemer does not need to provide a literal analysis of what he means by “seemings” because he takes it that everybody is already familiar with seemings in his/her experience. All you need to do is reflect on your past experience and you will see exactly what seemings are, because you are in that mental state all the time. He does not need to explain exactly what he means, because you can see what he means.

This brings us to a more serious issue, however. Phenomenal Conservatives suppose that we are all tacitly familiar with seemings and that we only need to be pointed toward them with some illustration, but reflecting introspectively on my own mental states, I am honestly very doubtful that I am familiar with anything which might be characterized the way Huemer characterizes seemings.

I will return to this introspective point later, but first let us consider the arguments which have been made for the existence of seemings. There are two arguments for the existence of seemings. The first proceeds by citing examples in which alleged seemings cannot be identified with other more familiar states. The strategy is to eliminate the possibility of identifying alleged seemings with other more familiar mental states, thereby encouraging the conclusion that seemings must be sui generis[27]. I call this the Seems-Talk Argument. The second argument claims that seemings are part of the best explanation of the phenomenon of blind-sight. I call this the Blind-Sight Argument. In the next

27 This argument is given by Huemer (2007); Moretti, (2015); Tucker, (2010) and, regrettably, me (Burns, 2017).

section I discuss the Seems-Talk Argument.

3. The Seems -Talk Argument

It is common to talk of things seeming to be true. Cullison lists a number of examples:

> It seems that it would be wrong to torture a baby. A few months ago, I saw a video of some men decapitating another man. What they did seemed wrong to me. Recently, several musicians got together to raise money for AIDS research. It seems to me that they did something good. There are also a variety of non-moral cases. Proofs and arguments sometimes seem valid. Certain logical principles seem true. It seems that the light is coming from behind the person in this photograph. It seems that there is someone downstairs. It seems that the stick is bent (Cullison, 2010, 260).

There are two ways of turning these observations of linguistic practice into an argument for the existence of seemings construed as sui generis mental representations.

Byerly (2012) interprets the Seems-Talk Argument as the argument that "*because seeming talk is so variegated, it has been observed that no single mental state with which those who are skeptical of seemings are comfortable could be that which makes seeming talk appropriate in every instance in which it is appropriate*" (Byerly 2012, 772). Let's say that someone skeptical of seemings is someone who denies the existence of seemings construed as sui generis mental states. We may reconstruct Byerly's argument:

> *(STA)*
> (1) The use of the locution "it seems to me that..." is often appropriate in English.
> (2) The use of the locution "it seems to me that..." is appropriate only if there is some single mental state referred to by "seems".
> (3) There is no single mental state with which those who are skeptical of seemings are comfortable which could make the locution "it seems to me that..." appropriate in every instance in which it is appropriate.
> (4) The mental state referred to in "it seems to me that..." locutions must be one with which those skeptical of seemings are not comfortable.

Since those skeptical of seemings are those who are not comfortable with seemings construed as sui generis, it follows that there exist such sui generis mental states.

This interpretation relies heavily on the idea of language being appropriate or inappropriate. The trouble is that what is meant by "appropriate" is far from clear. In one obvious sense, seeming talk is appropriate: seeming talk is a standard part of regular discourse the use of which is not morally impermissible. Or, again, seeming talk is a useful way of reporting how things are whilst indicating caution, lack of assuredness and the live possibility of mistake. Seeming talk being appropriate in these senses is not sufficient for STA however, because (2) is false on these interpretations of appropriateness. Seeming talk could be appropriate in these ways even if there were no single mental state referred to by "seems". In what way, then, is seeming talk appropriate but would not be appropriate were it not for the existence of a mental state referred to by "seems"? Byerly never says, nor do proponents of the Seems-Talk Argument.

Moreover, the claim that seems talk would be inappropriate were it not for the existence of some mental state to which seems talk refers (premise (2)) strikes me as completely gratuitous. Talk may be appropriate for myriad reasons and not all of these have anything to do with whether there are items in the world picked out by the words involved. As a scientific anti-realist might tell you, it could be appropriate to talk as if there were such things as atoms, quarks and string even if there are no such things, because it is useful to talk that way. Similarly, it might be appropriate to talk as though there are such things as numbers, sets and moral truths even if there are no such things. Likewise, it might be appropriate to use seems locutions even if there were no sui generis seemings and indeed even if there were no mental states referred to by seems talk at all. For all that has been shown, seems talk could be a kind of useful fiction. It all depends upon the purpose for which we are talking. Thus, Byerly's interpretation of the Seems-Talk Argument is unsound[28]

It has been pointed out to me[29] that I have assumed here that whether or not we should use a given piece of language depends on our purposes, goals and interests, and not on whether there is some single entity in the world to which we always refer in using the word. That might strike some as a controversial assumption, and some will hold, with the proponent of STA, that a piece of language

28 Byerly's (2012) own criticism of this argument is that seems talk may be appropriate even though there are no sui generis seemings because seems talk is ambiguous between belief, inclinations to believe and qualia. He might be right that seems talk is ambigouus in ordinary English, but his again rests on the vague idea of talk being appropriate or inappropriate.

29 By Sorin Baiasu.

is legitimate only if there is some one thing to which we refer in using it. If we were to accept that, I'd insist that the proponent of STA has given us no reason at all to think that seems locutions are appropriate or legitimate in the first place. That is to say, there is no reason to believe (1), and since (1) will be taken by these philosophers to entail the actual existence of a sui generis mental state, it cannot merely be asserted without begging the question.

So far I have argued that Byerly's Seems-Talk Argument hinges on a vague and problematic notion of appropriateness. Still, there is a second interpretation of the Seems-Talk Argument that is much stronger; namely, that our using seems locutions in the way we do *commits us to believing* that there are seemings. It is noted that we use the locution "it seems to me that...." such that we are committed to thinking that there are sui generis assertive mental representations distinct from beliefs, inclinations to believe and other familiar mental states.

More carefully, consider some subject, S who uses the locution "it seems to me that P" in all of the variegated ways suggested by Cullison above. The most obvious interpretation of what is meant by such a locution is that there exists some mental state M, where M is the mental state of its seeming to S that P.

(5) It seems to S that P = $\exists$(x)[M(x)]

Thus, the most obvious interpretation of seems locutions logically entails that there exists a mental state which could be called a seeming. It does not yet follow from this that we are committed to the existence of *sui generis* seemings, construed as a unique kind of mental state distinct from beliefs, sensations and inclinations. We could maintain that all we mean by seems locutions is that we are inclined to believe that P. S's seems locutions would then be interpreted, not as entailing the existence of a sui generis mental state, but as entailing that there exists a mental state of S's which is the mental state of being inclined to believe that P. The proponent of the Seems-Talk Argument claims, however that this interpretation of seems locutions is not consistent with how we use seems locutions. He claims that no mental state acceptable to those sceptical of seemings exists in every case where we use seems locutions.

Cullison (2010, 262) first argues against the interpretation of seems locutions as reports of belief.

Suppose that Pat knows that a popular clothing brand manufacture their clothing using child labour. Pat then sees her friend buy clothing of that brand. It seems to Pat that what her friend did was wrong. Suppose further that Pat has some evidence that refraining from buying clothing is not a productive way to make the lives of child labourers better and actually makes things worse. The evidence is enough to convince Pat to suspend judgement about whether or not her friend has done something wrong, even though it seems to her that he has. Since Pat does not believe that her friend did something wrong and it seems to her that he has, we have a case where we would use seems locutions in the absence of the relevant beliefs (Cullison, 2010, 262). Cullison also follows Huemer (2001, 71) in citing cases of perceptual illusion in this context. Take the case of a straight stick immersed in water appearing bent. The stick seems bent although I do not believe that it is bent; I am quite sure that the stick is straight[30]. Lastly, there are cases of mnemonic seeming. Suppose that I remember unwrapping a christmas present. It seems to me that the wrapping paper was red. I am shown a recording of me unwrapping the present and the paper is in fact green. I no longer believe that the wrapping paper was red, although it still seems to me, in my memory, that it was (Cullison, 2010, 263). All of these examples are intended to show that the way we use seems locutions is such that it makes no sense to interpret them as reports of belief.

Cullison next considers the view that seems locutions be interpreted as reports of inclinations to believe. He argues that a person may be inclined to believe a proposition which seems to them to be false. He cites a case in which a man's wife has a sudden religious conversion and he fears greatly that she will divorce him if he does not share her religious beliefs. The fear is great enough to cause in him an inclination to believe the key tenets of her religion, although all of them seem to him to be false. We may add to this Huemer's previously mentioned case of perceptual illusion. I might be so familiar with the illusion created by sticks immersed in water that I am not remotely inclined to believe that the stick is bent, but it still seems that way (Huemer, 2001, 71).

Since Cullison notes that moral propositions, propositions about the past and propositions about God can all seem to be true, he presumably holds that seems locutions cannot be consistently interpreted as reports of what modern philosophers would have called sensations and what are today called qualia – the phenomenal qualities which are before consciousness and may be described as differently shaped patches of colour. Cullision gives no argument for this, but it is easy to see what he would say in the writings of other advocates of seemings. Huemer (2001, 67) cites cases in

30 Cullison (2010, 263) also cites a case in which you hold a golf ball up to the sun and the golf ball seems to be the same size as the sun, but you do not believe that it is.

which a person has a sense of their limb's position in space without looking at it. It seems to such a person that, for example, their palm is facing downward, but they are not looking at their palm. I myself once tried to distinguish seemings from sensations on the basis of several considerations. First, it is possible to have seemings about mathematical or moral propositions (that 1+1=2 or that killing is wrong) and these do not involve qualia (Burns 2017, 255). This view is held by Huemer (2007), Tucker (2013) and Cullison (2010). Second, different people may have different seemings whilst having the same qualia. Upon looking at a picture, it may seem to an Illustrator that there is a painting by Arthur Rackham whilst it may seem to the untrained that there is a painting (Burns, 2017, 255). Third, I might have qualia of the sort I normally have when there are 2204 blades of grass in my line of sight, but at best it only seems to me that there are many blades of grass (Burns, 2017, 263). All of these are cases where we would use seems locutions in the absence of relevant qualia, and therefore seems locutions cannot be consistently interpreted as reports of qualia.

This completes the Seems-Talk Argument. Since in each case discussed, it makes sense to say that it seems that something is the case even in the absence of more familiar mental states, and since the most obvious interpretation of seems locutions is that they are reports of mental states, it is concluded that we are committed to believing that there are sui generis seemings. This argument, however, is fallacious. The argument assumes that in all of the cases presented the sense in which it seems that a proposition is true must always be the same, but this assumption is gratuitous. If we abandon that assumption, there is a way to interpret the “seems” locutions in each case without postulating sui generis seemings.

In the example involving Pat's friend buying clothing produced by child labour, we have a case in which it is clear that the seeming that her friend did something immoral is not a belief, since she explicitly suspends judgement in the face of a contrary seeming. But in this case, the sense in which it seems to Pat that her friend did something immoral may well be that she is simply inclined to believe that her friend did something immoral. On this reading, Pat is initially inclined to believe that her friend did something immoral but because of her evidence she sincerely decides to suspend judgement. It is psychologically possible, and I think it often happens, that a person consciously suspends judgement on an issue even though they have an inclination to believe something about it. And this is just what the seemings sceptic will say. He will say that the sense in which something seems true to Pat is just that she has an inclination to believe, and no other sui generis mental state need be postulated.

In the perceptual illusion cases we have cases where it is clear that the sense in which it seems to the subject that, for example, the stick is bent cannot be that he believes or is inclined to believe that the stick is bent. The seemings sceptic can maintain, however, that the sense in which it seems to the subject that the stick is bent is that the subject has various qualia which humans normally have when they are looking at a bent stick, and there is no need to postulate any further sui generis mental state.

The case of it seeming to me that my Christmas present wrapping was red even after having seen a recording showing it to be green shows clearly that the sense in which it seems to me that the paper was red cannot be that I believe that the paper is red, since ex hypothesi, I no longer believe that. Yet, the sense may still be either that I am still slightly inclined to believe that the paper is red – after all, I could swear that it was red! - or that I have some fleeting mnemonic imagery as of a red present, or perhaps both. In this case we can preserve a sense in which it seems to me that the present is red without postulating a sui generis mental state.

The man who fears that his wife will divorce him if he does not share her religious beliefs comes to be inclined to believe those religious beliefs even though they seem to him to be false, but we need not say that the sense of "seems" here has to be sui generis. We can say, instead, that the man has contrary inclinations to believe. He has inclinations to believe both that the religious beliefs of his wife are true and that they are false.

In Huemer's case where it seems to me that my palm is facing down even when I am not looking at it, it is true that the seeming cannot be identified with visual qualia of the kind I might expect if I were looking at a hand, but the sense in which it seems to me that my palm is facing down is that there are certain qualia which are associated with various muscular tensions throughout my arm and these qualia are associated with my palm facing downwards[31].

My own earlier arguments are no better. In a case where it seems to me that a moral or mathematical proposition is true, I cannot identify these with qualia, but it is plausible – or at least not clearly false – that the sense in which moral and mathematical propositions seem to me to be true is that I believe or am inclined to believe them. The same account is possible concerning two people who have different seemings but the same qualia. One person is inclined to believe that there is a painting whilst the art expert is inclined to believe that there is an Arthur Rackham painting.

31 Tooley (2013) makes this point as well.

And lastly I have the qualia associated with 2204 blades of grass but am inclined only to believe the more vague claim that there are many blades of grass. Thus, in all of these cases it is possible to identify the alleged seeming with some other more familiar mental state and it is never necessary to postulate the existence of seemings.

What I have done here is argued that in every case we may explain the sense in which it seems to a person that some proposition is true without postulating sui generis mental states. It follows that our using seems locutions in the many ways in which we use them need not commit us to postulating sui generis seemings. I can meaningfully use seems locutions without presupposing the existence of a special mental state which all of these locutions refer to. I therefore cannot see any way to make reflections about "seems" locutions in ordinary English into an argument for the existence of seemings.

It is important to be absolutely clear about the argument I have made here. The Seems-Talk Argument is an argument by ontological commitment. It tries to show that I am committed, by various things that I myself say, to the existence of sui generis seemings. I use seems locutions in a large variety of ways and the most obvious way to interpret what I mean by these utterances is as reports of some mental state that I am in. The argument goes, however, that there is no single mental state that I am in in all of the cases where I utter seems locutions, unless there are sui generis seemings distinct from beliefs, inclinations and qualia. Thus, the only way that my utterances of seems locutions might be true is if there are sui generis seemings. My own use of seems locutions logically commits me, so the argument goes, to the existence of sui generis seemings. What I have done in responding to this argument is provided an interpretation of my own seems locutions which is consistent with all of the ways I use them and which does not entail the existence of sui generis seemings – my interpretation only entails the existence of beliefs, inclinations to believe and qualia. I have, in Quine's terms, found paraphrases for my seems locutions which do not commit me to sui generis seemings.

The response I have given may sound similar to that of Byerly (2012). His claim is that seems talk is ambiguous between belief, inclination and qualia so that seems talk is appropriate because it refers to these mental states. This is not my view. First, I do not interpret the argument as one about the appropriateness of talk, for the reasons given earlier. So, I do not say that seems talk is appropriate or inappropriate. Second, it would be misleading to express my view as the view that seems talk is ambiguous and refers sometimes to belief, inclination and qualia respectively. I have

no view on how seems talk is used in ordinary English. My view is that *my* using seems talk in all of the variegated ways *I* do use it does not commit me to the existence of seemings construed as sui generis mental states, because *my own* seems talk may be understood as about beliefs, inclinations and qualia. I do not think there are any examples which may be constructed such that I would say that something seems to be the case even though there are no relevant beliefs, inclinations or qualia, and so I do not think my use of seems locutions commits me to the existence of seemings. It might be that things are different for the 'ordinary' user of the English language, but I leave him to grapple with his own ontological commitments.

I have examined two versions of the Seeming-Talk Argument and found neither of them compelling.

4. The Argument from Blindsight

Chris Tucker (2010) argues for the existence of seemings on the grounds that they are part of the best explanation of the phenomenon of Blind-sight. Blind-sight is a condition in which a person with a damaged visual cortex cannot see anything in a certain region of their visual field, yet they are able to "guess" with surprising reliability the motion and orientation of objects within their blindspot (Stoerig 1997: 225–6). Tucker argues that the best explanation of this phenomenon postulates the existence of seemings:

> The subjects'"blindspots"are regions in their visual fields that lack visual imagery. Nonetheless, the mechanisms that produce seemings function well enough to provide information about the region of the environment that corresponds to the subjects' blindspots (Tucker, 2010, 230).

Tooley (2013, 313) suggests that the person's guessing the locations and orientations of objects in the blind-spot is an action which may be explained by his having a slight degree of confidence in the propositions guessed. According to Tooley, this obviates the need to postulate seemings. As Huemer (2013, 333) has replied, "*one might still posit seemings to explain why the subject has such an elevated degree of belief*". Such a person has, for example, the belief that there is a circle in the blind area because it seems that way.

However, it is not necessary to postulate seemings to explain the elevated degree of belief in a case of Blind-sight. Although a person with blind-sight has damage to his visual cortex preventing the processing of visual information (which of course takes the form of various light waves) from being conscious, the processing of said light waves still occurs subconsciously, causing in the person an increased degree of confidence that there are objects of certain shapes in their blind spot. Of course, the source of this confidence will be opaque to the subject.

We have, then, two explanations of blind-sight. The seemings explanation and the unconscious explanation. Note first that the unconscious explanation is simpler than the seemings explanation, because the seemings explanation requires the postulation of more distinct kinds of entity than does the unconscious explanation, since a proponent of the seemings explanation will be committed to the existence of both seemings and the unconscious processing of visual information. It must be, on the seemings explanation, this unconscious processing which causes the seeming. Moreover, the seemings explanation raises the following issue. People afflicted with blind-sight are often very surprised when they are told that their "guesses" are quite often correct, because they thought they were simply guessing at random (Stoerig 1997, 225–6). Yet, if they were having an experience which presents a proposition as true to them, one would not expect them to be so surprised. If such people were having seemings, why would they be surprised to find out that things were just as they seemed to be? Tucker explains this by claiming that the seemings "*are very weak and the subjects understandably assume that, in the circumstances, they do not have any reliable access to what is taking place in their blind spot"* (Tucker, 2010, 231). This only raises a further question, however. Why are the seemings weak in cases of blindsight? The seemings are apparently not weak in cases of healthy sense perception which is accompanied by qualia. Yet, the mechanisms which produce seemings still work, according to Tucker, in cases of blind-sight – it is only the visual cortex which is impaired. There should be no reason, therefore, that seemings in blindsight cases are any weaker than in full-blown perception. No doubt it will be possible to explain this in order to save the seemings explanation, but all of these extra details make the seemings explanation vastly more complex than the unconscious explanation, with none of said details having been empirically tested. For these reasons I conclude that the unconscious explanation is superior to the seemings explanation and that the phenomenon of blind-sight provides no good reason to postulate the existence of seemings.

I conclude that there is no good reason to suppose that there are any seemings. Of course, it does

not follow from this that there are no seemings[32]. Yet, we are now in a position to appreciate how strange a mental state a seeming would be and to return again to my claim that I cannot find on introspection any such state. Consider again the case of the stick immersed in water. As I look at the stick and reflect introspectively on my mental states I can find several things. I can find, most obviously, the qualia which lead me to suppose that there is a stick – the brown patches of colour in an elongated shape for example. But we are told that this is not what the seeming is. I can find my belief that the stick is straight, but we are told that this is not what the seeming is. I *think* I can find a faint inclination to believe that the stick is bent, but even if I can, we are told that this is not what the seeming is. The seeming is something other than any of these which in some sense *asserts* that the stick is bent. Now, I can only make my own honest introspective report and ask the reader to see for themselves, but I cannot find any such state distinct from the qualia, the belief and the inclination to believe.

These, then, are the grounds on which I doubt that there are any seemings: there is no reason to believe that there are any seemings, no one has given any literal explanation of what a seeming is and I cannot find any seemings on introspection.

Chapter 5: The Self-Defeat Argument

1. So Far

I have given one reason to think that Phenomenal Conservatism is an unacceptable policy of belief: There are no such things as seemings. In this chapter I examine the Self-Defeat Argument for Phenomenal Conservatism. I will try to show that argument is no good.

Section 2 states the argument. Section 3 highlights an important point which Huemer concedes. Sections 4 criticizes the first premise of the Self-Defeat Argument. I argue that a crucial premise of the argument is unmotivated and far from obvious. Sections 5 and 6 discuss whether the argument entails that we should not deny Phenomenal Conservatism. I argue that it doesn't and, consequently, even if the conclusion of the Self-Defeat Argument were true, it would not be as worrying as Huemer makes it sound. Section 7 is a conclusion.

32 Tooley (2013) seems to think that it does follow but the argument seems to be fallacious.

2. The Argument Stated

Michael Huemer argues that the denial of Phenomenal Conservatism is self-defeating (Huemer, 2001; 2007; 2013). Here is a rough statement of the argument:

> I think the principle of phenomenal conservatism underlies judgement in general. I think reflection will reveal that all judgement, whether inferential or not, is a process in which one accepts a proposition on the basis of how things seem to oneself. If phenomenal conservatism is false, so that the way things seem to oneself is irrelevant to epistemic justification, then all judgement must be irrational (Huemer 2001, 107).

If this were not bad enough, the irrationality of all judgement extends to the denial of Phenomenal Conservatism itself:

> the rejection of Phenomenal Conservatism is self-defeating, roughly, because one who rejected Phenomenal Conservatism would inevitably do so on the basis of how things seemed to himself; he would do so because Phenomenal Conservatism did not seem to him to be correct, or because it seemed to him to be incompatible with other things that seemed correct. Therefore, if this opponent of Phenomenal Conservatism were right, his belief in the negation of Phenomenal Conservatism would itself be unjustified (Huemer, 2007, 39).

He spells the argument out formally this way:

> (1) All our beliefs (in relevant cases) are based upon appearances.
> (2) A belief is (doxastically) justified only if what it is based upon constitutes an adequate source of (propositional) justification.
> (3) Therefore, if appearances are not a source of justification, then all our beliefs are unjustified, including the belief (if one has it) that appearances are not a source of justification (Huemer, 2010, 1).[33].

As Huemer points out, the argument does not conclude that Phenomenal Conservatism is true, but that anyone who denies it must do so unjustifiably (Huemer, 2007, 41). Anyone who denies it ought not to deny it!

33 See also Huemer (2007; 2013).

Huemer, to his credit, includes the lemma "in relevant cases" in (1). He notes that sometimes beliefs are formed on the basis of self-deception or as acts of faith, and that these will not be believed because of how things appear to the person (Huemer, 2001, 55-57). He takes these exceptions to be irrelevant to his argument because such beliefs are not "*plausible candidates for being justified*"(Huemer, 2013, 341). This suggests a reformulation of (1). According to Huemer, any belief which we are pre-theoretically inclined to regard as acceptable is one which is based on how things appear to us. Thus:

> (1*) All beliefs (that are plausible candidates for being acceptable) are based on appearances.

In defence of (1*), he holds that "*reflection will reveal*" that this is just how our thought processes go (Huemer, 2014, 227). When we judge a proposition to be true it is either because it seems to us to be so or because it follows from things which seem to us to be true. He writes:

> Consider some reasonable candidate for a justified belief, say your belief that 2+1=3. If you reflect on this belief, I think you are just going to find it plausible that it is based upon the appearance that 2+1=3 (its seeming to you that 2+1=3) (Huemer, 2014, 227).

So, the Self-Defeat argument is just this. The basis of any belief which we are pre-theoretically inclined to regard as appropriate is how things seem to us. If it is not acceptable to form a belief on the basis of how things seem, it follows that no belief is acceptable. Among my beliefs is the belief that Phenomenal Conservatism is false, and thus, my belief that Phenomenal Conservatism is false is unacceptable.

3. The Uncontroversial Fact

I begin my evaluation of the argument by reminding the reader of a simple fact which Huemer concedes:

> (4) There are some cases where beliefs are not caused by how things seem.

Remember, Huemer's (1*) says, not that every belief is caused by how things seem, but that all beliefs which we are pre-theoretically disposed to regard as acceptable are caused by how things seem – thus the qualification "in relevant cases" in (1*). Uncontroversial examples are easy to find. Huemer himself lists instances of self-deception, faith and wishful thinking as examples (Huemer, 2013, 341). If I am disposed to believe in an afterlife because I want there to be an afterlife, my belief may be caused by my wishful thinking, even though things do not seem to me that way. The same may be said of a belief which is held in faith. For at least some people, it is not that they believe that there is a God because it seems to them that there is, but rather because they very deeply hope that there is, and that hope leads them to choose the belief. This uncontroversial fact, which Huemer already admits, will be important later.

4. "Based"

There is some ambiguity in the words "because" and "basis" as used in the foregoing argument. Huemer tells us that we believe that P because it seems to us that P, or that its seeming to us that P is the basis of our believing that P. This may be interpreted in two ways. First, it might be held that we believe that P because it seems to us that P, in the sense that the proximate causal origin of our belief is that it seems to us that P. Sometimes Huemer explicitly speaks this way (Huemer, 2007, 39). Yet, it might also be held that we believe that P because it seems to us that P, in the sense that if we were asked to defend our belief, we would cite the fact that it seems to us that way.

Take first the latter interpretation. Huemer's first premise would then read that all of our beliefs are of a kind that we would cite the fact that they seem to us to be true in defence of them. This reading of the premise would clearly be unsatisfactory, since sometimes I might cite another belief of mine in defence, and make no reference to how things seem. It is best then to read the premise as saying that all of our beliefs are of a kind that we would *ultimately* cite the fact that they seem to us to be true in defence of them, where "ultimately" means if we were asked to defend that belief and any further beliefs we invoke.

I think it cannot simply be assumed that most people would ultimately appeal to how things seem – in Huemer's sense – to defend their beliefs in any (apparently acceptable) case. In defence of a belief about the physical world such as that about the squirrel, many people might *say* "it seems that there is a squirrel in the garden", but it is far from clear that what they would mean by this is a sui

generis mental state. Speaking again for myself, I would mean by this phrase only that I am having sensations of a certain familiar kind. I might also sometimes say, in defence of a philosophical claim of mine, "it seems to me that this philosophical thesis is true", but I would not mean by this that I am in a special sui generis mental state. I would mean simply that I am inclined to believe it. On this reading of "based" premise (1) is, pace Huemer, not clear on reflection.

Now consider another way of reading (1). On the new reading, the premise says that all beliefs (that are pre-theoretically plausible cases of acceptable belief) are based on how things seem in the sense that seemings are the psychological-causal basis of the beliefs. Again, Huemer alleges that this is "obvious on reflection", but this is far from the case. There is almost always a plausible explanation of the psychological-causal basis of a given belief which does not involve seemings at all, once it is made clear that seemings in Huemer's sense are neither sensations nor beliefs nor inclinations, but special sui generis mental states quite apart from any of these.

Let us consider some beliefs which are pre-theoretically plausible cases of acceptable belief. Suppose that someone kicks me very hard in the shin. I come to believe that I am in pain. What causes the belief? The obvious explanation is not at all one which appeals to seemings. The obvious explanation is that I believe that I am in pain because I am in pain – that the pain itself directly causes the belief. Huemer admits that beliefs about our introspective lives are not plausibly explained by appeal to seemings. He writes:

> ''[i]t is plausible to maintain that, when I introspectively believe that I am in pain, my belief is directly caused by the pain; it is plausible to deny that any distinct, intermediary state of 'appearing to be in pain' is required'' (2007, p. 46)

Consider now beliefs about the physical world. Suppose I believe that there is a squirrel in my garden because I look out of my window and see one. What is the psychological process which causes that belief? According to Huemer, the cause will be that it seems to me that there is such a squirrel (Huemer, 2007, 37-38). I suggest, instead, that the belief is caused by the sensory experience or sensation of the squirrel. I see the squirrel, in having those sensations, and my seeing it causes, directly, my belief that there is a squirrel. The causal chain that I propose is this:

Squirrel → Sensations of a squirrel[34] → my belief that there is a squirrel.

Huemer, surely, would not deny that at least part of the causal chain which leads to my belief that there is a squirrel involves both the actual squirrel and the sensations caused in me by it. Those two elements seem quite plain. He will suppose, however, that there is a fourth element in the chain, so that:

Squirrel → Sensations of a squirrel → it seems to me that there is a squirrel → my belief that there is a squirrel.

But why postulate that a seeming is involved in the causal chain at all? The simpler theory is the one without seemings and I see no reason to suppose that seemings must be involved.

Our uncontroversial fact, (4), makes the problem for Huemer more acute. If he admits that sometimes beliefs are not caused by how things seem, then why might things not always be that way? On Huemer's own account, belief in the afterlife and belief in God might be caused like this:

Deep desire for there to be an afterlife → belief that there is an afterlife.

Hope that there is a God → choice to believe that there is a God.

He does not think, in these cases, that the causal chain must always be:

Deep desire for there to be an afterlife → seeming that there is an afterlife → belief that there is an afterlife.

Hope that there is a God → seeming that there is a God → belief that there is a God.

Huemer agrees that there are cases like these where seemings do not function as the proximate cause of belief. But if it happens here, why can it not happen in the case where I see a squirrel? Why must we postulate seemings in the case where I see a squirrel but not in cases of faith or

34 That my sensations cause me to see the squirrel need not mean that there is a literal screen of sensations or "veil of perception" between me and the squirrel. It could be taken that way, but it could equally be understood so that, although the sensation is not a literal image between me and the squirrel, it is the vehicle through which I see the squirrel. Huemer (2001) himself makes this clear.

wishful thinking? I cannot see that Huemer has any answer to this question, and without one it is very far from "obvious on reflection" that seemings are always the proximate causes of belief in cases like the one where I see a squirrel.

Here is one motivation one might give for postulating seemings in the squirrel case but not faith and wishful thinking cases. It might be thought that unless it seems to me that there is a squirrel, then it is inexplicable why I form the belief that there is a squirrel in response to those particular sensations rather than any other belief, say, that there is a bowl of oats. By contrast, it is obvious why I form the belief that there is a God when I hope that there is a God; the content of the hope becomes the content of the belief by a deliberate choice. Equally, when I believe that there is an afterlife because I really want there to be one, the content of the desire becomes the content of the belief by self-deception.

However, the explanation for why I come to believe "there is a squirrel" when having certain sensations as opposed to any other belief is readily available. The reason I form a belief about a squirrel in response to those sensations is that that is how I have been taught to interpret those kinds of sensations. I was taught that something that looks *like that* is called a "squirrel". I do not, therefore, see any reason to postulate seemings in this case.

For my criticism of Huemer's argument here, I do not strictly need to claim that my explanation of the cause of the squirrel belief is true. I only need to claim that it is a plausible rival explanation. If the seemings explanation is true, it is at least not "obvious on reflection" like Huemer supposes that it is. The result is that Huemer's (1) is not itself "obvious on reflection" and so that there is no reason to believe it.

5. The Denial of Phenomenal Conservatism

It is clear that these issues are peripheral to the most important one, for Huemer will argue that even if these other beliefs may be based, in either sense, on something other than how things seem to me, *my denial of Phenomenal Conservatism* must be based on the fact that it seems to me to be false, or that it follows from other things that seem to me to be true. Thus, I cannot deny that seemings are a source of justification on the ground that that is how things seem to me, because that would be self-defeating. To avoid the self-defeat however, we need only grant that certain kinds of seemings are a

source of justification. We need not grant that all seemings are, as Phenomenal Conservatism requires. We might hold, for example, that seemings are a source of justification in Philosophy, whilst denying that they are generally. We could even place further restrictions, holding that seemings are a source of justification when discussing normative or ethical theory specifically, and not when discussing other things. If we could find some principled motivation for denying that other kinds of seeming are sources of justification whilst insisting that seemings in these areas are, we could avoid self-defeat (BonJour, 2004, 359; Tooley, 2013).

I shall not pursue this strategy here because I reject the claim that my denial of Phenomenal Conservatism is based on how things seem to me. Take first the sense of "based" which has to do with what I would cite to defend my belief. I would not say "Phenomenal Conservatism seems to me to be false" or that "the denial of Phenomenal Conservatism follows from things that seem to me to be true" in defence of my denial. I would say something like "Phenomenal Conservatism presupposes that there are seemings, and there are no seemings. Therefore Phenomenal Conservatism is false". Moreover, I would not admit that my claim that there are no seemings is how things seem to me. Rather, I would say that there is no good argument for the existence of seemings; that no one has provided a literal characterization of what seemings are, and that I am not aware of any such state in introspection, which, according to Huemer, I should be.

Next, what is the *cause* of my denial of Phenomenal Conservatism? The causal origins of philosophical beliefs is an interesting empirical question – one which sociologists might fruitfully investigate. But I doubt that philosophers can do much other than speculate on such causes. For my part, when I first came to deny Phenomenal Conservatism, I do not think that denial was caused by a sui generis mental state, since as I have said, I am not aware of any such state. I think, in fact, that my denial of Phenomenal Conservatism was first and foremost a causal result of my forming new beliefs about Scepticism, sceptical arguments and sceptical writings, and second, a causal result of my rereading Huemer's work to understand exactly what he meant by "seemings". When I understood that, I speculate that the result was my being inclined to believe that I had never been aware of any such states and my consequent suspicion that there were none. I am sure that Huemer will want to say that seemings must be postulated somewhere in this explanation for it to make sense, but he has not given any reason why that must be. In the absence of any such reason it is very far from "obvious on reflection" that my denial of Phenomenal Conservatism is caused by how things seem to me in Huemer's sense.

Thus, I deny that reflection reveals that any of my beliefs (that I take pre-theoretically to be acceptable) are “based” on how things seem in either of the senses canvassed by Huemer. If we may sensibly deny this, we may also sensibly deny (1) and avoid both the conclusion that we have no acceptable beliefs and that the denial of Phenomenal Conservatism must be unacceptable.

6. Should I Deny Phenomenal Conservatism?

Even if we grant Huemer both premises of the argument and the conclusion, it seems to me of relatively little significance. Huemer takes his argument to show that the denial of Phenomenal Conservatism is self-defeating, but in what sense is it self-defeating? He says that if Phenomenal Conservatism is false “all judgement must be irrational” and that if I deny Phenomenal Conservatism I must do so “unjustifiably”, but when we see exactly what this amounts to, we see that it is far less problematic than he makes it sound.

Huemer's second premise contains the technical distinction between a belief being doxastically justified and its' being propositionally justified. Although the distinction is well known in Philosophy, it is worth explaining it as Huemer uses it, because the exact meanings turn out to be crucial to the argument. Huemer introduces the distinction with an example:

> suppose that Henry has been exposed to a number of rationally compelling arguments for the theory of evolution. Despite understanding these arguments, Henry refuses to accept them, through sheer stubbornness. One day, Henry’s tarot card reader tells him that, based on a recent tarot reading, she has determined that the theory of evolution is true. Henry then finally accepts evolution. At this point, Henry has an unjustified belief in evolution, since his belief is based on trust in a tarot card reader. But Henry has had all along, and continues to have, justification for believing the theory of evolution—he still knows the cogent arguments for evolution, which constitute adequate justification for the theory (Huemer, 2007, 40).

In the example, Henry's belief in evolution is inappropriate because it is based on something on which he should not base his beliefs. Henry does have some good arguments for evolutionary theory however, and if he believed on the basis of those, his belief would be appropriate. Thus, a belief is doxastically justified if and only if it is based on appropriate considerations and propositionally justified if and only if there are considerations which would make the belief appropriate if it were based on them.

It is a good thing to have a belief that is propositionally justified, but it is better for it to be doxastically justified. If it is only the former, then while you should believe it, you should not believe it *on the basis that you do*. Huemer's argument is for the conclusion that if Phenomenal Conservatism is false, then no belief is based on appropriate considerations – no belief ought to be held on the basis of the considerations on which it is in fact held. This negative conclusion will apply to the denial of Phenomenal Conservatism itself, with the result that if Phenomenal Conservatism is false, then I ought not to deny Phenomenal Conservatism on the basis on which I do deny it.

If I deny Phenomenal Conservatism whilst granting that all my beliefs are based on how things seem, I must admit that all of my beliefs up to now are inappropriate in the sense that I should not have formed them the way that I did. Of course, that is an alarming result, but it need not be a disaster. It does not follow, although it sounds like it, that we ought not deny Phenomenal Conservatism.

Return to Huemer's example of Henry the tarrot card reader who has excellent arguments for the theory of evolution, but ignores them and believes in evolution because his tarrot cards told him that it is true. Suppose that Henry realizes that tarrot cards are not a reasonable basis for belief. What should Henry believe in this situation? Should he abandon his belief in the theory of evolution? But Henry in fact has very good arguments for the theory. It would be silly for him to abandon it. What he should do, it seems to me, is forget about the tarrot cards and continue to believe the theory of evolution on the basis of his cogent arguments for it. It would be silly of him to abandon it because he realizes the deviant causal origins of the belief. Of course, he should not have formed the belief the way he did form it – that was inappropriate -, but given that he has already formed it, and that he has independently good reasons to believe it, he should continue to hold it.

Now let's consider all of my beliefs. Let's grant to Huemer, my previous objections not-withstanding, that all of my beliefs are causally based on how things seem to me. Suppose Huemer is right that, up to now, I have formed my beliefs only on the basis of how things seem to me. Suppose, further, that how things seem to me is not an appropriate basis for belief. It follows that I should not have formed any of the beliefs I have formed in the way that I did form them, and I should not, in the future, form any beliefs because of how things seem to me. Yet, both of these implications are logically compatible with the claim that I should continue to *hold* the beliefs which

I have already formed. In fact, if I have independently good reasons to believe what I already believe – as Henry does for the theory of evolution – I think that I positively should continue to hold the beliefs I earlier formed on a poor basis. Thus, it does not follow from the Self-Defeat argument that I should not, now, hold the beliefs that I already have. Of course, it does follow (a) that I should not have formed my beliefs in the way that I did form them and (b) that I should not continue to form beliefs because of how things seem to me. Once I realize that how things seem to me does not justify belief, I must make a conscious effort to avoid forming beliefs on that basis[35].

Crucially, the argument cannot show that I should not deny Phenomenal Conservatism. Suppose that I came to deny Phenomenal Conservatism because it seemed to me to be false. If Phenomenal Conservatism really is false it follows that I should not have denied it that way. Nevertheless, that fact is compatible with my now having very good reasons for denying Phenomenal Conservatism and so also with my rightly continuing to deny it. So, although I must admit that I was not previously entitled to my denial of Phenomenal Conservatism, I may continue to deny it on the basis of the good reasons for denying it which I have since found.

I anticipate a reply from Huemer here. He might argue that, as a matter of psychological fact, I just cannot do what I would need to do to have acceptable belief going forward. That is to say, it is a psychological fact about human beings that they can only (at least in the relevant cases) form beliefs on the basis of how things seem to them. Thus, there is no possibility of me trying hard not to form beliefs on the basis of how things seem in the future, or of my basing my beliefs not on how things seem but on other reasons for those beliefs which I have found. I *must* base my belief on how things seem to me. Huemer might say, for example, that in trying to base a belief on good arguments the result can only be that the arguments make it seem to me that something is true and that seeming causes me to believe it.

Turning to my denial of Phenomenal Conservatism specifically, Huemer might say that I simply cannot do anything other than base it on how things seem to me. Nothing else can cause me to deny it, as a matter of psychological fact. If arguments of any kind cause me to deny Phenomenal

35 This argument of mine depends crucially on a thought-experiment about Henry and the theory of evolution. In the context of the analysis of ordinary language, I am very critical of the use of thought-experiments (see later chapters), and so the reader might find it contradictory that I here rely so heavily on thought-experiment. I do not have any objection to the use of thought-experiments as such. There is a great difference between using thought-experiments in thinking through whether we want to accept certain norms for belief and using thought-experiments to determine an objective fact about the empirical world – especially if using thought-experiments from the arm-chair and trying to derive conclusions about the empirical world which far outstrip the data available in said arm-chair.

Conservatism, this can only be because they cause it to seem to me that Phenomenal Conservatism is false and so cause me to deny it.

Taking him this way, he will be saying that if Phenomenal Conservatism is false, then humans are psychologically fated only ever to form beliefs that they are not entitled to hold. Such a claim seems to me incredibly strong, and I see no reason to accept it. It certainly is not "obvious on reflection". Huemer admits that I can form beliefs on the basis of wishful thinking and other deviant causes. He holds only that I do not do this in any case which we would pre-theoretically deem a case of justified belief. But if Huemer admits that I can form a belief in the absence of seemings in some cases, why think that when it comes to pre-theoretically clear instances of acceptable belief, I am somehow psychologically restricted only to form *those* kinds of belief on the basis of how things seem? Why could nothing else lead me to form those kinds of belief? For this reason, I do not think such a reply on Huemer's behalf particularly plausible.

7. Conclusion on the Self-Defeat Argument

The Self-Defeat Argument for Phenomenal Conservatism has two flaws. First, it is far from "obvious on reflection" that the first premise is true, as Huemer says that it is. Moreover, even if the premise is true, it does not follow that I ought not to deny Phenomenal Conservatism. It only follows that I ought not to have denied it in the way that I did deny it, but this is compatible with my having very good reasons to deny it and with my rightly continuing to deny it going forward.

Chapter 6: Is Phenomenal Conservatism Scepticism?

1. So Far

I have argued that Phenomenal Conservatism is an unacceptable standard of belief. I have done so on several grounds. First, there is no such thing as a seeming. Second, the Self-Defeat Argument for

Phenomenal Conservatism is unsound.

Here I argue that even if we do accept it as an ethics of belief, it is still compatible with a devastating version of Scepticism. Section 2 makes the basic argument. Section 3 considers and criticizes how Huemer might reply to the basic argument. Section 4 considers one further way in which the committed Phenomenal Conservative might try to wriggle free. I argue that he cannot.

2. Phenomenal Conservatism is Compatible with Scepticism

Phenomenal Conservatism is typically praised for its ability to avoid Scepticism. According to Tucker (2013, 8), Phenomenal Conservatism "*avoids both skepticism and regresses of justification*", and Huemer writes that "*most if not all skeptical worries are easily resolved*" (Huemer, 2013).

Even if Phenomenal Conservatism were an acceptable ethic of belief, it would still be compatible with the main thrust of Scepticism. Despite the way that its many advocates praise it as an easy way to avoid Scepticism, it is in fact compatible with a very implausible version of it. To see how this is so, let us remind ourselves of Scepticism, and Agrippa's Trilemma.

The sceptic tries to show to the dogmatist that he has, ultimately, no reason to believe anything at all, and he expects the dogmatist thereupon to suspend judgement. To accomplish the task, the sceptic repeatedly asks the dogmatists for reasons for his beliefs, with the result being that the dogmatist always finds himself arguing either in a circle, from arbitrary assumptions or in an infinite regress. But none of those kinds of argument will yield a genuine reason for believing any of its premises or their conclusion over the alternatives. Thus, the dogmatist cannot, ultimately – and emphasis on the *"ultimately"* - think of any reason for his belief. Once the sceptic has the dogmatist admitting this, he expects the dogmatist to suspend.

Now, if Phenomenal Conservatism were an acceptable ethics of belief, the dogmatist could rightly retain his beliefs even if he has no reason to believe them. But even if Phenomenal Conservatism has this advantage, it would do absolutely nothing to give the dogmatist any reason to believe anything at all. Now if it is really true that we have, ultimately, no reason to believe anything at all, that is a monstrous version of Scepticism, implying as it does that from a strictly impartial point of view, no belief is better than any other; science and superstition are no different – even if we are entitled to believe one and not the other. Our entitlements aside, it is only by a kind of blind faith

that we believe anything at all. Phenomenal Conservatism is entirely compatible with this kind of Scepticism.

3. Does Phenomenal Conservatism Stop the Regress?

Perhaps I have been too quick here. Perhaps seemings can also be good reasons to believe (Huemer, 2001, 177) and perhaps those reasons are capable of stopping the regress of sceptical questioning without falling into one of the three problematic traps of assumption, circularity or regress.[36].

This is plainly not so. Suppose that I believe that P. A sceptic challenges me to think of a non-question begging reason to believe that P. I cite the fact that it seems to me that P. A seeming that P, according to Huemer, is an experience with the propositional content "P". That content, on Huemer's own account, may be true or false, and, as BonJour (2004, 357) points out, this admission raises the question of what reason there is for thinking that the content of the seeming is actually faithfully representing the world. In citing the fact that it seems to me that P as a reason to believe that P, I plainly presuppose that such seemings do, either usually or at the very least on this specific occasion, accurately portray the world. A relentless sceptic will demand a non-question begging reason for this presumption.

Huemer has two different responses to this. The first comes after this characterization of the problem:

> But, it will be objected, one belief can only justify another belief if the first belief is itself, justified. Similarly, therefore, shouldn't we say that a perceptual experience can only justify a perceptual belief if the experience, itself, is justified? (Huemer, 2001, 97).

Then he writes this:

> But the latter condition makes no sense. It does not make sense – it is a category error – to say that an experience is justified or unjustified. … if I go near a fire, I just will feel a sensation of warmth. What would it mean to say that I was "justified" in feeling warm? (Huemer, 2001, 97).

36 See chapter 1 for a reminder of what is wrong with each of these three.

There are two notions of “justified” which must be kept clear. In one sense that philosophers have used the word “justified”, to be justified in holding a belief means that you have good non-question begging reasons for holding it. It is this sense which I earlier called the Internalist conception of justification. In another sense that they have used the word “justified”, to be justified in a belief means that you *should* hold it. That is the deontological conception of justification associated with the ethics of belief.

If Huemer's Phenomenal Conservatism is to help in this context, it must provide a “justification” for our beliefs in the sense of a non-question begging reason for them. When confronted with the fact that seemings are insufficient for stopping the regress of requests for such reasons, Huemer claims that it makes no sense to think of a seeming as “justified” or “unjustified” because “*it cannot be the case that you should or shouldn't have an experience*” (Huemer, 2001,97). The concept of “justified” now in use is the deontological one. That concept is different to the concept of “justification” we were initially concerned with, which means having a non-question begging reason. We may agree with Huemer that it makes no sense to think of an experience as something which I should or shouldn't have, whilst insisting that there is still a perfectly intelligible question as to what reason there is to think that the propositional content of the experience is in fact correct (BonJour, 2004, 357).

Huemer's second response to the question of what reason there is to think that seemings accurately represent reality is to say that seemings are “*presumed true, until proven false*” (Huemer, 2001, 100). He compares the situation with that of a court case, in which a person is presumed innocent until proven guilty (Huemer, 2001, 100). He writes that this presumption in favour of the authenticity of seemings is the “Epistemological default position”. The purpose of the presumption of innocence in a court case is to try to minimize the number of innocent people that are wrongly punished, but there is no analogue of this rationale in the present context and so I cannot see any motivation for the view that seemings should be presumed true.

In any case, the idea that seemings should be presumed to be accurate, without any reason for supposing the presumption to be true, is plainly the making of an arbitrary assumption – a form of reasoning which was already ruled out as unacceptable on the ground that formally identical arguments from different arbitrary assumptions may be produced for two sides of any issue. Perhaps it seems to me that there is no God, and so, if I assume Phenomenal Conservative principles, I conclude that there is no God. Alternatively, I could arbitrarily assume that everything which seems

to me to be true is false and I would then be lead to the conclusion that there is a God. Huemer's Phenomenal Conservatism thus amounts to *arbitrarily assuming* that whatever seems to be true is true. Nor does it make things any less arbitrary if we say instead that what we are assuming is that whatever seems to be true is only probably true; or more probable than not; or even more probable than it would otherwise be. Nor, lastly, does it make things any less arbitrary if we say that whatever seems to me to be true is true (or probably true or...) unless there is some reason to suppose otherwise. I conclude that Phenomenal Conservatism is an unsatisfactory response to Agrippa's Trilemma.

A proponent of Phenomenal Conservatism will surely not see things this way. He will object that I have misconstrued his position. He does not claim that I can have a reason to believe that there is no God by inferring it from the premise that it seems to me that there is no God, together with the premise that seemings are correlated with the truth. He claims that when it seems to me that there is no God, I just have a reason to believe that there is no God, without having to assume anything further about seemings. How things seem is a 'non-inferential' reason for a belief (Huemer, 2001, 100). I do not see how saying this helps matters. Even if we concede that in some sense of 'justified', how things seem may be a 'non-inferential justification' for a belief, it is still plain that there is a further question about the reliability of seemings which the sceptic will inevitably raise if one appeals to a seeming as a reason for believing something. That Huemer and other Phenomenal Conservatives cannot answer this question without making an arbitrary affirmative assumption is a demonstration that their view does not stop the regress.

4. What is the Question?

The question which the sceptic raises and the Phenomenal Conservative must face is this. Why believe that its' seeming to you that P makes it even so much as probable that P?

There is some ambiguity in the sceptic's question concerning the word “probable”. There are various definitions of “probability” used by different authors. But however we understand the notion, the prospects of the Phenomenal Conservative stopping the regress are bleak.

Let me begin with frequency and propensity interpretations of probability. On these interpretations, probability is an objective feature of the world. It is identified, in the frequency interpretation, with

the actual frequency, expressible as a fraction, of the occurrence of a phenomenon. So the probability (in the frequency sense) of a coin landing heads on the next coin toss is the actual number of times it has landed heads previously out of the total number of times it has been flipped. On the propensity interpretation, the probability that the coin will land heads is identified with the propensity of the coin to land heads. It is quite clear that if the Conservative maintains that his believing that N makes probable N in either of these senses he will fail to end the regress. The sceptic will immediately want to know what reason there is for believing that the Conservative's believing that N really does make probable N in one of these senses. It is, after all, a substantial claim about the world that when the Conservative forms a belief the frequency with which it is true is even marginally higher than ½. Indeed, to assign any frequency at all is to make a substantial claim about the world. On this interpretation, Conservatism would be a claim about the general track record of spontaneously formed beliefs. If we interoperate "probable" this way the Conservative cannot, therefore, appeal to his Conservative principle to end the regress. For the sceptic will straight away ask what reason there is to believe that the Conservative's believing some proposition has the sort of track record he supposes it to have in making a claim of frequency probability. The same point can be made about probability in the propensity sense.

Another sense of 'probable' is that of subjective probability. In this sense, S's belief that P is probable (for S) if and only if S has high degree of belief. In this sense, the fact that S believes that P does entail that it is probable, and one might maintain that it simply makes no sense to ask whether S's belief that P is subjectively probable for him, because it is analytic that it is. Yet, subjective probability has nothing at all to do with truth. It is only a measure of the subject's confidence in a proposition. If the Conservative claims that it seeming to him that N makes it subjectively probable that N, the sceptic can agree. He knows that the Conservative is confident that N, but is asking what reason there is to believe that N!

Richard Swinburne (2001) claims that believing that P makes it logically probable that P, absent defeaters. Logical probability is thought of as analogous to logical entailment – as 'partial entailment'[37]. The model of entailment suggests that logical probability is an internal relation *between* propositions and that in turn suggests that there must be at least two propositions serving as relata. There is an ambiguity in Swinburne's claim, between the claim that the act of believing that P makes it logically probable that P and the claim that the proposition "S believes that P" makes it logically probable that P. The same moves are available to the Phenomenal Conservative. He could

37 See Fumerton (2007).

maintain that the mere existence of a seeming that P makes it logically probable that P, or he could maintain that the proposition, “it seems to S that P” makes it logically probable that P.

Consider the first position. A proposition cannot be said to 'just be' entailed, not by anything in particular but just entailed. It is tempting to suppose that, analogously, it makes no sense to think of a proposition as partially entailed, not by anything in particular but just partially entailed. If so, it cannot make sense to suppose that a proposition is partially entailed, not by anything in particular but just partially entailed (that is, logically probable), because it seems to be true. Propositions are entailed only by other propositions. In the same way, it does not make sense to suppose that a proposition is partially entailed by a seeming. Only propositions partially entail other propositions.

We must, then, take the claim to be that the proposition “It seems to S that P” makes logically probable that P, for any value of S and P, absent defeaters[38]. On this interpretation, the answer to the sceptic's question “why believe that N?” is “It seems to me that N, and it seeming that N makes N logically probable”. Once this is made explicit, it is clear that there is a request for justification that the sceptic can make. He can ask what reason there is to suppose that its seeming that N really does make it logically probable that N.

In answer, a Conservative can only claim (and Swinburne, 2001 does claim), that relations of logical probability are accessible a priori. As Fumerton (2007) points out, the nice thing about a priori relations of logical probability is that, apparently, whenever one is backed into a corner by the sceptic, one can 'discover' the relevant probability relations a priori. Faced with a question about why a proposition about the physical world should be believed, it is revealed a priori that propositions about sensory experience make logically probable propositions about the physical world. Faced with the question of why anything about the past should be believed, we discover a priori that propositions about apparent memories make propositions about the past logically probable. And crucially, faced with radical scepticism about everything we discover a priori that the mere fact that a proposition seems to be true makes that proposition logically probable.

If we really can come to be directly aware, a priori, of the truth of Phenomenal Conservatism, then the regress will have been ended, thus providing a non-question begging reason for why we believe

38 I did consider the thought that assessments of logical probability should be relativized to subjects, so that the claim would be that “S believes that P” makes logically probable, for S, that P. However, since the logical probability is supposed to be an objective internal relation between propositions, I cannot see any grounds for supposing that what is logically probable for me given one set of propositions may not be logically probable for you given those same propositions.

everything we do believe. It seems to me that it is, at best, dubious whether we can discover any a priori connection of partial entailment between seeming that P and P. I do not have a non-question begging argument against the position. I can only make a phenomenological appeal. On reflection, I do not think I can discover any such a priori probability connection. One might just as well postulate that my really wanting that P makes it logically probable that P. Indeed, it is hard to avoid the thought that postulating a priori probability relations of a Conservative character is nothing more than a desperate attempt to avoid scepticism. As Fumerton puts it:

> when I look for the inferential conservative's probability connection I find only the not very surprising contingent fact that I usually end up believing P when I find myself inclined to believe P. I don't find any logical or quasi-logical connection between it seeming to me as if P and P. Foundationalists who embrace foundational knowledge of epistemic principles must always exercise philosophical self-discipline to ensure that their choice of principles is not guided solely by their overwhelming desire to avoid skepticism. I can't help but feel that to defeat skepticism wielding the weapon of epistemic conservatism shows all the signs of theft over honest toil (Fumerton, 2007, 85).

I conclude that on any understanding of 'makes probable' that is of any help against Scepticism, there is a further request for justification that the sceptic can and will make. Phenomenal Conservatism does not, therefore, stop the regress. If we are to accept a belief because it seems to us to be true, that can only be because we arbitrarily assume that how things seem is at least a somewhat reliable guide to how things are. Pace Huemer, sceptical worries are far from "easily resolved" by his views. The fleet-footed sceptic remains unchallenged.

Chapter 7: The Implications of Doxastic Conservatism[39]

1. Is Doxastic Conservatism Plausible?

If Phenomenal Conservatism won't work owing to the difficulties I have mentioned, perhaps old-

39 Some of the argument of this section was developed as part of my M-phil thesis. It was also published by me in (Burns, 2017).

fashioned Doxastic Conservatism will do better[40]. Doxastic Conservatism is:

DC. S is (to some degree) entitled to believe that P if and only if S believes that P, absent defeaters (Swinburne, 2001, 141).

It is quite clear that if Doxastic Conservatism is true, then all of the beliefs philosophers have in the past struggled to see as acceptable will be acceptable in a very plain and straightforward manner. Do you believe that there is an external world? Do you believe that other people have minds? Do you believe that murder is wrong or that 2+2=4? How about that the future will resemble the past or that the world exists when unperceived[41]? If so, you may well find yourself entitled to believe all of these things according to the Doxastic Conservative ethic of belief. If we accept DC, turning back the sceptic is easy. The dogmatist can say "I believe that P, and what entitles me to believe it is that I believe it". The sceptic will, naturally, balk. He will ask, "why think that what you believe is actually the truth?", and dogmatist will have no answer. But if DC is true, he does not need an answer!

Most advocates of the view cite this as a virtue of it (Tucker, 2013; Markie, 2013). Virtue it may be, but a number of philosophers have argued that the view is too permissive – that it allows as acceptable beliefs which are obviously silly, and that therefore we should not accept it. Some of these objections seem to me of no force at all, although I do agree that, in the end, the view is too permissive.

I will examine a number of versions of this criticism put forward by others, before attempting my own. Section 2 assesses a criticism due to Tooley. Section 3 looks at Markie's criticisms. Section 4 develops my own criticism. The basic idea is that what is unattractive about Phenomenal Conservatism is that it licences obviously silly beliefs. In section 4 I look at Lycan's attempt to avoid this implication. In section 5 I show that Lycan cannot really avoid it, although I concede that he significantly weakens the force of my criticism.

2. Philosophy and Phenomenal Conservatism

40 The problems for Doxastic Conservatism that I bring out here also arise for Phenomenal Conservatism, with some modifications.

41 Although I do not think Phenomenal Conservatism can in the end justify this last belief. See me (Burns, 2017).

As I have stated DC so far, it is an ethic of belief for every domain. It does not say that, for example, in moral matters we should accept (to some degree) that things are how we believe them to be absent defeaters. It says that we should do this in every area, and that presumably includes in Philosophy.

Yet, think for a moment about the sorts of opinions that have been put forward in philosophy. Here are a few examples.

(1) There actually exists an infinite number of *concrete* possible worlds.
(2) Nothing exists except minds and there ideas.
(3) Everything that exists is physical.
(4) There is no such thing as an immaterial soul.
(5) There is an immaterial soul.
(6) There are objective moral truths.
(7) There are no objective moral truths.
(8) Truth is relative.

DC implies that any philosopher who believed that any of these were true was entitled to believe it, so long as they could stave off objections. Berkeley, for example, was entitled to hold (2), and David Lewis need not offer any argument for (1), since he was non-inferentially entitled to believe it. Swinburne (1986) need not bother with arguments for the existence of the soul, because he is entitled to believe it by the fact that he believes it.

Tooley (2013, 318-319) suggests, though he does not outright say, that this is unacceptable. You might think that (and indeed I am inclined to think), if any one is entitled to (1) – (8) it will take a very serious amount of argument. It is not sufficient, you might think, that you already believe them to be true and you are capable of staving off objections.

The objection will not work, however. DC only states that one is entitled to *some small degree*. In Lycan's (2013, 301) formulation, "*the justification furnished by [Doxastic Conservatism] is minute, the faintest edge, infinitesimal if you like*". The mere fact that you believe that P will make appropriate a very faint degree of confidence that P, but nothing more than that. Thus, in order to be fully entitled to any of (1) – (8), philosophers will have to work much harder. They will need, for example, as the view is developed by Lycan (2013), for the belief to stand in substantial coherence

relations to an entire system of beliefs. The point is that the more subtle version of the view does not imply that any of (1)-(8) are acceptable by merely seeming to be true.

One might insist that even the more subtle version is unacceptable, because unless there is some positive reason to accept (1)-(8), then they are not acceptable even in the slightest degree, but to say this is to beg the question against Doxastic Conservatism (Lycan, 2013).

3. Markie's Counter-Examples[42]

Markie asks us to consider a case in which a gold miner who yearns to strike gold finds a pebble and, as a result of wishful thinking, it seems to him to be gold. Meanwhile, another gold miner looks at the same pebble and it too seems to him to be gold, but this is because he has learned the skill of accurately identifying gold. "*Certainly my wishful thinking should not gain my perceptual belief the same positive epistemic status of defeasible justification as your learned identification skills."* (Markie, 2005, 356-357).

Doxastic Conservatism does not say otherwise than Markie suggests. The expert miner will be entitled to a far greater degree than the wishful thinker, because the expert will have many supporting beliefs about the appearance of the pebble, about what gold looks like, about the likelihood of finding gold in that location, and so on. All of this will increase the initial justification which the expert gets from his belief, and none of it is available to the wishful thinker (Lycan, 2013, 303).

In another example, Markie again argues that Doxastic Conservatism is too permissive. Suppose that I see a walnut tree in my garden, and I believe both that the tree is a walnut and that it was planted on April 24, 1914. The first belief results from my skill in identifying trees, but, let's suppose, the second belief is the result of a malfunction in my brain. Markie then argues:

> its seeming to me that the tree was planted on that date outstrips the phenomenological character of my experience and my identification skills. My perception cannot directly justify my belief about the planting date. Nonetheless, according to (DC), both my belief that it is a walnut tree and my belief that it was planted on April 24, 1914, are prima facie, and so

42 Markie's examples are aimed at Phenomenal Conservatism, but they are even more forceful against Doxastic Conservatism, and yet they still fail!

defeasibly, justified for me (Markie, 2015, 357).

As in the previous example, however, there is a vast difference between the two beliefs. With the first belief, I have many beliefs about what walnut trees look like, about what was in my garden yesterday, about what trees grow in the area and so on. All of this will increase my justification for believing that the tree is a walnut tree, and no such coherence with other beliefs is available for my belief about when the tree was planted (Lycan, 2013, 303).

Markie points out that my belief cannot be made acceptable my sensory experience, because there is no aspect of the experience which indicates the date on which the tree was planted. This is obviously the case, but Doxastic Conservatives do not say that the sensory experience justifies the belief; they say that the belief does.

4. Doxastic Conservatism and Religious Belief

The crucial idea behind charges that Doxastic Conservatism is to permissive is just this: that obviously silly beliefs are acceptable given the theory. This is most clearly shown not by philosophical beliefs or beliefs which result from some sort of cognitive malfunction, but by radical forms of religious belief.

I have argued elsewhere that Richard Swinburne's (2004; 2011) version of Conservatism has counter-intuitive consequences of just this kind (Burns, 2017). Consider again a very strong version of Doxastic Conservatism, on which if you believe that P and you have no defeaters, then you are *fully* entitled to believe that P.

Suppose I believe very strongly that the great pumpkin will return every Halloween. I have never seen the great pumpkin, nor had any sort of religious experience of the great pumpkin, nor do I have any testimony to that effect. I have no argument for the existence of the great pumpkin at all. It is just something that, when I think about it, I believe. Perhaps I really wished as a child that the great pumpkin did exist because it would make Halloween more interesting and eventually became utterly convinced of it. Let's add, moreover, that I do not realize that this is the cause of the belief. Perhaps I believe in the great pumpkin because it is a vital part of my religion. A very strong version of DC will be forced to say that I possess a great deal of entitlement for my belief; perhaps even

more than I have for more ordinary propositions like that I had oats for breakfast. I will be, then, fully entitled to believe in the great pumpkin, absent defeaters.

Swinburne (2011) argues that the great pumpkin worshipper is not entitled, *all things considered*, to his beliefs even within the framework of a very strong version of DC. He writes:

> We do not normally need a priori principles to rule out 'wild' basic-beliefs (beliefs that one has seen fairies, or knows the future from an astrological chart, etc.), since a posteriori criteria will normally rule these out. We almost all have theories rendered (subjectively and —I suggest—logically) probable by other basic propositions (including what 'everybody knows' about how the world works) which rule out 'wild' basic propositions from being overall probable. If someone believes that he has seen the Great Pumpkin return at Halloween, then this belief is normally rendered improbable by a lot of other evidence (in the form of his or her basic-beliefs or what others have told him or her about their observations) (Swinburne 2011, 203).

Swinburne's reply is to say that a person will normally hold many other theories derived from how things seem to them as well as the great pumpkin theory. The conditional probability of the great pumpkin theory given those other theories will be low.

Let's consider, then, someone who is as Swinburne describes, so that he does have many background theories given which the probability that the great pumpkin exists is low. PC alone still does not yield the result that such a belief is all things considered unacceptable. The problem is that the conditional lowering of probabilities is symmetrical (Burns, 2017). Consider three propositions:

> B1. The great pumpkin returns to town every Halloween.
> B2. If the great pumpkin came to town, someone would see him.
> B3. Noone has ever seen the great pumpkin.

The three are jointly inconsistent. Any two of them may be true, but not all three. Let's suppose that I nevertheless believe all three through different sources. B1 is, like before something I believe because I wished it were true as a child and it came to seem to me to be true. Swinburne holds that typically I will not have good reason, all things considered, to believe B1 because I will have other theories, B2 and B3, and the probability of B1 given those is low. This claim about probabilities

may be true. Yet, it is also true that the probability of any one of the triad is low given the other three and all three are propositions which, according to PC, I have prima facie justification for believing since they either do seem to me to be true or else derive from things which seem to me to be true. Which conditional determines what I am right in believing (Feldman 2011, 296)? Is the great pumpkin belief unsupported by our other opposing beliefs and theories making it unacceptable or is it instead that all our opposing theories and beliefs are unsupported by our great pumpkin belief? Nothing in DC provides an answer to this question and so there is no way for his theory to yield the verdict that the great pumpkin belief is not supported by the subject's total evidence (Burns, 2017).

5. Modest Doxastic Conservatism Again

Of course, the easy way out is the same as the way out against Markie's and Tooley's objections; insist that a mere belief that P provides only entitles you to an infinitesimally small degree of confidence that P, and nothing more.

The proponent of DC can then maintain that a great pumpkin worshipper gains only a vanishingly small amount of entitlement from the seeming that the great pumpkin exists and that, no matter how strongly it seems to him to be true, that entitlement will ordinarily be easily defeated by the person's counter evidence (that no other pumpkin is capable of walking or talking; that pumpkins are clearly visible objects and no-one has ever seen the great pumpkin, not even on Halloween, etc.). The result will be that the great pumpkin theory is not acceptable after all; not by the standards of DC.

This move does nothing, however, to resolve the problem concerning the direction of entitlement which was raised in the last section. It is still the case, even on the weaker principle, that conditional probabilities are symmetrical. Each of B1-B3 is improbable given the other two and there is no non-arbitrary way, deploying Doxastic Conservatism alone, to say which conditional probability determines what the pumpkin worshipper is entitled in believing.

Lycan (1988), however, integrates his Conservative principle into a larger Coherentist account, and thereby appears to have an easy way out of the forgoing issues. Lycan's (1988) epistemological picture is this[43]. Each belief we have possesses a minimal degree of credibility by the very fact that it is believed. The only way for those beliefs to gain any more significant degree of credibility is by

43 I provide only the barest sketch of a complex position. See Lycan (1988).

standing in relations of coherence to one another. Those very same beliefs, however, may end up with no credibility at all, or there may end up being justification for their negation, depending on how neatly they 'fit' with the rest of the system. On such a view, I have nothing more than a vanishingly small amount of entitlement to any single belief that is independent of other beliefs. I may be entitled to a great deal of confidence in a whole system of beliefs if it exhibits a large amount of coherence.

Lycan distinguishes four sorts of coherence:

> consistency with other spontaneous beliefs; consistency and fit with the wider belief system; being explained; and holding metabeliefs about the source of the belief (Lycan, 2012, 9).

The first two forms of coherence are requirements of logical consistency and Lycan calls a belief which is logically consistent both with the subject's other spontaneous beliefs and his wider belief system “tenable” (Lycan, 2012, 9). Beliefs may become more than merely tenable, however, the more the truth of those beliefs is explained by other believed propositions. Lastly, a system of beliefs is more coherent for having meta-beliefs which attribute reliable sources to first order beliefs. For instance, a system of beliefs which contains many beliefs about the physical world is more coherent for containing meta-beliefs about the reliability of sense perception than it would otherwise be.

Now, turning back to the issue of the symmetrical lowering of probabilities, Lycan might admit that each of B1-B3 is improbable given the other two, but insist that whether or not the worshipper is entitled to believe in the great pumpkin has nothing to do with conditional probabilities. Rather, a more global evaluation of the coherence of the whole system of beliefs is required. In a typical subject, they would have good reason to reject at least one of B1-B3, since accepting all of them introduces a degree of incoherence – one of them is probably false. In a typical sane person, B2 and B3 will stand in far stronger coherence relations than B1 – they will explain and be explained by many other propositions the person believes. The existence of the great pumpkin will neither explain nor be explained by little if anything that an ordinary person believes. A typical system of beliefs, moreover, will not contain meta-beliefs which attribute reliable sources to belief in the great pumpkin. On the contrary, most people would have at least tacit meta-beliefs to the effect that beliefs about supernatural matters of this kind *do not* stem from reliable sources. Thus B1 will not cohere with the system as well as B2 and B3. It will be an explanatory anomaly, and for that reason

should be rejected. Thus, because Lycan's Conservatism is integrated into a more complex Coherentist view, his position yields the intuitively correct result that apparently silly beliefs do not have the same credibility as common-sense beliefs about our immediate surroundings. Commenting on the implications of his theory for “wild” beliefs, he writes:

> It is the third and fourth kinds of coherence that are not exhibited by what we may call “wild” spontaneous beliefs—superstitious forebodings, déjà vu, mild hallucinations, and the like. Such beliefs may be tenable in my sense, but normally they are soon ruled out by their failure to be explained and/or by our having reason to think that they have no reliable source (Lycan, 2012, 10).

6. The Great Pumpkin Returns

There is, however, a way to alter the great pumpkin example so as to rehabilitate an objection to Lycan's position. Suppose that the great pumpkin worshipper is, while delusional, a great system builder. He is able to add to his system of beliefs a series of propositions which might strike any of us as absolutely mad, though they seem utterly obvious to him:

> B4. Magical pumpkin seeds are left every Halloween in my bedside drawer with a note which reads “Enjoy! Regards. Great Pumpkin”.
>
> B5. Every Halloween night a message appears in the clouds which prophesies the return of the great pumpkin in the town square at a given time.
>
> B6. I have been to the town square at that time for the last six years and always heard the laugh of the great pumpkin.
>
> B7. No-one has seen the great pumpkin because he only shows himself to believers.
>
> B8. I once saw a large pumpkin flying through town square late at night.
>
> B9. Belief in the great pumpkin is produced by the magic of the pumpkin working in our hearts.

Let's also stipulate that our pumpkin worshipper has never actually seen nor heard anything which would confirm any of these, nor had any testimony to that effect or anything of the sort. Suppose that he is someone who never leaves his bedroom. He just sits in his room and these things all seem to him to be true. If B4-B9 are added to the great pumpkin worshippers belief system, it is far from clear that B1 should be rejected to maximize the coherence of the system. After all, B1 explains B4, B5, B6 and B8, whilst B7 explains how B1 might be true despite B2 and B3. B9 is a meta-belief attributing belief B1 to reliable sources. There may be some room for argument here, since one measure of coherence in Lycan's view is simplicity, and it might be thought that the simpler explanation of B2 and B3 is not B7 but the negation of B1. The point is, however, that if we can make it less clear whether B1 should be rejected simply by expanding the system of beliefs so as to cohere more with B1, it should be possible to continue expanding, to the point where B1 coheres so well with the system that there is not only no reason to reject it, but excellent reason – given Lycan's account – to accept it. That is, the great pumpkin worshipper can become entitled in believing that the great pumpkin exists, just by continuing to add more and more to his great pumpkin theory[44].

Even more ominously, Tooley (2013) points out that Doxastic Conservatism looks to licence dangerous religious beliefs very easily:

> imagine another person, Jim, who believe in Jod, a jealous deity who wants those who believe in him to kill the evildoers who worship false gods, or none at al, and who will reward only those people who do this. Neither Jim nor those who share his belief claim to have had experiences of Jod. But it certainly seems to Jim, and very strongly indeed, and also to those who share his belief, that Jod exists, and they are not aware of any defeaters of this belief... moreover, it may very well also seem to them that they should certainly carry out the will of Jod by killing the evildoesrs... (Tooley, 2013, 320).

The point is that Jim might easily integrate his religious belief into a coherent system of other things that he believes. The great pumpkin worshipper might believe that:

> (B10) We ought to carry out the will of the great pumpkin by killing anyone who denies or

44 It might be thought that when the worshipper adds B4-B8 to his system, he will notice that he is randomly or arbitrarily adding them and that his method of arriving at them is unreliable. This could then provide a good reason for rejecting them. Not necessarily. Our worshipper is delusional, so perhaps he does not realize that spinning theories as he is doing is unreliable. Perhaps he even thinks he is an infallible oracle!

doubts his existence, or otherwise fails to pay him the proper respect.

The great pumpkin worshipper's belief system now includes an incredibly dangerous belief, and one which, by Doxastic Conservatism, must be an acceptable belief because he believes it and it coheres with all of the other madness which he believes. As Tooley points out in this connection, such dangerous beliefs are not so far removed from the real world, because many religions have held in the past or else continue to hold that *"heritics, apostates, or both should be put to death"* (Tooley, 2013, 320). Not only do or have many religions contained such ideas, but, moreover, those ideas have been well integrated into coherent systems of religious belief. Of course, some of those systems have had tensions in various places, but they are very rarely irremediable. The consequence is that religious believers who hold to a dangerous and yet coherent religious system like that of the great pumpkin worshipper are fully entitled in so doing, according to Doxastic Conservatism.

Note that I am not here raising what is sometimes called the 'multiple systems' objection – that more than one total system of beliefs may be maximally coherent and yet the two systems might contradict one another, leaving a coherence theorist with no account of why one system should be believed over another. Nor is the present point that coherence is not truth conductive. Rather, the point is that Lycan's standards for belief may be met by systems of belief which are obviously silly – systems which are such that nobody should take them seriously.

Lycan (2012) plainly accepts this consequence of his theory, insisting that if a 'wild' or 'crazy' belief happens to be part of a significantly coherent system, the person is right to believe it. It seems to me that this result is obviously incorrect, although I admit that this version of the great pumpkin objection is far more complicated than the original version and so far more difficult to assess clearly[45]. I leave the reader to decide.

The argument I have been developing against Doxastic Conservatism may be summarized in this way:

(1) Doxastic Conservatism implies that obviously silly beliefs are rightly held.
(2) But those obviously silly beliefs are not rightly held. They are silly.
(3) Therefore, Doxastic Conservatism is false.

45 For other objections to Coherentism, see BonJour (2008).

I conclude that Doxastic Conservatism is unattractive.

Chapter 8: Michael Williams' Contextualism

1. Williams' Conception of Scepticism

Michael Williams explains Agrippa's Trilemma this way:

> Suppose, then, that I make a claim—any claim. You are entitled to ask me whether what I have said is something that I am just assuming to be true or whether I know it to the case. If I reply that it is something I know, you are further entitled to ask me how I know. In response, I will have to cite something in support of my claim: my evidence, my credentials, whatever. But now the question can be renewed: is what I cite in defence of my original claim something that I am just assuming or something that I know? If the former, it will not do the job required of it: you can't base knowledge on a mere assumption. But if the latter, it will in turn need to be backed up, and so on. Of course, attempts to provide justification come to a halt. But how? The sceptic will say that we just run out of ideas: either we have nothing to say, or we find ourselves going back over old ground. As an implied claim to knowledge, then, every statement I make invites a new challenge; and in the face of these constantly renewed challenges, I can do only one of three things:
>
> 1. Keep trying to think of something new to say—i.e. embark on an infinite regress (Mode of Infinity).
> 2. At some point, refuse to answer—i.e. make a dogmatic assumption (Mode of Assumption).
> 3. At some point, repeat something I have already said—i.e. reason in a circle (Mode of Circularity).
>
> None of these gives us what we want.... the conclusion seems to be that justification is a complete illusion (Williams, 2001, 62).

The sceptic tries to convince us that we have no reason to believe anything at all, and that, because of this fact, we ought to suspend judgement about everything. As Williams puts it, the idea is that "*we never have the slightest justification for believing one thing rather than another*" (Williams, 2001 58-59) and that "*we can never even get to the point of having justified beliefs"* (Williams, 2001, 59). But, he says, this conclusion is "*the product of contentious and possibly dispensable theoretical preconceptions*" (Williams, 1991, 1). He sets for himself the task of exposing those preconceptions in order to show that, although once we accept the sceptic's standards for acceptable belief, there is no avoiding total suspension of judgement, those standards "*may be reasonably declined*" (Williams, 2004, 122).

The rest of this chapter is an explication of Williams' views on Scepticism. Section 2 discusses what Williams takes to be the standards of acceptable belief underlying Agrippa's Trilemma. Section 3 articulates Williams' proposed alternative epistemic standards.

2. Williams on the Sceptic's Standards

Williams gives several different characterizations of the sceptic's ethics of belief. In one place, he says that the sceptic assumes Clifford's (1877) doctrine that "*it is irresponsible—always, everywhere, and for everyone—to hold a belief on less-than-adequate evidence"* (Williams, 2004, 128).

Clifford's dictum is supposedly analysable into four different principles:

> *(PG1)* No Free Lunch Principle. Epistemic entitlement—personal justification—does not just accrue to us: it must be earned by epistemically responsible behaviour.
>
> *(PG2)* Priority Principle. It is never epistemically responsible to believe a proposition true when one's grounds for believing it true are less than adequate.
>
> *(PG3)* Evidentialism. Grounds are evidence: propositions that count in favour of the truth of the proposition believed.
>
> *(PG4)* Possession Principle. For a person's belief to be adequately grounded, it is

> not sufficient for there merely to be appropriate evidence for it. Rather, the believer himself or herself must possess (and make proper use of) evidence that makes the proposition believed (very) likely to be true (Williams, 2001, 147).

The introduction of these four principles by Williams seems to me only to confuse things. According to him, (PG1) and (PG2) together imply "*the uniform subordination of personal justification to grounding. By (PG2), believing on less than adequate grounds is always irresponsible and hence, by (PG1), never justified*" (Williams, 2001, 147-148). But it is hardly a surprise that the conjunction of PG1 and PG2 should imply that it is irresponsible to believe a proposition in the absence of adequate grounds, because PG2 implies this all by itself – in fact, it is a mere rewording of PG2. PG1 is therefore redundant.

PG3 and PG4 allegedly "*add to this a strongly internalist account of what it is for someone's belief to be adequately grounded*" (Williams, 2001, 147-148). If my belief that God exists is produced by a cognitive process which is in fact reliable, you might say that that is a grounding – of sorts – for the belief. But PG3 and PG4 are designed, according to Williams, specifically to rule this out, and to insist that the only things which count as grounds are things which are cognitively accessible to the believer.

All of this may be vastly simplified, however, by removing all mention of "grounds" (and anyway, Clifford's principle itself does not contain the word "grounds"). If we were to do that and remove the redundant PG1, we would be left with the following:

> *(PG2*).* It is never epistemically responsible to believe a proposition when one's evidence for believing it is less than adequate.
>
> *(PG4*)* For a person's belief to be epistemically responsible, it is not sufficient for there merely to be evidence for it. Rather, the believer himself or herself must possess evidence that makes the proposition believed likely to be true[46].

We thus have, not four distinct principles but two. The first is a mere rewording of Clifford's dictum itself, whilst the second is an important qualification which serves to underscore the thought that merely externalist justification is insufficient for responsible belief formation. Let's just call the

46 There is no sense to be made of PG3 at all once we remove the reference to "grounds" from our analysis of Clifford's dictum.

combination of PG2* and PG4*, “Evidentialism”.

We may now see how it is that Williams thinks that Agrippa's Trilemma presupposes Evidentialism:

> At the heart of the Agrippan argument is the apparently fatal trilemma: any attempt to justify a belief must open a vicious regress, end with a brute assumption, or go in a circle. The sceptic concludes that no one is ever justified in believing one thing rather than another. Given the distinctions we have just drawn, we see that this conclusion concerns epistemic entitlement: personal justification. However, all the sceptic's argument shows is that there are limits to our capacity to give reasons or cite evidence. This is a point about grounding. To get from what he argues to what he concludes, the sceptic must take it for granted that no belief is rightly held unless it rests on adequate and citable evidence. He needs the Prior Grounding Requirement. More precisely, he needs the Dependence Thesis (to link responsibility with grounding) and Strong Internalism (to identify grounding with the possession of evidence). Nothing less will do the job (Williams, 2001 148).

The sceptic first tries to convince the dogmatist that he is no reason for his belief. According to Williams, the sceptic wants us to infer from this that our beliefs are unjustified *in the sense of blameworthy* (Williams, 2001, 148). To arrive at that further conclusion, however, the sceptic has to presuppose Evidentialism; he has to presuppose that it is never responsible to hold a belief for no reason. Thus PG2*. Moreover, the sceptic must understand “reason” and “evidence” in the internalist way – as the sort of thing to which the believer has cognitive access. For if the sceptic does not presuppose this, the mere existence of a reason for the belief which falls entirely outside of my grasp will be sufficient to end the regress. Thus PG4*. If the sceptic is to persuasively arrive at the conclusion that we should not hold beliefs, he must presuppose Evidentialism.

Williams calls this view various things – Cliffordism, Evidentialism, the prior grounding conception of justification.

3. The Default and Challenge Model

Williams does not just claim that Evidentialism is presupposed by Agrippa's Trilemma. He claims, moreover, that it is a *contentious and entirely optional bit of philosophical theory*. Opposing it, he offers a rival doctrine, which he calls a “default and challenge model of justification”, about which

he has this to say:

> The difference between the 'Prior Grounding' and 'Default and Challenge' conceptions of justification is like that between legal systems that treat the accused as guilty unless proved innocent and those that do the opposite, granting presumptive innocence and throwing the burden of proof onto the accuser. Adopting the second model, epistemic entitlement is the default status of a person's beliefs and assertions. One is entitled to a belief or assertion (which, remember, is an implicit knowledge-claim, unless clearly qualified) in the absence of appropriate 'defeaters': that is, reasons to think that one is not so entitled (Williams, 2001, 149).

The Default and Challenge model thus turns out to be the view that "*a person is entitled to a belief in the absence of appropriate "defeaters": i.e., reasons to think that he is not so entitled*" (Williams, 2004, 133). Evidentialism entitles the sceptic to enter "brute challenges". He can legitimately ask, for any claim that I make, "why believe that?", paying no attention to the context in which I claim it. If I fail to answer any such question, it will turn out that my claim is unacceptable. On the Default and Challenge model, a belief can be rightly held by default and *"there is no universal default entitlement to enter a challenge"* (Williams, 2004, 133).

Now, Williams is not suggesting that just any and every belief is rightly held just because it is believed. The qualification "in the absence of appropriate defeaters" is crucial. Sometimes the sceptic's challenge will be reasonable, but not always:

> Appropriate defeaters cite reasonable and relevant error-possibilities. There are two main types. Non-epistemic defeaters cite evidence that one's assertion is false: this evidence might be purely negative, or it might be positive evidence for the truth of some incompatible claim. Epistemic defeaters give grounds for suspecting that one's belief was acquired in an unreliable or irresponsible way. Here the objector concedes that his interlocutor's claim or belief might be true but denies that it is well grounded (Williams, 2001, 149).

Putting all of this together, a belief is rightly held unless there is a defeater – some evidence that the belief is false or some positive reason to think that the belief was acquired unreliably. Taken in this way, Williams' position is a version of Conservatism – the view that a belief is acceptable (to some degree) because it is believed (Lycan, 2013). This is how Williams initially states the view, but the

many subtle qualifications he adds to it suggest something quite different.

In various other places, Williams adds myriad other factors which might affect a belief's default justificatory status. Entitlements are, as he puts it in one place, "contextually determined", and in a very severe way (Williams, 2007, 100-105). Whether a particular belief may be legitimately challenged often depends on whether a challenge there is even intelligible:

> to be legitimate, a challenge must at least be intelligible. Th is is not automatic. I take it for granted that two plus three equals fi ve. It would be ridiculous for someone to say "I see what you mean, but why do you say that?" Anyone who thinks that a challenge is in place here does not see what I mean (Williams, 2007, 100)[47].

In a similar fashion, according to Williams, certain perceptual judgements are insulated from challenge, and in this connection he quotes Wittgenstein:

> Suppose now I say "I'm incapable of being wrong about this: that is a book" while I point to an object. What would a mistake here be like? And have I any clear idea of it? 155. In certain circumstances a man cannot make a mistake (Wittgenstein, cited by Williams, 2007, 100)[48].

It seems that Wittgenstein is straightforwardly mistaken on this point. It might not be a book at all, but a hallucination. I seem to have a perfectly clear idea what such a mistake would be like. I walk into the room, I see an item, I point at it and say "this is a book". Perhaps I even seem to pick it up, riffle through the pages and read a few words. I put it down. Someone else comes into the room and asks what I'm doing. I tell them "I was just having a look at this book", again pointing to the item. They look puzzled. "What are you talking about?", they say. They conclude that I must have drank too much, because there is no book at all. After an hour or so away, I return to the place where I seemed to see the book, but it isn't there. I made a mistake. There was no book. Thus, the question

47 This is pretty much identical to the well-known Empiricist account of empirical justification (See BonJour, 2008).

48 As another side note, this too seems to be close to a traditional Empiricist account of empirical justification (Stace, 1934). Williams works hard to distinguish his view from these by arguing that "*the kind of certainty that is connected with the impossibility of mistake – or with the unintelligibility of epistemic challenges – does not allow us to defi ne the epistemic kinds that are the hallmark of traditional foundationalism*" (Williams, 2007, 101). He suggests that whether something like "this is a book" may be justified by default depends on the circumstances. If I am in a paraphernalia store, which sells not only books but also cigarette boxes that look like books, "this is a book" could be legitimately challenged (Williams, 2007, 101). The position is thus importantly different.

“why believe that what you are seeing is a book?” raises a perfectly intelligible doubt.

I am not sure whether Williams appreciates this, but he also seems to hold that perceptual judgements can be acceptable by default *even if* a challenge to them is intelligible:

> Even when intelligible, challenges are not always legitimate. They can be far-fetched or utterly groundless. Th e logical possibility of a certain kind of error is not generally sufficient for a legitimate challenge. Often one needs some reason to think that the possibility is live: that there is some reasonable probability of its having been realized. (Williams, 2007, 102)

It might be absurd for me to question whether what I am holding is a book if I am in a library riffling through the pages. There is simply no reason to think that I might be mistaken here. On the other hand, it might be sensible to question it if I am in a store which sells not only books but boxes which look just like books (Williams, 2001, 101).

Challenges can, according to Williams, also fail to be legitimate if they are irrelevant to our current concerns. So we may be entitled to a belief because it sets the direction of enquiry (Williams, 2001, 160). If our goal is to pursue historical research on ancient Greece, the view that the earth has existed for more than five minutes cannot be questioned. Questioning it would simply be to give up on that kind of inquiry. According to Williams, beliefs which have this role are rightly held:

> Methodological necessities are a source of default entitlements because they determine the direction of inquiry. For example, serious worries as to whether the Earth even existed five minutes ago, or whether every piece of documentary evidence is some kind of forgery, do not result in an especially scrupulous approach to historical investigation (Williams, 2001, 160).

It is not just, as the sceptic would have it, that we accept that the earth existed five minutes ago for practical purposes, so that we can go on with what we need to do. Rather, that presupposition is, in Williams' words “*a fundamental fact about the logic of inquiry*” (Williams, 2001, 160). It is important to be clear about this point. It is pretty obvious – and I think few would deny – that as a matter of descriptive fact what Williams says is true. It is true that pursuing historical research into ancient Greece logically requires the assumption that the earth existed for more than five minutes. It

cannot be denied that there are these kinds of methodological necessity to be found in various forms of inquiry. What Williams is saying, however, is more than this. He is saying that methodological necessities are *rightly held* because they are necessary for the inquiry.

Methodological necessities, on Williams' view, '*fix the angle of scrutiny*' (Williams, 2001, 160). They enable us to look into a particular issue from a particular perspective, taking certain things for-granted. We are entitled to the takings-for-granted by the very fact that they enable the enquiry, but they are by no means the fixed unchangeable assumptions the sceptic paints them as being. If we choose to investigate from a different angle, we can simply change the takings-for-granted, but we cannot operate without any such assumptions at all:

> We can no more inquire into everything at once than we can travel simultaneously in all directions (Williams, 2001, 160-161).

Thus, whether we are entitled to a belief by default may change as our choices of inquiry change. A belief that is rightly held in the context of one inquiry may cease to be so from a different angle, where the aims of inquiry are different (Williams, 2001, 161). He again sees this in Wittgenstein:

> 163. We check the story of Napoleon, but not whether all reports about him are based on sense-deception, forgery and the like. For whenever we test anything, we are already presupposing something that is not tested. Now am I to say that the experiment which perhaps I make in order to test the truth of a proposition presupposes the truth of the proposition that the apparatus I believe I see is really there (and the like)?.... We just can't investigate everything, and for this reason we are forced to rest content with assumption. If I want the door to turn, the hinges must stay put (Wittgenstein, cited by Williams, 2007, 102).

There are also other economic considerations which Williams introduces. I earlier mentioned that a belief's justificatory status may be defeated by counter-evidence, but the amount of evidence is not at all fixed. How much evidence is needed before we rightly become suspicious of a once default claim will depend on what the costs are of being wrong, how important the issue is to us and so on. It may even be that a particular issue is of such great importance, and the costs so great if we are mistaken about it, that we cannot rightly take any position on the matter even if it is a methodological necessity of a desirable kind of enquiry. Williams sums up all of this:

> Methodological, dialectical, and economic factors concern primarily the epistemic responsibility dimension of justification. They reveal that the relationship between personal and evidential justification is multiply contextual. In the first place, with respect to maintaining epistemic responsibility, the existence of a properly motivated challenge determines whether evidential justification—in the strict sense of citable evidence—is required at all to secure personal justification. In the second place, contextual factors fix the adequacy conditions on evidential justification's securing personal justification. Most importantly, they determine what potential defeaters ought to be excluded. These will never amount to every logically possible way of going wrong, but will be restricted to a range of relevant alternatives. However, there are two sources of irrelevance that must not be confused. An error- possibility may be beside the point—strictly irrelevant to the subject in hand—or, while not strictly irrelevant, it may be too remote a possibility to be worthy of serious consideration (Williams, 2001, 161).

All of this serves to underline the crucial point. On the Default and Challenge model, the sceptic cannot legitimately enter brute challenges all over the place without concern for context. He cannot just ask "why?" without presenting some specific evidence that the belief in question is mistaken or dubiously arrived at. He cannot, as Williams puts it, engage in "freefloating suspicion". He must motivate his challenge. And, crucially, he cannot conclude from our failure to answer such brute challenges that our beliefs are irresponsible. Williams thus concludes that if we reject Evidentialism in favour of the Default and Challenge model, "*the threat of radical, general scepticism will no longer be on the table*" (Williams, 2004, 134).

Before moving on, we must recognize that the Default and Challenge model is a genuine alternative to Evidentialism. The Default and Challenge model sometimes feels very much like a mere description of everyday practices of epistemic evaluation (at least, for a certain sort of people). Williams (2007, 105)) even says at one point that his view is "*more descriptive than it is theoretical*". But this cannot be allowed to confuse things. The view certainly does try to stay very close to everyday epistemic evaluation, but it is, at the same time, an *endorsement* of those evaluations. The Default and Challenge model is not just a mere attempted description of our practices; to oppose Evidentialism in the way Williams wants it to, it must be a theory of what makes a belief responsible or acceptable.

Like with the sceptic's standards, Williams has various names for his own view. He sometimes calls it “The Default and Challenge Model” and sometimes “Contextualism”. Both names are apt.

Chapter 9: Contextualism and “Ordinary Practice”

1. Arguments?

Why would anyone favour Williams' account of right belief? He gives two arguments.

> There are two main lines of defense for the contextualist view: that it stays much closer to ordinary epistemic practice; and that alternatives serve only to generate unnecessary skeptical puzzles, such as epistemic relativism (Williams, 2007, 99).

The first argument is the subject of this chapter. The second argument is the subject of the next. Section 2 clarifies the sceptic's epistemic standards. Section 3 states the argument Williams gives against them. Section 4 contends that the argument is of no force.

2. The Sceptic's Standards Explicated (a bit)

Williams argues that the Default and Challenge view fits better with “*the phenomenology of everyday epistemic practices*” than Evidentialism (Williams, 2001, 254). Williams characterizes Evidentialism in this way:

(PG2).* It is never epistemically responsible to believe a proposition when one's evidence for believing it is less than adequate.
(PG4)* For a person's belief to be epistemically responsible, it is not sufficient for there merely to be evidence for it. Rather, the believer himself or herself must possess evidence

3. The Ordinary Practice Argument

The Default and Challenge view is supposed to be more in line with everyday epistemic evaluations than Evidentialism in a number of ways.

First, everyday practice allegedly has no place for brute challenges. We do not normally allow the question “why believe that?” unless there is some particularly salient reason to doubt the belief in question:

> If I think you might be making a mistake, that you have not shown proper epistemic responsibility, or that your epistemic procedure may have been flawed, I ought to be able to say how and why. Groundless, freefloating suspicion is not ordinarily considered a basis for a reasonable challenge (Williams, 2004, 133).

Evidentialism is in sharp contrast to this, because it allows the entering of brute challenges in the absence of Williams' “how and why”. It allows “freefloating suspicion”.

Second, it is often possible to reject challenges to provide reasons. That is, we normally allow room for declining to offer further reasons when asked:

> [Evidentialism] leaves no room for legitimate challenges to challenges. But such challenges to challenges are a pervasive feature of ordinary reason-giving (Williams, 2001, 144).

Third, ordinary practices supposedly contain an important distinction between justifying a belief and being entitled (justified) to hold it it:

> It is certainly true that to justify a belief is typically to marshal evidence, offer one's credentials, explain away apparent counter-evidence, and so on. Justifying, in other words, just is giving grounds. But being justified is not always a matter of having gone through a prior process of justification (Williams 2001, 154).

This distinction, Williams says, is captured by the Default and Challenge view, because sometimes a belief may be acceptable without having undergone a process of justification – for it may be acceptable by default. Evidentialism makes no room for the distinction, because it insists that every right belief must be one which has *been* justified.

Williams admits that it is possible to square Evidentialism with these (alleged) features of ordinary practice. We might say, for example, that although ordinarily we do not allow the entering of brute

challenges, this is only because of the constraints of practicality. We simply cannot, if we want to get anything done, allow brute challenges. Nevertheless, when we set aside practical constraints we will recognize that, strictly speaking, our beliefs are irrightly held in virtue of our failure to answer such challenges. Similar extensions of Evidentialism could be made to accommodate the other elements of ordinary practice which Williams raises. Doing this, however, severely increases the complexity of Evidentialism. We have to attach to the basic view about epistemic responsibility a series of descriptive hypotheses about ordinary practice, designed to explain away apparent conflicts between the basic Evidentialist view and ordinary practice. Such hypotheses, moreover, are added on to Evidentialism in ad hoc fashion, with no motivation save for preventing it from being at odds with our practices. The Default and Challenge view, on the other hand, needs no such further hypotheses and is thus theoretically superior (Williams, 2001, 154-155).

Williams says that all of this looks badly on the sceptic, because:

> [the sceptic's] conception of justification cannot be read off ordinary epistemic procedures. It has nothing to do with ordinary doubts of justifications, which are always in various ways restricted. Rather, its function is to make room for an extraordinary, unrestricted kind of doubt: general (hence radical) Skepticism (Williams, 2007, 135).

It is this, then, that Williams meant by saying that Scepticism presupposes contentious and dispensable theoretical considerations, and what he means in various other passages, where he says that Scepticism is not “natural” or “intuitive”.

4. The Argument Evaluated

All of this is very quick. Williams makes three points about ordinary epistemic practice:

(1) Brute challenges are not part of ordinary epistemic practice. If you think I might be wrong in claim, you must have something specific in mind and some reason to think it might be the case. You cannot legitimately just ask, in a vacuum, “why?”, as the sceptic does.
(2) It is often legitimate to “challenge a challenge”. That is, to question the appropriateness of someone asking you to provide further reasons for your claim.
(3) Being entitled to hold a belief is not always a matter of having gone through a process of

prior justification.

One place we might have reservations is in Williams notion of “our epistemic practices”. Who is meant by “our”? If Williams means everybody in the world, he is surely wrong that all of their practices have the features which he describes. Some people do, pace Williams, allow the entry of brute challenges. If I confess to believing that there are ghosts, I assure you that lots of people I know will enter the challenge “but why?”, and they won't think it acceptable for me to dismiss their challenge on the grounds that the existence of ghosts is a “presupposition” of my practices as a medium. Moreover, many critics of religious belief make brute demands for reasons for accepting religious claims, and they take the failure of religious believers to answer such challenges to show that religious belief is unacceptable. If you are unsure of this point, think here about what students say on Philosophy of Religion courses, or what scientists like Richard Dawkins and Laurence Krauss say in debates about religion. Equally, I have spoken with plenty of people in other disciplines who make the same objection. The assumption, as has been pointed out by Plantinga (2000), is that religious belief is reasonable only if the believer can answer a brute request for evidence[49].

As for (2), it seems to be part of my own practice and of some of the people around me, but I've no idea whether it is part of “ours” in any interestingly wide sense. But assuming it were true, there is no reason to think it is at odds with Evidentialism. Suppose that we are investigating the history of

49 I hold that there is no interesting sense in which everyone shares the same epistemic standards. Disputes between philosophers about the correct epistemic standards are rife. Some philosophers defend simplicity as a criterion of reasonable theory choice in every area (Swinburne, 1997). Some hold that simplicity is a legitimate criterion in science but not in philosophy (Huemer, 2009). Some advise against the criterion of simplicity in scientific research (and biology specifically (Crick, 1988) whilst others are more generally doubtful of the value of simplicity (Bunge, 1961).

Some accept and some reject the legitimacy of inference to the best explanation (Boyd, 1981; Douven, 2002; Van Fraasen, 1989). Some hold that the mere fact that you hold a belief makes it (to some degree) reasonable to hold it, absent defeaters (Lycan, 2013) and others find that view preposterous (Christenson, 1994; Burns, 2017). There are those who hold that it can some times be reasonable to hold a belief in light of pragmatic, economic or utilitarian considerations (Leary, 2017; Rinard, 2018; Harman, 1999; James, 1979) and there are others who insist that we ought only to form beliefs on the basis of good reasons or evidence (Clifford, 1999; Way, 2016; Conee and Feldman, 2004). Williams holds that a belief may be reasonable if it is a methodological necessity of an inquiry that we are interested in pursuing, but I deny it. It is quite clear that there are many disputes among philosophers about the best epistemic standards. It seems to me that there is no reason to think that philosophers are, in this respect, any different to the rest of the population.

ancient Greece and someone raises the question as to why we should believe that the earth is more than five minutes old in the first place, never mind as old as required for a study of ancient Greece. Someone might dismiss the challenge, saying something like “that doesn't really matter at the moment”. According to Williams, that dismissal is perfectly appropriate according to “our” epistemic practice.

But Evidentialism does not say otherwise. It is not the view that any time anyone comes up to you and insists that you give reasons for one of your beliefs, you ought to either defend it or suspend judgement. It is the view that you should suspend judgement if you have no reason at all for the belief. “Having” a reason, however we should interpret the phrase, is obviously not meant to be interpreted such that you “have” a reason only if you would tell anyone who asks what that reason is any time that they ask it, regardless of what else you are doing at the time. That is a maximally uncharitable interpretation of the view.

As concerns (3), it seems true of my own practice, and for all I know it is true for some fairly wide sense of “our”, but Evidentialism does not prevent a distinction between acceptable belief and the process of justification. Believing something at some time is right, at that time, if and only if you have some reason to believe it at that time. This does not mean that you need to tell those reasons to anyone, so as to have completed a “process of justification” . Note, crucially, that there is no need at all to amend any further ad hoc hypotheses to Evidentialism in order to make this distinction. It is not as though I am adding to Evidentialism various other ideas so as to accommodate (3). Rather, all of this is already part of Evidentialism on any charitable reading of it. It does not say, not even as Williams originally states it, that a belief is acceptable for S only if S has in the past completed the process of its justification. It says merely that a belief is acceptable for S only if S has good reasons to believe it.

The situation, then, is this. Williams says that Evidentialism is at odds with ordinary practice in three respects. The first of those seems not to be a feature of ordinary practice, at least for lots of people. The other two features are perfectly compatible with Evidentialism.

So what of Williams' claim that the sceptic's standards have “*nothing to do with ordinary doubts or justifications*” (Williams, 2007, 135)?. Well he might be right, but he certainly hasn't shown it.

Chapter 10: Williams Radical Relativism

1. The Second Argument

I turn now to Williams' second argument for Contextualism – to wit – the claim that "*alternatives serve only to generate unnecessary skeptical puzzles, such as epistemic relativism*" (Williams, 2007, 99). Pace, Williams, I think his view is a severely implausible version of epistemic relativism. If I can show this, it follows both that Williams has no motivation for his Contextualism and that the view is independently quite implausible, even by Williams' own admission.

Section 2 distinguishes different versions of Relativism. Section 3 discusses Fogelin's charge that Williams is a Relativist. Sections 4 and 5 argue that Williams is, despite his protestations to the contrary, committed to an implausible Relativist standards of belief. Section 6 argues that even despite having adopted Relativism in an effort to avoid Scepticism, Williams' views are still compatible with the heart of Scepticism.

2. Versions of Relativism

According to O'Grady (2002), a Relativist about some phenomenon, X, says that X is dependent on, co-varies with, or is *relative to,* some other variable, Y. Ashton (manuscript), a defender of Relativism, concurs. Baghramian (2010) gives three examples:

(a) Justice is relative to local norms.

(b) Truth is relative to a language-game.

(c) The measurement of temperature is relative to the scale we use.

Focussing in on truth, Baghramian writes:

> Relativism about truth, or *alethic relativism*, at its simplest, is the claim that what is true for one individual or social group may not be true for another, and there is no context-independent vantage point to adjudicate the matter. What is true or false is always relative to a conceptual, cultural, or linguistic framework (Baghramian, 2010).

Thus:

> *(RelativismT)* There is no such thing as objective truth. There are only relative truths which hold for some people and not for others.

The Relativist about truth thinks that there are things that are true-for-me and things that are true-for-you, these might well be entirely different from one another and there is no further fact about whose beliefs are "*really true*". Suppose that you believe that there are aliens and I believe that there are no aliens. The Relativist about Truth will say that "there are aliens" is true for you and "there are no aliens" is true for me, and there is no answer to the question whether there are "*really*" any aliens. All truth is relative in this way[50].

I do not think there is anything in Williams' work which suggests Relativism about Truth, so I set that aside.

A version of Relativism which comes closer to the point is Relativism about acceptable belief. That would be the view that whether a belief is acceptable is relative to some other variable. Ashton (manuscript) defines her own epistemic Relativism this way:

> The epistemic form of relativism which we are concerned with holds that justification is relative to some kind of epistemic framework, where an epistemic framework is a set of propositions that a given epistemic community uses to distinguish 'good' beliefs, or those that should be believed, from 'bad' ones, or those which shouldn't be believed. Put simply: epistemic relativists (usually) believe that justification is relative to some sort of standard of use (Asthon, manuscript, 2).

Fogelin's characterization of the view concurs, with him defining it as the view that *"S is justified in believing that p if P is justified within the framework in which S is operating"* (Fogelin, 1994, 96).

So, the epistemic relativist holds that whether we ought to hold a belief is relative to the framework in which we are operating. Further to this basic characterization, Ashton adds another idea:

50 There is no need to look further into what might be meant by these assertions, because I will not have anything more to say about RelativismT.

> the endorsement of equal validity – the idea that all the different sets of justified propositions, which arise as a result of the various possible epistemic frameworks, are equally valid (Ashton, manuscript, 2).

We may, therefore, define Relativism about acceptable belief in this way:

> *RelativismJ.* (a) S's belief is acceptable if it is acceptable relative to his epistemic framework, and (b) all frameworks are equally valid.

RelativismJ may be further divided in terms of which frameworks it is talking about. So cultural RelativismJ is the view that whether S's belief is acceptable is relative to the epistemic framework of the S's culture. Subjective RelativismJ, on the other hand, is more egocentric. According to it, each individual person has their own epistemic framework relative to which his or her beliefs are justified. A belief may be reasonable-for-me or reasonable-for-you, but there is no such thing as reasonable *simpliciter* (Williams, 2001, 220).

A "framework" might be thought of as a set of assumptions – about responsible ways of forming beliefs, about what kinds of considerations count as evidence and which don't, and about which methods of inquiry are reliable. It may even include certain fundamental assumptions about what the world is like. You might have as part of your framework, for example, the belief that the world is ordered and stable, and for that reason capable of explanation in terms of scientific laws of nature. Or your framework might include the belief that God exists and makes his presence known to us through the holy spirit.

A Relativist about justification will hold that whether you ought to hold a belief depends on whether it is licensed by your framework. So, given that you have the ordered-world framework, believing that miracles do not happen is quite reasonable. Equally, given that you have the religious framework, belief in miracles may be acceptable. A defender of Relativism about acceptable belief thinks that this is all there is to be said about the matter. There is no further fact about which framework is acceptable.

RelativismJ presupposes an assumption which it is worth pointing out. It assumes that there are such things as "epistemic frameworks" that are relied on by – for cultural RelativismJ – different

cultures or – for subjective RelativismJ – different individuals, in their evaluation of beliefs. It is relative to these frameworks which all evaluations of belief are to be made, and there is no way to evaluate the frameworks themselves.

It is undeniable that there are differences across cultures and historical eras in how beliefs are formed and evaluated. Cultures of earlier times relied heavily on oracles and seers in predicting the future. We do not. Some cultures rely heavily on ancient scripture as a basis for beliefs about the origin of the human race and the world itself, but that practice is not at all a universal one today. It was once quite common to rely on mythical fables as explanations of physical phenomena – the weather for example. Today all of these issues are handled much differently by most of us – in a way you might loosely call "scientifically". Myths and fables are replaced with experiments, observation and theory. It might be tempting to think that this difference between contemporary culture and that of previous eras is a sign of progress – we have realized the proper way of learning about the world is through scientific procedures. But to the Relativist about Justification this is a fantasy. Our way of doing things is not better in any way than the ancient reliance on oracles, myths and fables. It is just different. Our beliefs are acceptable relative to our framework; their beliefs are acceptable relative to theirs and there is no way to evaluate the frameworks themselves.

There is some ambiguity in the above characterization of RelativismJ, specifically when the Relativist says that "*our way of doing things is not better in any way than the ancient reliance on oracles*", or equally when he says "*no framework is superior to any other*" or "*there is no way to evaluate the frameworks themselves*". What is meant by these claims?

Suppose that our way of doing things is, in fact, a reliable way of discovering the truth. Well then there is one sense in which our way of doing things is better than reliance on oracles. I do not think the Relativist is charitably taken as denying that if our way of doing things is reliable then it is better, nor is he charitably taken as explicitly denying (or affirming) that our way of doing things is reliable. The Relativist does not have anything to say on that matter at all.

I propose that when the Relativist says these things, he is accepting a form of Scepticism. The Relativist is suggesting that our way of doing things is "not better" in the sense that there is *no non-question begging reason* to think that it is more reliable than the use of oracles. He is suggesting that, ultimately, there is no reason to favour our framework over the ancient framework. As Williams puts the Relativist view:

> There is no common ground, substantive or methodological, on which argument between those who see the world from different standpoints can proceed. Clashes between them are thus power struggles, 'objectivity' being no more than the dominant world-view's preferred self-description (Williams, 2001, 220).

So the Relativist about justification really has three views. First, he accepts the sceptical view that there is, ultimately, no reason to believe anything at all. Second, he holds the view that whether we ought to hold a belief depends, not on whether there is some reason to believe it, but on whether it is licensed given our framework. Third, he holds that all frameworks are equally good[51].

3. Williams and Relativism

Many philosophers, Williams included, hold that Relativism is a sort of response to Scepticism. It is an attempt to avoid Scepticism, although exactly how is often not very clearly explained, either by advocates of Relativist views or by their critics. Here is one way to understand the Relativist gambit. Agrippa's Trilemma, as we have seen, presupposes Evidentialism. The sceptic has to assume Evidentialism if he is to arrive at the conclusion that no belief is reasonable or rightly held. Williams' response is to reject Evidentialism. We might think of the Relativist as, like Williams, rejecting Evidentialism to avoid the sceptical conclusion. He rejects Evidentialism in favour of the view that a belief is acceptable if it is acceptable-in-framework. The question which then faces us is to what extent the Relativists' replacement for Evidentialism is like Williams' replacement for Evidentialism.

Well, the Relativists' picture of things has it that a belief is right when it is right within a particular framework[52]. A framework might include principles about what kinds of argument are legitimate or illegitimate (inference to the best explanation, deduction, argument by analogy etc) as well as substantive claims about the world (Odin is the king of the gods. Everything is fated. We are radically free. Everything is physical. Etc). The framework in question may be that of the individual (as in subjective RelativismJ) or the wider culture (as in cultural RelativismJ). The assumptions which comprise the framework cannot be thought of as responsible or irresponsible, reasonable or

51 I will not explore the reasons that the Relativist might have for holding any of these views.
52 The Relativist must hold, on pain of consistency, that his theory of justified belief is itself only justified relative to the framework in which he is operating.

unreasonable on this view. The framework itself has no normative status whatsoever. What's more, it is not possible to provide anything like a good reason to believe any of the framework assumptions, nor to have any reason to reject one in favour of another. They are totally in-evaluable.

Fogelin (1999) rejects RelativismJ because of the rigid status it gives to framework beliefs. He points out that even if a belief is reasonable for you given your framework, the framework itself may be unreasonable – you "*may be using astrological tables*" (Fogelin, 1994, 96). Imagine I belong to a culture who believe ourselves to be capable of contacting the dead for their opinions on present matters. I believe that Plato is thrilled with the present state of Philosophy, and I believe it because I went to see an alleged medium who told me so. My belief might be quite reasonable given my framework – say that my framework includes the belief that certain mysterious people can reliably contact the dead and speak to them through crystal balls. My framework itself, however, is unreasonable.

Williams says that he too rejects RelativismJ, and for the same reason that Fogelin does (Williams, 2001, 226). He says that on his view "frameworks" are no more immune to criticism than anything else is:

> Fogelin's criticism misses the point that contextualists not only can but must be as fallibilist about epistemic frameworks as they are about beliefs in general. For contextualists, there is no sharp line between epistemic and factual commitments, and so no clear boundary between methodological propositions and propositions within a method. Fogelin's criticism equates the contextualist's revisable methodological presuppositions with the relativist's ultimate principles.... I said that talk of 'frameworks' is harmless provided that we do not take it too seriously. But such talk is best avoided. Almost inevitably, it encourages us to think of contexts of justification as insulated from external criticism, a view that contextualism is simply not committed to (Williams, 2007, 108).

On first hearing Williams' view, it might be tempting to think of his suggestion that whether a belief is acceptable depends on the context as the very same claim as the Relativists claim that whether a belief is acceptable depends on the framework. It is tempting to think of Williams' "contexts which set the direction of inquiry" as rigid frameworks immune from any sort of evaluation, but this is not at all what Williams has in mind. It is true that Williams holds:

(C1) All justification takes place in a context of presuppositions and other circumstances which are not currently under scrutiny.

But he also holds:

(C2) These presuppositions and circumstances can themselves be articulated and challenged, but only by a recontextualization of the original justificatory procedure, a recontextualization that will involve presuppositions of its own.

And

(C3) Recontextualization can go on indefinitely. But this is the open-endedness of inquiry, not a vicious regress of justification (Williams, 2001, 227).

These two further theses, Williams thinks, distinguish his view from Relativism, on which epistemic frameworks cannot ever be evaluated in any sense at all. While the Relativist sees alternative epistemic frameworks as completely isolated from one another, incapable of being brought into dialogue for any sort of criticism at all, Williams sees the assumptions of a context as always open to criticism from the perspective of a different context. According to Williams, his view is, for this reason, not Relativism about justification.

4. Criticism, and Astrology

If Williams' position is not Relativism about justification, it is at least cut from a very similar cloth; a cloth which looks to all the world like Relativism. There are some striking parallels. First, both of them reject Evidentialism in response to Agrippa's Trilemma. Second, the Relativist says that all right belief is right-in-framework, and that there is nothing that is acceptable (or unacceptable) simpliciter. Williams says that all acceptable belief is acceptable-in-context, and that there is nothing that is acceptable (or unacceptable) simpliciter. The only difference – which Williams thinks is crucial – is that Williams' view allegedly has room for the critical evaluation of contextual assumptions whilst the Relativist openly denies any such possibility.

It is worth looking more closely, however, at what Williams calls criticism of contextual assumptions. On Williams' view, a proposition which is an assumption in one context may be evaluated from another perspective, taking up new assumptions and working out of another context. So the assumption that spiritual mediums are reliable might be operative in the context of my inquiries into the opinions of long dead philosophers, but it is evaluable if we come at it from a context in which sense perception is taken to be reliable – because from that angle it is quite clear at least most purported mediums are con-artists using well known psychological manipulations to trick clients.

The general idea is this. Suppose that the belief that P is acceptable in a context which takes fore-granted assumptions Q, R, S. In that context Q, R, S are acceptable by default as a result of whatever contextual factors may be in play. In such a context, Q, R and S cannot be challenged. It is, nevertheless, possible to evaluate Q, R and S by 'recontextualizing'. That is, Q, R and S can be evaluated if we move to a different context where they are not taken fore-granted any more. In moving to a different context, we must take fore-granted other propositions, T, U, V, relative to which we will assess Q, R and S. Equally, T, U and V are immune to challenge in this context, but we could shift the context so as to evaluate them. Any contextual assumption is so evaluable, by taking up different contextual assumptions and looking at things from there.

The question which must be raised, however, is how much of this “recontextualizing” is really evaluation and criticism and how much of it is playing charades. Consider Theism – the view that God exists. It is, perhaps, possible to find some arguments for Theism if we make a handful of assumptions to 'fix the direction of inquiry'. Perhaps I assume that Jesus rose from the dead; that the Principle of Sufficient Reason is true and various other things. From there, I could quite well be entitled in believing Theism. Of course, that Jesus rose from the dead and the Principle of Sufficient Reason is true is probably not a pair of assumptions for which a person would typically have default-entitlement as a result of methodological and pragmatic factors of the kind Williams' envisages. Still, I can imagine perfectly well a context in which “Jesus rose from the dead” is a methodological necessity of further inquiries – for example, into what Jesus did after having risen, how people reacted to seeing him, what happened, biologically, to his body after he rose and so on. The point is, with some ingenuity, it should be possible to imagine a context in which the following is true for some logically possible inquirers:

(Context 1)

(1) Propositions A, B and C are default-acceptable, because they are methodological necessities of the inquiry we want to pursue; because it is useful to assume them for now and because the resulting inquiries promise to be valuable to us in various respects.

(2) Further, given propositions A, B and, C, it is reasonable to believe Theism.

But equally, if I take a handful of different assumptions I can find some arguments for the view that God does not exist – Atheism. With some ingenuity, it should be possible to imagine a context in which, for some logically possible inquirers:

(Context 2)

(3) Propositions D, E, and F are default-acceptable, because they are methodological necessities of the inquiry we want to pursue; because it is useful to assume them for now and because the resulting inquiries promise to be valuable to us in various respects.

(4) Further, given propositions D, E and F, it is reasonable to believe Atheism.

According to Williams, it is possible to evaluate any of A – F by shifting to another context where they are not default-acceptable. Well suppose we move to a context where Theism itself is default-acceptable (perhaps we are in the context of philosophical theology). If Theism is default-acceptable, together with various other things, we can generate a third logically possible context:

(Context 3)

(5) Theism, together with Propositions G, H and I are default-acceptable, because they are methodological necessities of the inquiry we want to pursue; because it is useful to assume them for now and because the resulting inquiries promise to be valuable to us in various respects (again, perhaps it is the context of philosophical theology).

(6) Further, given Theism, G, H and I, it is reasonable to believe that all of D, E and F are false.

I claim that all of these three are logically possible contexts which might be occupied by some logically possible set of inquirers. In Context 1, it is reasonable to believe Theism given A, B and C. In context 2 it is reasonable to believe Atheism given D, E and F, and in Context 3 it is reasonable

to deny D, E and F given Theism, G, H and I. Now add a final wrinkle – that on Williams view there is no answer to the question "is Theism acceptable?" which is independent of any of these different contexts. It seems to me that what you have here is not evaluation at all, but various propositions 'butting heads' with one another until we blindly choose one context in which we would prefer to stay, at least for the moment. What Williams advertises as the evaluation of contextual assumptions is starting to look like a silly game, in which all we do is see what follows from various propositions.

Now, Williams will no doubt say that the choice is not "blind" at all, but is made on the basis of pragmatic, methodological and economic considerations. Yet, to say this is just to admit that, in the relevant sense, the choice is blind. The choice will not be one which is settled by superior arguments, for the arguments in each context are, as Sextus would say, equipollent. In each case, you start with some assumptions that there is no reason to accept and you arrive at certain conclusions acceptable relative to those assumptions. The choice between assumptions, on Williams account, can only ever be utilitarian. We make our choice on the basis of which assumptions are useful for our purposes, which ones are necessary for the inquiries we are interested in and which ideas are valuable to us. Of course, different people at different times and places inevitably have different purposes, interests and values, and there are certainly all kinds of logically possible people with different values to us contemporary western philosophers. The result will be that different contexts will be preferable to different people.

Now return to Williams, Fogelin and astrology. Fogelin rejected RelativismJ on the grounds that, although it may be reasonable to believe that P given your epistemic framework, the framework itself may be unreasonable. You might be using astrological tables. Williams claims that his view can accommodate such criticism. What, then, would Williams be able to say about astrological tables? At most he could say this:

> *(Williams' Criticism of Astrology)*
> "I see that you have come to believe that P on the basis of astrological tables. Given that astrological tables are reliable, it is quite reasonable to believe that P, but wait just a moment. I have been working from a different context where the reliability of astrological tables is not taken fore-granted. Instead, assumption X is taken fore-granted. From the perspective of assumption X, astrological tables are unreliable and so, from the perspective of assumption X, the belief that P is not reasonable".

> [and now Williams must add the fatal qualification..] I didn't accept X because there are good reasons to believe it. I accepted X because it was useful for my purposes and a necessity for the sort of inquiry I wanted to get into".

If Williams makes this qualification, he admits that his criticism of the astrological belief is hardly worth the name, because all he ends up saying is that the belief that P is unacceptable given the purposes, values and interests which Williams has. Of course, the defender of astrology is free to reply:

> *(The Astrologists' Reply)*
> "Well, that's interesting. I don't really care about the sort of inquiry that takes X fore-granted, nor am I interested in the same things as you. What I really care about is astrology, and I'd love to know more about the relationships between different star signs. See you".

Now, the important thing about the astrologists reply here is not merely that he is capable of saying it. He can say anything he likes. The important point is that, if the astrologist says this then he is, on Williams account, not doing anything wrong. He is conforming to Williams' proposed epistemic standards and so being completely reasonable in the face of Williams' criticisms. Crucially, *that is the only sort of rational criticism which Williams can make room for.* The only criticism Williams can give of what seems like an obviously unreasonable belief-forming practice is one which the Astrologist can reasonably brush aside merely by saying that he isn't interested in doing things from the same context as Williams, because he really likes Astrology.

Thus, although Williams can pay lip service to the idea that epistemic frameworks can be evaluated, the kind of evaluation on offer is ultimately hollow.

It is an often touted objection to Relativism that it makes "anything goes" the standard of reasonableness. Since a belief is reasonable if it is reasonable-in-framework, and there is no evaluating frameworks, then so long as you can produce a silly enough framework, any and every belief will turn out reasonable. Suppose I had a crystal ball which told me every morning, "you are a poached egg". If I operate within a framework which includes the assumption that the crystal ball is reliable and discounts evidence to the contrary then my belief that I am a poached egg will be

reasonable.

The problems revealed in this section illustrate just how true it is that “anything goes” on Williams' account. Of course, in one sense, not everything does go on Williams' account. For one thing, what goes is determined by the context. In any given context, some things are reasonable and some aren't, but as Fogelin notes:

> this response to the question ‘Doesn’t anything go?’ seems only to invite a new, higher-order, question: ‘Doesn’t any context go?’ (Fogelin, 1999, 169).

And the answer Williams must give on this point is “yes”. There are no restraints on what can and cannot be built in as a contextual assumptions – it all depends on what you want to investigate, how important it is to you and so on. And this lack of restraint leads to what I take to be an identical twin of Relativism. Since any context goes, any and every belief will be acceptable in some contexts and unacceptable in others *and there is nothing more to be said than that*. What's worse, any attempted criticism of your views may be reasonably turned aside by your lack of interest in the perspective from which the criticism comes. “Any context goes” is barely any different to “anything goes”, and certainly no more plausible.

5. Some Restraints

I have been arguing that Williams cannot really make space for rational criticism. What he presents as a cogent criticism of astrology turns out to be smoke and mirrors. It looks like cogent criticism, but the Astrologist can reasonably brush it off simply by virtue of not being interested in the context out of which the criticism comes. Again, I stress that the important point is not merely that he can brush it off, but that he can, on Williams view, justifiably brush it off; and that is the best Williams can do by way of external criticism of astrology.

Williams does try to locate sources of criticism which exist irrespective of context. The aim of these posits is to make another attempt at securing space for rational criticism. By identifying context independent sources of external criticism, rational evaluation can amount to something more than stubbornly pitting sets of propositions against one another. The propositions can be evaluated from the outside.

The first source of criticism Williams adds is the intelligibility constraint which we saw earlier. If something is unintelligible then we will be right in denying it, regardless of context, and this, according to Williams, yields a large amount of cross-context commonality:

> Intelligibility constraints guarantee the existence of a wide range of cross-contextual commitments and entitlements (Williams, 2001, 227).

I am content to grant that the intelligibility constraint must hold in every context. A context which did not respect it would be one which contained unintelligible propositions, and I take it that you cannot be entitled in believing an unintelligible proposition. I cannot be entitled in believing that P if I cannot even understand P. The problem, however, is that the intelligibility constraint does not do nearly as much work as Williams suggests that it does. Quite literally anything that I can think of is intelligible and so barely anything is really ruled out by insisting on intelligibility. To have moved the view from "anything goes" to "anything intelligible goes" is hardly any more plausible.

Williams also introduces another constraint which he insists is cross-contextual – the evidence of sense perception:

> Furthermore, observational evidence operates cross-contextually (Williams, 2001, 227).

This is, on the face of it, a sensible suggestion, but it won't help Williams produce a criticism of Astrology within the resources of Contextualism. Suppose that Williams approaches the astrologist and points out to him that his astrological beliefs are wildly at odds with beliefs that result from sense perception. Why should the astrologist care, on Contextualism? Why should he not say, as some old religions would have said: "Well I don't really care about sense perception. Its pretty useful for practical purposes, sure, but the whole thing is an illusion. Sense perception is completely unreliable. Reality is revealed in deep meditation on astrological truths". Would the astrologist be doing anything wrong on Williams view? Its' hard to see how. The astrologist operates in a context in which the reliability of sense perception is not acceptable – it isn't part of the context at all. So why should the astrologist take the fact that his beliefs are at odds with sense perception seriously?

Another way to put the point is this. If what I am entitled in believing depends on my context, and my context does not contain the reliability of sense perception as a background assumption, how

will I be blameworthy, given Contextualism, in completely ignoring sense perception?

Now, if sense perception were construed in a very traditional way – so that the experience provides a direct awareness that something is true – then the answer would be quite clear. Sensory experience would carry with it a direct grasp of the truth and since such sensory experience would be available in every context that we could operate, it would serve as a constant external criticism. Any time we adopted a belief at odds with sensory experience, there would be a completely context independent reason for thinking that the belief was false – the belief would be at odds with our direct awareness of how the world is -, thus making possible a powerful sort of rational evaluation of belief.

Unfortunately, Williams' understanding of the role of sense-perception is purely Externalist. He denies that sense perception itself gives one any reason at all to believe anything (Williams, 2001, 97). He writes:

> how could merely having experiences or sensing sense-data justify anything? However basic knowledge is understood, it must be capable of standing in logical relations to whatever judgements rest on it. For example, it must be capable of being consistent or inconsistent with them. But this means that even basic knowledge must involve propositional content and so cannot consist in a mere relation to a particular. Sensing a sense-datum is no more knowing anything than is standing next to a lamp-post. (Williams, 2001, 97).

And again, in connection with Russell's paradigmatic internalist conception of experience:

> Many foundationalists have contrasted the givenness of experiences or sense-data with any kind of judgement. Russell's 'acquaintance' is supposed to be a direct relation to a sense-datum, conceived as a sensory particular: for example, a red patch in
> one's visual field. This account of experience gains an air of intelligibility from its analogy with ordinary talk about acquaintance with people and places: knowing the Prime Minister, knowing Manhattan, and so on. But the analogy is superficial. Russellian knowledge by acquaintance is supposed to be prior to—thus independent of—all propositional knowledge, which Russell refers to as 'knowledge by description'. Knowing people and places is nothing like that. It is impossible to 'know Manhattan' without knowing anything
> whatsoever about Manhattan. Acquaintance with sense-data is supposed to be a form of non-propositional knowledge. This is what I claim we cannot understand: how something can be

> non-propositional and yet knowledge. Knowledge provides evidence, grounds for further inferences. But only that which can be true or false—thus prepositionally contentful—can confirm or refute (Williams, 2001, 98).

Sense-perception is, on his account, a process which happens to reliably produce true beliefs about the world much like a thermometer reliably tracks the temperature (Williams, 2001, 173-185; 227; 2007, 105). But how on earth are we to understand the role of sense-perception in this way? If what I am entitled in believing depends on my context, then how can the mere fact that sense perception is in fact reliable make any difference to what I am entitled in believing when my context does not even contain the assumption that sense perception is reliable in the first place? Williams could say, I suppose, that what I am entitled in believing does not depend on context; it just depends on which contextual assumptions are in fact reliably produced or (perhaps) just which assumptions are true. To say that, however, is just to abandon Williams' brand of Contextualism for Externalism[53]. He cannot have both, or at least, it is entirely mysterious how they are supposed to fit together.

The only role left for sense perception to play, then, is one where observational evidence is relevant only if the reliability of sense-perception is default-acceptable. And to say this is just to say that the reliability of sense perception is merely one more contextual assumption which may or may not be made depending on your interests, values and purposes. The upshot is that there is no theoretical space for Contextualism to make room for anything more than what is, to my mind, a seriously hollow form of rational criticism. Williams' position is a radical version of Relativism about reasonable belief.

7. Why The Dogmatist Should Kill the Sceptic

Return to our ongoing debate between the sceptic and the dogmatist. The dogmatist claims that P. The sceptic is frustratingly demanding that he think of reasons for that belief. How can Contextualism help the dogmatist out? Well, if Contextualism is true, then in some contexts the dogmatist will be entitled to believe that P. Will he be entitled to believe it now, in his debate with the sceptic? It is hard to see how the Contextualist can say anything other than “no”. If the dogmatist has agreed to operate in the sceptic's context, with Agrippa's Trilemma looming in the background, then he has agreed to operate in a context where he is entitled to nothing by default; he

53 Externalism, as I pointed out in the introduction, isn't an ethic of belief at all, and so, if Williams moves to Externalism, he just abandons the current topic.

must earn his beliefs by thinking of reasons for them. So long as the dogmatist remains in his discussion with the sceptic, he won't be entitled to believe anything. He will have to suspend judgement. The sceptic will have won the battle!

Unless, that is, the dogmatist makes a more ominous move. Dogmatist could pull out the hammer he carries around for dealing with troublesome philosophers, and proceed to kill the sceptic by bashing his head in, so bringing an end to the context in which he needed reasons for his belief. Well, now that the very restraining context is at its end, dogmatist will be entitled to his belief again.

Can dogmatist's believing go from unreasonable to reasonable, from blameworthy to blameless, or from open to criticism to beyond reproach, by his killing anyone who dares question him? It can given Contextualism. As long as there is no one around pesky enough to create contexts where your beliefs are not default-acceptable, you remain entitled to believe them; so keep your hammer ready just in case!

Of course, the Contextualist can say that dogmatist ought not to kill other people, but that won't change things. He ought not to kill other people, but if he does then, by Contextualism, he can increase the credibility of his beliefs.

The point doesn't just go for the dogmatist and his plight to avoid the sceptic. It goes for anybody. If I get tired of being in contexts where other people expect me to have reasons for my beliefs, I could just kill them all, or round them all up and ship them to the moon. Then I will have default-entitlement to believe everything that I do believe, no matter how ridiculous it might be. Now, it is one thing to say, like the Conservatives say, that everybody has at least some default-entitlement to what they already believe just because they believe it; and it is one thing to say, like some others say, that I cannot be properly criticized or blamed for my beliefs at all; but it is quite another thing entirely to say that I can *earn* entitlement to my beliefs by killing anyone that would create an uncomfortable context. How is that absurd result not a consequence of Contextualism?

8. Williams' Scepticism

The serious implausibility of Williams' position is plain. If this is the cost for avoiding Scepticism, it is indeed a very high price. But what has Williams gained for having paid it? Williams has avoided Scepticism as he conceives of it. He has avoided the view that we ought to suspend

judgement about everything:

(S)* We ought not to believe anything.

He has avoided (S*), essentially, by building an alternative standard of belief to the sceptic. Doing this, however, does absolutely nothing to address one of the fundamental aspects of Scepticism. So, let us remind ourselves of that aspect.

The central concept involved is that of a reason for a belief which actually indicates its truth. The reasons in question are meant to fit several constraints. First, they are supposed to be non-question begging; they are supposed to be the sort of thing which might convince someone who did not already hold the beliefs in question. Second, they are supposed to answer the sceptic's question, "why believe that?". And third, they are supposed to be reasons which the believer has, in the sense that they are more or less readily available to reflection. The sceptic denies that we can have any such reasons:

(S) There is no complete reason to believe anything at all.

Once this is made clear, it is made equally clear that nothing Williams says undermines (S) or the case that the sceptic makes for it via Agrippa's Trilemma. Williams in effect stops the sceptic from inferring (S*) from (S) by denying Evidentialism. Undermining (S*) is neither necessary nor sufficient for undermining (S) and Williams allows the sceptic to reach (S) without objection.

Moreover, various aspects of Williams position themselves suggest (S). Take the idea that there is no such thing as a belief that is acceptable simpliciter, but only beliefs that are acceptable given the context. I suggest that if one thinks that there are genuinely good, internally accessible and context independent reasons for thinking that various things are true, the idea that there is no belief that is acceptable simpliciter will appear itself massively implausible. Then there is the great struggle that Williams has to find some sort of context independent source of rational criticism – the struggle which ends with an acceptable but largely unhelpful appeal to intelligibility and a promising but ultimately useless appeal to sense perception. As I had cause to explain earlier, if sense perception could have been understood as yielding a reason – in the internalist sense – for a belief then the problem of rational criticism disappears completely. Any set of "contextual assumptions" will be answerable to the contents of experience in the straight-forward sense that the content of such

experience may itself be a reason for or against the assumptions in question. We have already seen that Williams denies that this is really possible[54] and to that extent comes closer to (S).

Now, you might think that denying the traditional Empiricist-Internalist conception of sense perception is not the same as being committed, even tacitly, to (S). You might, after all, think that there are other good reasons for beliefs about the world, even if sense perception cannot itself be understood as their source. Yet there is no trace of this in Williams work. He nowhere gives any account of the structure of justification (in the internalist sense) at all. The only places where he addresses the issue are explicitly negative – his extended criticism of Empiricist Foundationalism of the sort we find in Russell (Williams, 2001, 96-104) and his equally heavy criticism of Coherentism, with particular reference to BonJour's work (Williams, 2001, 117-137)[55].

There is even at least one place where Williams outright admits that the sceptic has successfully shown (S):

> However, all the sceptic's argument shows is that there are limits to our capacity to give reasons or cite evidence (Williams, 2001, 148).

The "limit to our capacity" which the sceptic shows with his argument is this. That if you question any belief for long enough, it will eventually be revealed that it rests on sheer assumptions that there is no reason to believe and that no belief is better than any other in this respect.

It is perhaps worth spelling this out a bit more carefully, for the last time. (S) is not obviously equivalent to the idea that there are "limits to our capacity to give reasons". Of course, one can produce arguments for a given belief by starting from premises which your conversation partners agree with. Such arguments are apparently reasons of a sort, and in the context of convincing your conversation partners, they are quite good ones.

But such arguments score merely dialectical points. Any proposition whatsoever can be established by arguing from assumptions that there is no reason to believe. This goes for any proposition P *and its negation, -P.* It is this last point which leads us from the idea that there are limits to our capacity to give reasons to (S). If all we can produce is an argument from assumption, then no matter how

54 If there is any doubt about this, the chapter "The Problem of Basis" in Williams' (2001) is an extended criticism of the idea that sensory experiences may be understood as good reasons for beliefs.

55 According to Williams, Coherentism is "Foundationalism in disguise" (2001, 137).

helpful that argument is in a particular dialectical context, there is an equipolent argument for the contrary conclusion which starts from different arbitrary assumptions. Faced with a pair of such arguments, it is quite clear that there is no reason at all to believe either conclusion (unless you, for no reason at all, happen to be convinced by one of the sets of premises). Since such arguments are possible for any and every belief, it follows that, in the last analysis, there is no reason to believe anything at all over anything else. The concession that there are limits to our capacity to give reasons just is (S) with a more palatable coat of paint.

The way that Williams puts the point really does make it seem harmless, but I stress that this is an illusion created by his way of putting it. If we really do have no reason to believe anything at all then it follows that I must at some point just arbitrarily accept various propositions. I must accept propositions which are such that I cannot explain, even to myself, why I find them convincing. They will be rationally inexplicable from my perspective. As BonJour puts it, "*if I have no reasons for thinking that my beliefs are true, then I am "flying blind" in an obvious way*" (BonJour, 2008, 175). The implausibility of this result is not diminished at all either by framing it in terms of "limits to our capacity" or by saying that our beliefs do not violate the proper norms of acceptable belief.

One final point is worth making in this connection. Imagine someone who comes to be concerned with their beliefs as a result of Agrippa's Trilemma. Imagine that the person comes to realize that there are intelligible questions to be asked about why they believe various things which they usually take fore-granted, and imagine that any 'common-sense' answers which they might be inclined to produce are quickly shown to be vague, imprecise and problematic. This is, I take it, the situation of someone who discovers Agrippa's Trilemma and is subsequently introduced to the fallibility of sense-perception, its compatibility with radical sceptical hypotheses and so on. They come to the philosopher who is an alleged specialist on the topic. The philosopher tells him: "don't worry. Your beliefs might be acceptable by default! If you are in the right context, you may not need reasons for them. To think otherwise is to be in the grip of the dubious Evidentialist standard of right belief".

I think the ordinary person will find all of this quite unsatisfying. His original question has effectively been ignored. He began by wondering what reasons he has for his beliefs and he finishes his conversation with the philosopher still wondering that very same thing.

9. Conclusions on Contextualism

I have argued here that Contextualism is a highly implausible ethics of belief. I have argued so on several grounds. First, Williams' two arguments for Contextualism (that it fits with ordinary practice and avoids 'sceptical puzzles') are both of no force at all. Second, Contextualism is a maximally implausible version of Relativism. Third, even given Contextualism, we are still left with a puzzling kind of Scepticism.

Chapter 11. Giving The Sceptic His Due

1. The Sceptical Policy

Dogmatist: P

Sceptic: Why believe that?

Dogmatist: Because Q

Sceptic: Why believe that?

Dogmatist: Because R.

Sceptic: Why believe that?

Dogmatist: Because n.

Sceptic: Why believe that?..

In playing a well-known dialectical gambit, the sceptic tries to convince the dogmatist to suspend judgement. When would the sceptic be happy? When would he be prepared to accept P, or prepared to leave the dogmatist's belief as it is? In other words, what are the sceptic's standards for acceptable belief? And what can be said in defence of those standards[56]? But what exactly is that policy for belief? And what can be said in defence of it? That is my question. I'll try to defend the sceptic's standards for belief here. I warn you, if you're a philosopher, you probably won't find it all that plausible no matter what I say, but if it is the job of the philosopher to explore all of the different coherent ways of thinking about important philosophical questions (Shand, 2017), then I won't be doing that job if I shy away from presenting a view because the good guys won't much like it. So, I'll give it a go.

56 It isn't quite right to say that they are “the sceptic's standards”. He doesn't himself accept them. He tries to lure the dogmatist into suspension of judgement by showing the dogmatist that his beliefs don't meet certain standards. For that purpose, it is only necessary that the dogmatist accepts those standards. It is, nevertheless, useful to speak in this way rather than saying “what are the standards that the sceptic hopes that the dogmatist accepts in trying to lure him to suspend judgement?”. Talk of “the sceptic's standards” is short hand for this mouthful.

I will argue that there are no strong criticisms of the sceptical policy for belief, and that it is plausible in at least two respects. Section 2 explicates the sceptical policy. Section 3 distinguishes it from other ideas in epistemology. Section 4 is even further explication. Sections 5 and 6 give two motivations for the sceptical policy. The remaining sections consider and defend it against objections.

2. Extreme Evidentialism

According to Richard Fumerton:

> The [sceptic]…wants to know why we can legitimately conclude that a certain way of forming a belief is legitimate, and the [sceptic's] philosophical curiosity isn't going to be satisfied by being told *at any stage of the game* that it just is. (Fumerton 2006, 184).

When it comes to the debate between sceptic and dogmatist, we know from Sextus Empiricus and the Modes of Agrippa that certain answers the dogmatist could give won't satisfy the sceptic.

The dogmatist could try making an assumption and refusing to defend it against any further questioning. He could hold that God exists and that this follows from the premises "my religious text is infallible" and "my religious text says God exists". He could then insist that he doesn't have any further defence of those assumptions, nor does he need one. We know that the sceptic won't be happy with that, for the reason given by Sextus and made clear by Barnes (2007). For any two contradictory propositions, P and -P, I can give an argument from arbitrary assumptions for both sides. I can oppose your argument for P with the argument: "P, because Thor said P", where I don't have any reason to think that Thor said P or that Thor is reliable or even that Thor exists. If I accept an argument on the basis of arbitrary assumptions, there is a further question: why those assumptions and not any others?

The dogmatist could try arguing in a circle. He could argue that God exists because his religious text says so, and the text is reliable because it is is the word of God. We know the sceptic won't like that, for the reason given by Sextus and made clear by Barnes (2007). For any two propositions, P and -P, I can give a circular argument for each side, with nothing to choose between them. If you give what you think is a knock-down argument for P, I'll just return: "-P is true because Thor said so, and Thor is trustworthy because he said -P, and -P is true". We aren't getting anywhere here.

When you have a circular argument for P, there is, again, a question left over about why any of the beliefs in that circle rather than another circle should be accepted.

The dogmatist could try arguing on infinitely with the sceptic, citing further and further new reasons at every stage of questioning. We know the sceptic won't like that, for the reason given by Sextus Empiricus and made clear by Barnes (2007). An infinite series of reasons is nothing more than a long list of sentences in which one is inferred from the other. For any pair of contradictory propositions, P and -P, an infinite chain of reasons can be produced on both sides. If you argue that P on the grounds of what you think is a very powerful infinitely long argument, I could counter with an equally long argument of my own: "-P is true because Thor told me so, and Odin told me that Thor is infallible, and Loki told me that Odin is infallible, and Hades told me that Odin is infallible, and Zeus told me that...". Why should anyone prefer the infinitely long argument for P over the infinitely long argument for -P?

If the sceptic is not happy with any of those three options, when would he be happy? Here is where I think the sceptic's policy for belief strikes most philosophers as outrageous. He holds that you should believe something only if there is no further question about why it rather than anything else.

Suppose that you believe that P. I can ask, "why believe that P?". If the answer to the question, "*why believe that P?*" is some other proposition, Q, then "why believe that Q?", and if the answer to that question is some other proposition, R, I can ask, "*why believe that R?*". The questions keep coming. Say that a "complete reason" for believing that P is a chain of reasons which would answer all of those "why?" questions about P. In that sense a complete reason is an unconditional indication that the belief in question is true. The sceptic says that you should believe that P only if you have one of those[57].

Let's call this proposal Extreme Evidentialism:

57 The issue is a little more complex than that. If you infer P from Q, then the inference from Q to P also presupposes an inference rule – something like "Q makes probable P"and the inference rule may or may not be true.

Is it enough to be justified in believing that P on the basis of Q that the relevant inference rule is in fact true, or must I also have some reason to believe that the inference rule is true? Fumerton (1995) calls the latter part the Principle of Inferential Internalism (PIJ) and defends it by appeal to examples. Given PIJ, the threat of an unmanageable infinite regress looms. The most radical sceptic will also insist on that as well, but one thing at a time!

Extreme Evidentialism. S is entitled to believe that P only if S has a complete reason for believing that P[58][59].

I'll sometimes call it "EE" for brevity. One qualification: The sceptic obviously doesn't mean to say that the ordinary meaning of the words "entitled", "justified", "acceptable" or the like are captured by EE. EE is a proposal for how we should regulate our believings. We should believe that P only when the belief meets the standards of EE. EE is an epistemic prescription[60]. It is akin to a rule about actions, e.g, "do not kill". EE says "don't believe without complete reason"[61].

3. What EE is Not.

You might think that, despite my protestation to the contrary, EE entails the view that to be entitled in believing anything at all I must have an infinite sequence of reasons for believing it[62]. It doesn't. For one thing, as I just explained there *is* a question left over about why P should be believed, even when you have an infinite series of reasons for it. So EE is incompatible with Infinitism. For another, EE just doesn't say anything about how many reasons one needs for a given belief. It might be, for all that it says, that there are some beliefs such that no question of the form "why believe that?" is even intelligible, and so, the answering of questions comes to an end long before infinity. McGrew (1995) seems to hold that view about certain introspective beliefs. Perhaps Fumerton (1995) holds it too. On the assumption that that view about introspective beliefs is correct, the sceptic's standards would have been satisfied. That would be a happy result, but that is all *on the assumption* that that is the right view about introspective beliefs. I don't say that it is, and if it isn't the sceptic will surely remain unhappy with the dogmatist's beliefs about his introspective states.

EE is also compatible with Coherentism given certain other incredibly controversial views. A Coherentist will hold that a belief is acceptable only if it is part of a sufficiently coherent system, where "coherent" is understood in a sufficiently robust way – perhaps in terms of explanatory power (Lycan, 2012). Given a correspondence theory of truth, a person who satisfies Coherentist standards will not satisfy EE. A belief system can be maximally coherent (in the Explanationist

58 I call the view "extreme" to distinguish it from Conee and Feldman's (2004) Evidentialism. As they state the view, it is apparently compatible with some versions of Conservatism. This view isn't.

59 Note that I say "only if" to indicate a necessary, but perhaps not sufficient, condition.

60 See Stich (2001) for the difference between normative and descriptive projects in epistemology.

61 It probably makes more sense to speak of degrees of confidence than of belief/dis-belief. In which case the view is that you shouldn't have any degree of confidence at all in P unless you have a complete reason for believing that P. You should be confident in P to the degree that "matches" the strength of your complete reason for it.

62 Weiland (2013) thinks that the sceptic who argues with the dogmatist in this way presupposes Infinitism.

sense) and there will still be a further question about why that system should be believed over some rival equally coherent system. That is sometimes called the “multiple systems objection” to Coherentism. Given a coherence theory of truth, on the other hand, the problem disappears. A maximally coherent system will be a true system, and so there will be no further question about why we should think it true. The sceptic will be happy with the dogmatist who has a perfectly coherent set of beliefs, given a coherence theory of truth. But most philosophers find the coherence theory of truth outrageous. I think I find it outrageous as well, so long as it is interpreted to imply that there is just no such thing as “the way the world is” independent of what we coherently believe about it. Without the coherence theory of truth, the sceptic will demand an answer to the question: “why this coherent set and not that one?”.

EE is obviously incompatible with some major positions in contemporary epistemology. It's incompatible with Conservatism (Huemer, 2013), because EE implies that a person should not believe that P just because they believe or are inclined to believe that P, nor just if it seems to them that P. In every such case there will be a further question: why think that what seems to you to be true is a reliable indication of the truth?

EE is also incompatible with Externalist theories of justification of every sort (Goldman, 1979; Plantinga, 2000). It won't do that my belief does, in fact, stand in some nice causal, modal or nomological relation to the facts. If my belief is, for example, reliably produced but I have no reason to think it is true, EE implies that I should not hold any such belief.

Lastly, EE is incompatible with Contextualist theories of justification (Williams, 2004), because those theories imply that some beliefs are sometimes “default acceptable” - acceptable for no reason – if the context is right (Williams, 2004), and no proponent of EE, sceptic or otherwise, will concede that[63].

All of this might make you think that EE is just the view that to be entitled to believe that P, you must have a reason for P which makes it absolutely certain that P. It is not that view. Suppose that you are justified in believing some propositions P, Q, R because, let's say, there is no intelligible question about why P, Q, R should be believed. Suppose that you infer another proposition, S,

63 It isn't just flatly incompatible with Externalism and Contextualism. If they are theories about the word “justification” in English, which sometimes they are presented as being, then EE is compatible with them. They are incompatible only insofar as Externalism and Contextualism are proposals about how we should form and evaluate beliefs.

because S is the best explanation of P, Q and R. Your belief that S satisfies the standards of EE. You have some reason for believing that S (it is the best explanation of P, Q and R), and P, Q and R are such that there is no further question about them. Nevertheless, your belief that S is not absolutely certain. It might turn out that what is the best explanation of your data is in fact false[64]. So EE does not set the standard for belief at absolute certainty. It sets the standard at having *some* answer to the question "why believe that P?".

4. Having Reasons

EE requires that I "have" complete reasons in order for my belief to be acceptable. When do you "have" reasons? Feldman (2004, 219-241) usefully distinguishes various senses in which a person might "have" reasons for a belief whilst formulating his own Evidentialism. He eventually settles on this in defending his own Evidentialism:

> (1) S has p available as a reason at t if S is currently thinking of p (Feldman, 2004, 232).

Feldman understands the notion of "thinking of" fairly loosely. What one is "thinking of" at t is to include everything which one is consciously aware of at t. Suppose I look out of the window and I see a tree. The visual information that I am aware of then will be included as something I am "thinking of". As will anything that I am occurently believing at t, and even anything that I am non-consciously believing at t. Thus he writes that the evidence one has at any time consists in "*everything one is thinking of, consciously and perhaps non-consciously, as well as non-belief states of which one is aware*" (Feldman, 2004, 240)[65].

There are various other alternatives to (1). Here is another:

> (2) S has p available as a reason for q at t iff S would think of p if S were to think about what evidence there is for q.

On that version of Extreme Evidentialism, a person "has" a complete reason for believing that q iff the person would think of that complete reason if they were to think about what reasons there are for q.

64 Here again is the thorny issue about inference rules. An argument to the best explanation presupposes that the criteria of best explanation are truth conductive. Do we need some reason to believe this, or is it enough that they are in fact truth conductive? Like I said, the sceptic will probably want the latter view, but *even that* is not to set the standards for belief in general at absolute certainty.

65 See Feldman (2004) for a defence against some tempting objections.

Feldman objects to (2) on the grounds that "*it restricts a person's available evidence concerning some proposition to those things whose relevance the person appreciates*" (Feldman, 2004, 230). He gives an abstract example where I "*consciously believe both p and d, but fail to recognize that d constitutes strong evidence against p*" (Feldman, 2004, 230). According to Feldman, a version of EE which understands "has" in the sense given by (2) "*may lead to the result that I am justified in believing p when in fact I surely am not*" (Feldman, 2004, 230).

This is a curious objection. Of course it *may lead* to the result that I am justified in believing that p, but it also may not, depending on the details of the case. The mere fact that I consciously believe p and d does not by itself determine whether I am justified in believing that p on Extreme Evidentialism. It all depends. If I have a complete reason for believing that p and I don't have any such for believing that d, it is quite clear what EE will say; I should believe that p. But this result is not at all implausible. If I am able to answer all challenges to p but unable to do so for d, it is clear which one I should favour. On the other hand, if I don't have a complete reason for p, EE will predict that I am not justified in believing that p, and there is nothing implausible about that. To insist otherwise would be to beg the question[66].

If EE is interpreted along the lines of (2), the sceptic has the high ground by a long way. He can show that a person is ought not to believe what he does just by repeating his request for reasons until the person is at a loss with how to respond. He doesn't have to do anything more than that. Things are hardly any better if we require that, to be entitled to believe that P at t, I must be "thinking of" a complete reason for P, at t, in Feldman's wide sense of "thinking of". It is no more plausible that I have the resources to answer all of the sceptic's questions in my mind in Feldman's wide sense. For this reason, the sceptic need not settle on (1) or (2)[67]. Either is fine.

I'm sure that by this point most philosophers are sharpening their knives. They will think that EE is completely absurd. I think EE is far more defensible than many would suppose, however. I turn first to what can be said in its favour.

5. Impartiality

Perhaps the best argument for Extreme Evidentialism is the one which in fact attracts me to it. That

66 In fairness to Feldman, the objection seems to arise because he isn't considering Extreme Evidentialism, but a more modest version of Evidentialism.

67 Again, it isn't strictly speaking the sceptic, who needs (1) or (2). See footnote 1.

argument starts from the assumption that we should not be impartial in our inquiries. Consider this scenario, due to Lammenranta (2008):

> Ivan, Smith and Jones are sincere truth-seekers. They want to know the truth about things. Ivan is an impartial observer who is watching on as two people, Smith and Jones argue about whether or not P. Smith holds that P and Jones holds that -P. Both Smith and Jones have their arguments for P and -P respectively, but in the end those arguments depend on at least one premises for which neither Smith nor Jones can provide any reason at all. The result is that neither Smith nor Jones is convinced of the opposing view. Ivan does not have his own belief about the issue and this is the first time he has ever heard anything about it. He suspends judgement about whether or not P.

In the scenario, Ivan plays the role of an impartial judge of the dispute. He does not favour either Smith nor Jones for no reason. He assesses the situation looking only for reasons to favour P or -P. I suggest that that is, intuitively, just what Ivan ought to be doing. He ought not to be taking sides willy-nilly, because he happens to like Smith's hair or because Jones has a suave accent. Now consider another:

> Ivan and Smith are sincere truth-seekers. They want to know the truth about things. Ivan is himself in the place of Smith. Ivan argues that P and Jones argues that -P. Both Ivan and Jones argue for their views but do so depending on premises for which neither of them can provide any reason at all. The result is that neither Ivan nor Jones is convinced of the other side. Of course, this time Ivan does have his own belief about the matter: he believes that P.

Ivan is, again, in his role as an impartial judge of the dispute. This time, however, Ivan is himself party to the dispute. Yet, because Ivan is impartial, he does not favour any side of a dispute for no reason, and the same goes when the dispute involves himself. Of course, from the point of view of someone who asserts either P or -P, the arguments do not seem to be equally good. To Ivan P seems to follow from premises which are, though not supported by reasons, plausible on their own. To Smith the same is true of -P. But since Ivan is an impartial person, he is able to appreciate Smith's point of view as well as his own, and to see that they are both equal (Lammenranta, 2008, 20). My suggestion is, again, that, intuitively, Ivan does just what he ought to do. He should not just favour himself willy-nilly.

The upshot is that when someone actually disagrees with me about P, I ought not to favour P just for no reason. If we can convince ourselves of that much, however, it is only a short step to the idea that I should *never* prefer a view for no reason, even if no-one in fact disagrees with me. I could, after all, make it so that no-one in fact disagrees with me by devious tactics. I could bribe my opponents to keep quite. I could move to another country where my views are more popular. I could kidnap those who disagree and brain-wash them; or, I could just kill them all. Yet, it is incredibly implausible to suppose that I could gain an entitlement to believe that P by such horrible means. If I am doing something wrong in believing that P, it does not suddenly become right by my doing other far more horrendous deeds (Lammenranta, 2011, 209). If that's right, then it does not matter whether any one is around to disagree with me or not. If any one even *could* disagree with me, I will not favour P just for no reason. From that idea it follows that for any proposition, P, I ought not to believe that P for no reason; and that's Extreme Evidentialism.

Perhaps another way of looking at the same point is this. It is very tempting to think that any reason which is less than a complete reason is worthless to an impartial inquirer. If a reason for P is less than complete then there will be a question of the form, "why believe that?" which is left open once we have understood the reason for P. We saw that earlier on.

An argument is, in the end, just a set of sentences which is supposed to somehow indicate the truth of another sentence. But, so long as there is an open question about why those sentences and not others, its easy to drum up a set of sentences for the opposite conclusion, with nothing to choose between them. Any reason that is less than complete will be, from the impartial perspective, worthless. So far as we want to be impartial, nothing less than a complete reason will do.

It is this demand for impartiality which pushes us towards a policy of Extreme Evidentialism. Inquiry without impartiality is inquiry which settles for unfounded assumptions, favouring hypotheses because they are convenient, pleasing or popular; it is not inquiry worth the name[68].

6. Epistemological Miracles

Everybody knows by now of the fact that there is a difference between my believing that P and its being true that P, at least for almost every P. Perhaps even more familiar is the fact that the broad

68 I am sure that Conservatives will object out-right that we ought to be impartial. They will say that it is, at least sometimes, acceptable to be biased in favour of what you already believe (See Lycan (2012)). As I see it, that is intuitively not the case. In Lycan's terms, I "balk at Conservatism". I have also discussed Conservatism at length.

details of our world-view are things we swallow up as a result of our upbringing, early education and cultural surroundings, and one doesn't have to venture too far outside of one's immediate neighbourhood to find people with all sorts of different opinions. If you go far enough afield, you will struggle to find that you have anything of any significance at all in common. I think ancient sceptic's made appeal to such facts because they thought that once you saw them, it would just be natural to feel dissatisfied with one's own beliefs.

I recognize that I'm not an oracle. I don't have any magical insight into the truth, and it would be something like an epistemological miracle if I *just happened* to live at the right time out of every possible time in history both in the future and the past, in the right place in the entire universe, to have been educated by the right folks out of everyone on earth; to have been endowed with the right perceptual and cognitive hardware, and as a result to have inherited the right system of beliefs, out of every logically possible set that I could have had. It is hard to feel at all confident in one's beliefs in the face of that. Once one feels the disappointment that this sort of reflection engenders, it is hard to think of yourself as reasonable in believing something without some explanation of why this rather than anything else. Now I'm not suggesting that these reflections about our radical contingency[69] entail EE. Of course they don't, but they do pull you towards adopting a policy like EE.

When it comes down to it, you either answer the question, "why believe that P?" or you don't. If you don't and you believe P whilst in full realization of the radical contingency of that belief, you are banking on an epistemological miracle in that respect. You are banking on just being lucky enough that all of the circumstances line up in the myriad ways that I just described. It is far too much like question begging just to insist that I should never bank on an epistemological miracle and that therefore EE must be correct. But I suggest that it is at least *intuitively* right that I should not hope for an epistemological miracle, and that this intuition needs to be accommodated (or at least explained away) by a satisfying policy of belief.

Moreover, no currently popular theory can accommodate it. Externalist theories (and their relatives) will hold that it is reasonable to hope for such a miracle if the belief you are banking on was caused in the right way, or has some other nomological property that entirely evades your grasp (better hope the belief does have that property!). Conservative theories will say that it is reasonable to hope for a miracle if the belief seems to you to be true (better hope that how things seem to you is a

69 I use the phrase "contingent" here not in contrast with "necessary" but in the sense of "subject to chance".

reliable guide to truth!)[70]. Contextualist theories will say that its reasonable to bank on a miracle if you are in the right context for it (better hope your context is the right one!).

It won't help any of these theories to introduce what is sometimes called a “defeater” condition. A defeater is something which, under certain conditions, would prevent your belief from being acceptable when it otherwise would be. Many contemporary versions of these theories do impose a defeater condition, but the realization that you are relying on an epistemological miracle is not typically allowed to count as a defeater.

Externalists won't allow that the “mere” fact that your belief, that there is a God, is the product of all of the radically contingent factors mentioned above can defeat your justification for believing that there is a God. On the standard account, S's justification for believing that P at t is defeated if and only if there’s some reliable or conditionally reliable process available to S at t which, if it had been used by S in addition to the process actually used,would have resulted in S’s not believing p at t (Goldman, 1979; Lyons, 2009). That plainly won't accommodate the intuition.

Another account of defeat – one more friendly to Conservatives – is one which distinguishes rebutting and undercutting defeaters. A rebutting defeater is “*evidence that what appears to be the case is in fact false*”, while an undercutting defeater is “*evidence that one's appearance (whether it is true or false) is unreliable or otherwise defective as a source of information*”. (Huemer, 2018). Of course, the fact that your belief is the product of a radically contingent history isn't evidence that the belief is false. For all that is shown, the belief is true.

Whether, once you realize that your belief is a product of a radically contingent history, that gives you evidence that the belief is unreliable or otherwise defective, depends on what counts as “otherwise defective”, but it is quite clear that Conservatives don't mean to construe it in the required way. For if they did, any person who realized the radical contingency of their beliefs would immediately have their justification for believing anything at all defeated pending some positive reasons to think that the belief is true, and the chief motivation for Conservatism is that it is supposed to side-step these kinds of sceptical worries.

70 Lycan's (2013) Conservatism holds that a belief is only fully acceptable if it seems to you to be true and significantly coheres with your system of beliefs, but the detail makes no difference, because it will still be acceptable to bank on your radically contingent system of beliefs being true as opposed to another.

Extreme Evidentialism accommodates the intuition, because to bank on an epistemological miracle would involve accepting a belief without a complete reason for it. Again, I stress that the point here is not at all one about the ordinary meanings of epistemic words. I don't mean to say that the sceptic's EE offers an intuitive analysis of the word “justified” or any other word because of these reflections. I mean to say that the desire to avoid epistemological miracles is what pulls the sceptic towards adopting the policy, “you should believe what you have complete reason to believe and nothing else”. It is what tempts him to treat as acceptable only beliefs which meet that condition.

7. Huemer's Absurd Speech Argument

Huemer (2006) argues against other views on the grounds that they council a person to sometimes endorse an absurd speech. He argues, for example, against:

> *Reliabilism.* S is justified in believing that p, if S formed the belief that p by a reliable method, S has no beliefs that either support ~p or support the proposition that S formed the belief that p by an unreliable method, and S has no available reliable belief-forming method that, if used, would have led S to believe that ~p (Huemer, 2006, 2).

He argues against the view by appeal to a variation on Bonjour's well-known thought-experiment:

> *The Clairvoyant Brain.* Susan has two interesting ways of forming beliefs: apparent sensory perception, and clairvoyance. Susan, unfortunately, is a brain in a vat, and her sense perception is entirely unreliable, although she has no reason to suspect this, and it seems to her that her sense perception is just as reliable as her clairvoyance. It also seems to her that her perceptual beliefs are adequately justified, just as much as her clairvoyant beliefs. Nor has she any reason to doubt any of this. Oddly enough, Susan actually has psychic powers, and her clairvoyance is highly reliable. One day, Susan seems to see a dog in front of her and has no special reason to doubt the dog’s reality. She also has a clairvoyant experience of a purple unicorn grazing in a field somewhere, with no special reason to doubt the unicorn’s reality. In fact, there is no relevant dog of the sort she seems to perceive, but there is a real unicorn that she is accurately detecting clairvoyantly (Huemer, 2006, 4).

He points out that "*If Reliabilism is a correct theory, then Susan would be justified in believing that the purple unicorn exists, but unjustified in believing that the dog exists*" (Huemer, 2006, 4). If Reliabilism is right, then, Susan is reasonable in giving what Huemer calls an "absurd speech" to those around her:

> *Absurd Speech.* I seem to be aware of a dog, just as I seem to be aware of a unicorn. These two experiences seem equally reliable to me, and in general, seem alike in all epistemically relevant respects. However, I believe that there is a unicorn, and I do not believe that there is a dog. I have no reason to think that the unicorn experience is any more likely to be accurate than the dog experience; I just accept the content of the one and not the other, for no apparent reason (Huemer, 2006, 5).

But, Huemer says, the Absurd Speech is not a reasonable thing for Susan to say, nor is it even a reasonable state of mind for her to be in (Huemer, 2006, 5). Absurd Speech would (if true) be a report of an epistemically rational state of mind; "*even to think to oneself what the Absurd Speech says would be a mark of irrationality*" (Huemer, 2006, 5). He concludes about Reliabilism and similar views that:

> Externalist theories of justification countenance peculiar cases in which subjects rationally believe (disbelieve, withhold) some proposition yet are seemingly in no position to account for why they should believe (disbelieve, withhold) as they do. This is what internalists object to. A rational person, it seems, ought to be in a position, if he should come to reflect on his doxastic attitudes (that is, his attitudes of belief, disbelief, or suspended judgement toward various propositions), to approve those attitudes as justified—or at least he should not be in a position such that on reflection, he would or should disapprove of those attitudes. Such cases as that of the Clairvoyant Brain bring out externalism's violation of this constraint. In the Clairvoyant Brain Case, it seems that Susan (the brain) is in no position to reflectively endorse both her credulity towards her clairvoyant experiences and her skepticism towards her sensory experiences; from her own point of view, the combination of attitudes must appear arbitrary and inexplicable. It therefore seems irrational of her to persist in those attitudes; yet that is what the externalist counsels (Huemer, 2006, 10).

About this Huemer is quite right, and his argument against a Reliabilist ethics of belief is utterly decisive. However, he draws the further moral that "*there cannot be a pair of cases in which*

everything seems to a subject to be the same in all epistemically relevant respects, and yet the subject ought, rationally, to take different doxastic attitudes in the two cases—for instance, in one case to affirm a proposition and in the other to withhold" (Huemer, 2006, 6), and, even further, that something like Phenomenal Conservatism is the most "plausible and natural" explanation of this:

> Something like Phenomenal Conservatism seems to underlie our intuitive reactions to the scenarios discussed above and to the various Absurd Speeches that those scenarios would lead to on externalist theories of justification. For example, in the Clairvoyant Brain Case, Susan's combination of attitudes towards her dog experience and towards her unicorn experience seems irrational, because the dog seems to her just as real as the unicorn, the two experiences seem equally likely to be veridical, and she has no apparent reason for doubting either. All of this would render her combination of attitudes irrational only if these seemings were relevant to what Susan was justified in believing in roughly the way that Phenomenal Conservatism indicates—that is, if the dog's seeming equally real as the unicorn conferred at least some sort of justification (in the absence of defeaters) for thinking that it was equally real, if the two experiences' appearing equally likely to be veridical was some sort of prima facie justification for thinking that they were equally likely to be veridical, and so on (Huemer, 2006, 12).

These further points beyond the criticism of Reliabilism make heavy use of Huemer's notion of "seemings" construed as sui generis mental states. But, if, as I have argued, there are no such things as seemings, the argument cannot even get started. Phenomenal Conservatism cannot be the most plausible explanation of the fact that absurd speech is absurd if there are no such things as seemings[71].

Still, Huemer's argument does suggest a motivation for Extreme Evidentialism. What is absurd about absurd speech is, and Huemer agrees with this, that Susan takes different attitudes to two propositions *inexplicably*. If she asks her self, "why do I believe that there is a unicorn while not believing that there is a dog?", she will draw a complete blank. That is what makes Susan's state of mind a silly one. But, if that is what makes absurd speech absurd, then wouldn't it be equally absurd for Susan to give this speech?;

71 To point this out is really to do something quite obvious. Of course if there are no seemings then the argument for a view which presupposes them will not be convincing. But I point it out for the sake of completeness.

> *Absurd Speech 2*. I believe that there is a unicorn on Mars. I don't really know why I believe it. I can't think of any reason to. I just do. I don't believe that there is a unicorn on Jupiter. I don't really know why I don't believe it. I just don't.

Just like the first Absurd Speech, the two propositions are, from Susan's perspective, of equal credibility, but she favours one and not the other, for nothing. It seems clear that Susan's attitude here is completely unreasonable, and she ought not to take it. If she takes it, she has no coherent account of what she is even doing[72].

Now, you will be committed to some such absurd state of mind *whenever* you make an assumption with no answer to the question, "why believe that?", because you will always be in the position of assuming something inexplicably while not assuming other things which are, from your perspective, just as good. Consider Susan again, who this time believes that her deepest desires are a guide to the truth:

> *Absurd Speech 3*. I believe that how I deeply desire things to be is how things probably are, at least unless there is some reason to suppose other wise. I don't know why I believe this. I just believe it. I don't believe that what I see with my eyes is how things probably are. I don't really know why I don't believe it. I just don't.

Absurd Speech 3 is surely no less absurd than Absurd Speech 2. In it Susan assumes that her deepest desires are at least a fairly reliable indication of the truth, and she rejects the same view about her senses, for nothing. Her differing attitudes here are completely inexplicable from her point of view, and she has no coherent account of what she is even doing. She just opts, willy-nilly, to trust her deepest desires and ignore her senses. Moreover, she would not be any less absurd were she instead to trust her senses, completely inexplicably, and ignore her desires, for nothing. If Susan proceeds in accordance with Absurd Speech 3, she does exactly the sort of thing which the Reliabilist implausibly councils that she should do; she takes different attitudes towards two propositions but cannot explain, even to herself, why she is doing so.

One is in that absurd state of mind whenever one makes an assumption for no reason – whether that assumption is that sense perception is trustworthy, or that how things seem to be is trust worthy, or

72 If there were such things as seemings, there would be an easy way out of my argument. Perhaps it seems to Susan that there is a unicorn on Mars, but doesn't seem to her that there is a unicorn on the moon.

that our inclinations to believe are trustworthy, or whatever it is. If we agree that such a state of mind is irrational and that we ought to avoid being in it, we agree to follow Extreme Evidentialism.

8. Forgotten Evidence

I turn now to a discussion of objections to EE. Most of the objections stress that EE is an implausibly strict policy, and that adopting it would lead us to treat as unacceptable beliefs which obviously are acceptable.

EE stresses the role of what the person has in his mind when he is deciding what to believe. Goldman (1999) objects to theories which take this approach on the grounds that they produce implausible consequences in cases of forgotten evidence:

> Last year Sally read about the health benefits of broccoli in a New York Times science-section story. She then justifiably formed a belief in broccoli's beneficial effects. She still retains this belief but no longer recalls her original evidential source (and has never encountered either corroborating or undermining sources). Nonetheless, her broccoli belief is still justified (Goldman, 1999, 281).

Suppose, then, that pace the sceptic, Sally has a complete reason for believing that broccoli has beneficial effects. But then she forgets all or part of that reason. EE will imply that Sally is no longer entitled. That is implausible, says Goldman, because Sally doesn't lose justification that she had just by forgetting.

Whether EE has this result depends on how we fill in the details of the case. If Sally is fairly normal, she will have all sorts of background beliefs; that most people think broccoli is beneficial; that health experts say that it is, and so on. She will also remember that when she originally became convinced that broccoli is beneficial, she had then a complete reason for believing it. If these beliefs are acceptable, she will be entitled to once again affirm that broccoli is beneficial on the basis of her background beliefs.

If Sally is a real wierdo, and doesn't have any relevant background beliefs, nor any relevant occurring memories, EE will imply that Sally is not entitled to her beliefs[73]. But if Sally is that weird, it is at least unclear whether she is entitled to believe that broccoli is beneficial. To insist otherwise is to beg the question against EE.

9. Over-Intellectualizing

Extreme Evidentialism, paired with either (1) or (2) sets the standards for belief very high. The demand is so strong that, even supposing, pace the sceptic, that it is at least logically possible to have a complete reason for a belief, and even supposing that some clever philosophers have those reasons, it is quite clear that most people would be not be entitled to their beliefs. But, so the objection goes, that is a monstrously implausible over-intellectualizing of the standards for right belief. It is plain that people other than very clever (and weird?) philosophers have acceptable beliefs. So we must reject EE.

Here are Rescorla and Silins:

> "young children, and possibly also non-linguistic animals, are justified in believing many propositions, even though they cannot mount sustained arguments" (Rescorla, 2009, 50).

> Consider a young child... who gets a good look at the Sesame Street character Elmo in a book, and who forms the belief that that is red without further ado. In forming the belief, the child certainly does not consciously draw on beliefs about the reliability of her experience... she does not even have the concepts required to form beliefs about the reliability of her experience.... however the child and the adult are plausibly both justified in forming and in holding the belief (Silins, 2014, 10)[74].

The case of animals is fairly easy to handle. Most animals are not cognitively sophisticated enough to be appropriate subjects of normative appraisal[75]. When a bird swoops down and steals your chips at the seaside, hardly anyone would suppose that what the bird did was morally wrong, or that the

73 Feldman (2000, 70) responds in a similar way. I have moulded his response to fit my theory of justification, which is different to his in some respects, though also borrows from it.

74 It isn't just against EE that this objection is made. It is made, again and again by different authors in a volume discussing Bonjour and Lehrer's versions of Coherentism (1989). Silins (2014) makes this same objection against Fumerton's Acquaintance theory of justification.

75 I offer no account of when a creature is cognitively sophisticated enough, but I take it that there is some such distinction to be made, and defer to psychologists and cognitive scientists to fill in the details.

bird ought not to have stolen the chips, or that the bird was blameworthy for having stolen them, or anything of the sort. Yet, by the same token, no one would suppose that what the bird did was morally acceptable either. Birds are just not proper subjects of moral evaluation. In the same way, they are not proper subjects of epistemic evaluation either. It is inappropriate to hold birds and various other animals to the standards of reasonable belief that we expect humans to adhere to.

Young children are a more difficult case, but something similar holds, I suggest. Young children certainly do get away with lots of things that it would be completely unacceptable for humans to do. It is unacceptable, for example, for me to keep my mother awake all night crying because I am feeling irritable. If I were to do that, everyone would think that what I did was unfair and that I should not have done it. But, I suggest, we do not want to make that same evaluation of small infants. We do not react to a child crying late at night with negative evaluation and criticism. We do not say things like "I can't believe our 6 month old has the audacity to keep me awake all night! He is a selfish and careless person, and he should not be doing this". The child *does not know any better,* and for this reason is not seriously held to the standards of acceptable behaviour that an adult would be held to.

In just the same way, young children are not appropriately held to the standards of acceptable belief that cognitively sophisticated adults are held to. Some children believe that they have friends that they don't actually have (imaginary friends). If I were to hold such a belief, most people would criticize me for being unreasonable – perhaps even downright stupid – and suggest that I should not believe it. But if a child is very young, I suggest that it is inappropriate to criticize the child in the same way - to wit – to say that the child is unreasonable or stupid. The child is simply not old enough that we can properly demand that they critically reflect on their beliefs in the way demanded of sophisticated adults[76].

10. Self-Refutation?

EE looks to be self-refuting. The EE policy advices me to form beliefs only when I have a complete reason for doing so, but I don't have a complete reason to believe EE – all I've got are some reflections about what's plausible and what isn't, and who knows whether what's plausible to me has any bearing on what the true ethics of belief is. Thus, EE will recommend that I don't believe EE.

The difficulty is of the same form as that faced by the verifiability criterion of meaning – that the

76 Silins (2014) calls this the "spider man principle" according to which "greater conceptual power brings along greater epistemic responsibility". That seems to me exactly right.

criterion itself is not verifiable and so is itself meaningless. The proponent of EE should reply in the same way that Carnap defends the verifiability criterion. He distinguishes two kinds of question:

> A question of the first kind is a theoretical one; it asks, what is the actual state of affairs; and the answer is either true or false. The second question is a practical one; it asks, how shall we proceed; and the answer is not an assertion but a proposal or a decision (Carnap, 1936, 3).

The verifiability criterion of meaning, Carnap says, answers a question of the second kind. It isn't a principle aimed at being true to the facts about meaning, if there are any such facts. It isn't even a principle aimed at being true to the facts about the word "meaning" in ordinary English. Carnap proposes that we replace the ordinary concept of meaning with the concept of "logical" meaning – a concept which conforms to the principle of verifiability (Surrovell, 2013). In other words, the proposal is that we should *treat* as meaningful only sentences which meet the verifiability criterion. We should proceed from here by disregarding ideas that don't meet the verifiability criterion[77].

The proponent of EE should make this same move. EE is not put forward in an attempt to capture *the true* epistemic duties. It isn't even put forward as a principle aimed at being true to the facts about the words "acceptable", "entitled", "justified", and the like. Rather, it is a proposed rule. It is not a principle which one believes to be true, but a rule one decides to follow. If we take EE that way, it isn't self-refuting. EE does not say that you should follow a policy only if you have a complete reason for believing it to be the true policy. It says that you should believe something to be true only if you have a complete reason for believing it.

Williams likens epistemic norms to the rules of a game:

> is talk of correctness, in the sense of truth, out of place with respect to norms? For aren't norms like the rules of a game, mere arbitrary conventions? (Williams, 2004, 156).

If we follow Williams in this suggestion, the charge of self-refutation has no force at all. When I play a game of basketball, I don't believe the rule "you should not carry the ball without dribbling it" to be the truth. I decide to follow the rule for the purpose of playing a good game.

77 Hempel (1950) held that the verifiability criterion was an explication of the ordinary concept of meaning. For a sorting through these issues, see Surovell (2013).

Of course, in following the rule I might tacitly believe that it is a good rule to follow while playing[78]. So too in following EE. If I believe anything about EE, I might believe merely that it is the most plausible policy to adopt out of those I have considered, and I *can* have a complete reason to believe that – a typical philosophical discussion of the implications of different policies, their internal consistency and the motivations for them will suffice for that.

11. Useless?

I have just admitted that the question of what our epistemic duties are is a question to be answered with a decision about how we want to proceed – about which policies we want. That admission might cause some trouble for EE and the sceptic, because, if a policy for belief entails that we should not believe anything, then it is, you might think, a *useless* policy. Why should we proceed with it then? For that reason, EE should be rejected. Thus, Williams, in criticizing what he thinks is the sceptic's policy, writes:

> however, I suggest that we look at the issue pragmatically. In saying this, I mean that we take into consideration the interests that are subserved by practices of epistemic assessment... standards of justification... can be evaluated in the light of our epistemic interests: avoiding errors, coming to believe significant truths, improving our theories, and so on. Viewed in this pragmatic perspective, the Prior Grounding conception does particularly badly. No proposed normative structure for our epistemic practices is useful if it precludes making any distinction between justified and unjustified beliefs. Unless this distinction can be made, there are no such practices. The Prior Grounding Requirement, which makes scepticism unavoidable, is self-defeating in just this way. The Default and Challenge conception, which heads off scepticism, is normatively preferable (Williams, 2004, 156).

It is far from clear that a policy that entails Scepticism “doesn't serve our interests” in any significant sense. Williams lists three interests of “ours”.

(1) avoiding errors
(2) coming to believe significant truths
(3) improving our theories

78 I say “might”. I might not. I might find the rules completely ridiculous and in need of reform, but just be going along with it for now.

As for (1), if by "avoiding" it is meant "not believing", then a policy that entails Scepticism does help us avoid errors, because it councils us not to believe anything, and one cannot believe erroneously without believing at all. Such a policy helps us with (1) to the maximal degree!

As for (3), we can improve all of our theories without *believing* them. Scientists are free to continue work on theories about the origin of the universe and about the evolutionary history of human beings and Historians are free to continue work on theories about the culture of ancient civilizations. Even philosophers are free to work on theories about morality, metaphysics, philosophy of religion, philosophy of language and so on. One can develop and improve theories without believing them to be true. So an policy of belief with sceptical consequences doesn't frustrate the goal of improving our theories.

That just leaves (2). Obviously a policy which entails that we should not believe anything will frustrate the goal of believing significant truths, and frustrate it to the maximal degree. Is that a strong motivation to replace EE with something else? It depends. It depends, first, on whether there is anything better to replace it with. Second, on whether we should make (2) one of our goals, and third, on whether there are any other benefits of EE that balance the scales.

With respect to the first issue, it is at least unclear that there is anything better. I have heavily criticized several of the most prominent options, and there are plenty more criticisms around besides[79].

With respect to the second issue, many philosophers hold that one of "our" goals is mere true belief. Now, once you make your goal the mere "getting it right", a policy that entails Scepticism will seem quite unattractive. Yet, I suggest that there is nothing particularly valuable in merely "getting it right" if it comes with no understanding at all that the belief is true. An illustration from Sextus Empricus is instructive:

> Let us imagine that some people are looking for gold in a dark room full of treasures.... [N]one of them will be persuaded that he has hit upon gold even if he has in fact hit upon it. In the same way, the crowd of philosophers has come into the world, as into a vast house, in search of truth. But it is reasonable that the man who grasps the truth should doubt whether

79 Williams (2004, 156-157) admits this point, but he thinks his Contextualism provides the needed alternative, but see my discussion of that.

he has been successful[80].

There is nothing particularly valuable about grabbing a piece of gold in the dark, not at least, for the person who grabs it. The person who grabs it will never see that he has gold, and so for all the difference it makes to him, it might as well be a clump of dirt. By that same token, if I believe that evolutionary theory is true and happen to be right, there is no particular value in this for me if I could not even explain *to myself* why I suppose it to be true. I will be "flying blind" in an obvious way if I have no answer in my mind at all to the question "why believe that evolutionary theory is true?". I could get myself in that state by sitting in my room without doing any research and taking a guess, and I do not see why anyone would make it a goal of theirs to be in this state for any belief at all, even if the belief is, as a matter of fact entirely outside of your grasp, true.

Let me be clear about how strong my suggestion is here. The person who grabs gold in the dark is no better off *in the slightest* for, as a matter of fact having a piece of gold, than he would be if he merely had a clump of mud. It does nothing for him at all. For any purpose that matters to him whilst in that dark room, a piece of gold is just as good as a piece of mud. The same is true, I suggest, of a true belief which I hold without any reason for holding it. Even if the belief is, as a matter of fact, true, it makes absolutely no difference to me for any purpose whatsoever. So long as the belief is useful for various purposes, it might as well be false. I deny, in short, that there is anything intrinsically valuable in merely being right. The fact that I can never be right,in this mere sense -given EE- should not be taken as a strong motivation for the rejection of EE.

Now to the third issue. A policy that entails Scepticism is of some practical benefit. In collapsing the distinction between acceptable and unacceptable beliefs it removes any theoretical basis for thinking that some ways of thinking about the world are silly and some superior. In so doing it fights off the inclination to think that the dominant ideas of your time, culture or group of associates is the best set, and that alternative ways of approaching the world are for quacks. There is just no room for that distinction in a policy that entails Scepticism. No idea is more credible than its rivals. Such a policy therefore encourages humility, open-mindedness and free-inquiry, as opposed to rashness, refusal to consider different perspectives, and dogmatism[81].

80From Sextus, *Against the Mathematicians,* VII 259.

81 Ancient sceptics would have contended that the benefit of their Scepticism is peace of mind and that this benefit outweighed any alleged benefits of merely believing truth by accident. I suppose that the reflections just given are my replacement for that argument.

There is, for these reasons, no good argument for the claim that a policy entailing Scepticism does not serve our interests.

12. Conclusion

Though the arguments for Extreme Evidentialism are not absolutely decisive, I claim that they are somewhat persuasive. What's more, I have here defended Extreme Evidentialism against the strongest objections known to me. No doubt most philosophers will still reject EE, but bare rejection is not argument. Extreme Evidentialism remains an attractive policy, and we dogmatists find ourselves unable to wriggle free of the sceptic's net.

Concluding Remarks

1. A Summary

The Pyrrhonian sceptical strategy aims at convincing others first that they have no reason for their beliefs, and second that they should give up their beliefs. I have defended this kind of Scepticism in several ways. I recount briefly some of those here.

First, I have pointed out numerous times that the philosophers I have considered have not done anything at all to give any of us any reason to believe anything. Such philosophers have either conceded that it isn't possible to think of such reasons, or been committed to it by their views. It seems to me that this is the most fundamental issue in this connection. Even if we can get used to some weaker standards for belief like Conservatism or Williams' Contextualism, if the sceptic is right about our lack of reasons, then all of our beliefs are, in the last analysis, mere guess work; blind faith no more rationally explicable than any system of beliefs there has ever been or ever could be. BonJour writes:

> For the denial that such reasons exist amounts already to a very severe and intuitively implausible version of skepticism, no matter what may be said further about the concepts of justification (and of knowledge). If I have no reasons for thinking that my beliefs are true, then I am “flying blind” in an obvious way, and the seriousness of this result is not diminished in any clear way by adding that in some other, perhaps externalist sense my beliefs are (or rather may be – see below) still justified (BonJour, 2003, 175).

It is this idea that drives the sceptic's pessimistic assessment of ordinary human knowledge and his total suspension of judgement. It is, therefore, the heart of Scepticism, and it remains unchallenged by everything I have here examined.

Some of the critics of Scepticism have said that the sceptic's definition of "knowledge" is not the ordinary one and that this completely undermines his argument. In reply, I distinguish between Semantic Scepticism and Substantive Scepticism. The former is weak to the critic's objection, but the latter is not. In defining "knowledge" the way that he does, the substantive sceptic is not at all trying to refute ordinary knowledge attributions. What he means to say (or convince us of), rather, is that ordinary human knowledge is doubtful, fragile and just not that impressive – perhaps even so doubtful that we are reproachable for accepting it.

Other critics have responded to Scepticism not by thinking about epistemic words or by giving good reasons for our beliefs, but by contending that the sceptic's ethics of belief should be rejected. Here, I'd like to say something more detailed about what I take myself to have shown. We may distinguish different grades of response to the sceptic. The first, call it a "Lousy Defence", is to meet the sceptic with an incredulous stare, ignore his arguments, call him absurd for even suggesting that we should not hold our beliefs, and then move on.

One grade higher is a "Minimal Defence", which involves locating the assumptions of a sceptical strategy, and then creating and accepting an alternative to those assumptions. One could, for example, create a form of Conservatism as opposed to the sceptic's Extreme Evidentialism, and then, for no reason at all, just dismiss the latter and accept the former. In other words, one just creates a non-sceptical way of thinking, and then gives the incredulous stare again.

One grade further from there is a "Moderate Defence". A Moderate Defence involves creating an alternative to the sceptic's assumptions, and then giving some independent reasons to prefer your alternative. One might, for example, claim that your Contextualist view fits better with "ordinary practice" and should be accepted for that reason.

Higher still is a “Strong Defence”, which involves doing all of the above and providing some independent criticisms of the sceptic's assumptions. One might argue, as Williams did, that Extreme Evidentialism is a policy which would frustrate our goals.

If what I have argued here is correct, then we have yet to find any independent reasons for rejecting Extreme Evidentialism, and so we do not have a Strong Defence against the sceptic. Moreover, as far as Contextualism and Conservatism go, neither is a Moderate Defence, because the best arguments for them are no good.

They aren't even persuasive as Minimal Defences, because both are fraught with their own serious problems. It is here, in my estimation, that the best argument for the Extreme Evidentialist policy lies. Although it is, obviously, a very strict and demanding policy, the alternatives that I have considered are all absurdly permissive or else suffer from other theoretical problems. Is there some middle road between absurdly relaxed epistemic policy and incredibly demanding policy? Until we locate the middle road, we dogmatists have nothing more than the Lousy Defence – looking stubbornly into the sceptic's eyes and refusing to suspend judgement no matter what he says. I take it that no philosopher is happy with that.

2. Critical Reflections

The kind of Scepticism I have focussed on here is radical. It is Scepticism about absolutely everything. There are more restrained versions of Scepticism which focus on particular domains. Religious Scepticism is the view that we do not know, ought not to believe, or have no reason to believe religious claims, chief amongst those claims being that God exists. Several philosophers have tried to criticize Religious Scepticism in the same ways that more radical Scepticism has been criticized. Plantinga (2000) argues that Religious Scepticism presupposes a mistaken definition of “knowledge”, and Swinburne (2004) defends a version Conservatism applied to religious belief. The latter view is modified and developed in some detail by me (Burns, 2017). It is not hard to imagine a critic of Religious Scepticism arguing in the way that Michael Williams does either; that “God exists” is default acceptable in the contexts that religious believers often find themselves. If my arguments here are right, however, none of these criticisms of Religious Scepticism will be of any force at all, for the same reasons that they are of no force against more radical Scepticism[82].

82 It should be noted that both Plantinga and Swinburne have much more to say in defending religious belief against Scepticism than just these things, but they do rely on these arguments at crucial points in their work.

There are various ways in which my discussion here might be improved. I have not discussed every anti-sceptical move which philosophers have made. I have stuck to moves which you can find in contemporary epistemology and even there I have restrained myself to a subsection of those. I do not claim that Scepticism is true or that there is no plausible way to resist Sextus' sceptical strategy. I only claim that responses which I, at one time or another, found absolutely decisive are completely unsatisfying.

Further, I have not discussed a number of other aspects of the sceptical philosophy. I did not discuss whether it is possible for the sceptic to consistently or even fruitfully live out his Scepticism. I did not discuss the ancient Pyrrhonian idea that suspension of judgement leads to a kind of peace of mind. I did not discuss why the sceptic cares so much about convincing others of his sceptical theses and I only very briefly touched on the other Pyrrhonian idea that sceptic's are honest truth-seekers. My omission of these issues is because, for most of the time that I have been thinking about Scepticism, these issues seemed to me only of secondary importance to those discussed here. I may well have changed my mind by now!

I mentioned a moment ago that there are various other arguments in the sceptical tradition than the one I have discussed. I chose the Sextan strategy on the grounds that it seemed to me the most powerful, but that is not to say that there are no other strong tools in the sceptic's box. No doubt I will have cause to examine those arguments in the future, and so too to re-examine the present arguments.

Appendix A. The Conceptual Variation Hypothesis for Knowledge

1. A Little Reminder

Some critics of Scepticism have accused the sceptic of using a non-ordinary definition of knowledge in his arguments. The consequence is allegedly that the sceptic fails to contradict

anything that we believe and that the sceptic's conclusion does not matter. I argued earlier that neither of these consequences really does follow, even if we admit that the sceptic's definition is non-ordinary. To this end, I drew a distinction between Semantic and Substantive Scepticism. The Semantic sceptic denies ordinary knowledge attributions while the Substantive sceptic thinks that ordinary human knowledge is quite flimsy and unimpressive, even if sentences like "S knows that P" are often true.

This appendix is something of a digression. I have already shown that the sceptic can develop Substantive Scepticism in a way to defend it against his linguistic critics, but I would like to convince other philosophers that Semantic Scepticism, or the business of understanding Scepticism as the denial of knowledge attributions, is pointless and muddled (good luck to me!). To that end, I wish to make plausible the thought that there is no such thing as the ordinary meaning of "knowledge", where this means a single meaning shared by all or at least the vast majority of people. The corollaries of this are that Scepticism cannot be criticized for using a non-ordinary definition, because the sceptic's definition is just one among many different definitions. *Semantic* Scepticism entails that your beliefs about what you know are false only if you share the sceptic's definition of knowledge and there is no saying in general that *we* do or do not share that definition. One of two conclusions may be drawn from this; either that Scepticism is a parochial subject which you need only bother with if you accept one of the many definitions of "knowledge" floating around, since only then will it entail that your knowledge attributions are false; or that it is not philosophically fruitful to understand the issue of Scepticism as one about whether our knowledge attributions are literally true. At the end of the appendix, I shall suggest that this latter conclusion is correct, but this is a long way away. First, I shall argue for my claim that there is no such thing as *the* ordinary meaning of "knowledge". I present two arguments, neither of them conclusive on their own but, I claim, taken together they provide a convincing case.

Section 2 clarifies what I shall argue. Section 3 gives the first argument. Section 4 gives the second argument. Section 5 considers the significance of my arguments for the evaluation of Scepticism.

2. The Conceptual Variation Hypothesis

Almost 20 years ago, Harold Brown (1999) criticized conceptual analysis in philosophy for

assuming that all members of the wider community share the same concepts. His claim was:

> *CV.* Members of a conceptual community often associate different, although similar, concepts with a given term (Brown, 1999, 40).

I will not argue for CV here, but I shall argue for a version of it which is limited to the concept of knowledge:

> *CVK.* There are substantial amounts of variation in the concept of knowledge among people from the same culture.

When I say that there are "substantial amounts of variation" I just mean that different people have different concepts of knowledge. I am not saying that each individual has a different concept to every other individual, but I am saying that it is false that everybody or even any large majority of people have the same concept of knowledge. When I say that a person "has a concept of knowledge", I mean that they use the word "knowledge" as a label for a certain idea.

Before providing the argument for CVK, it is necessary to ward off an objection which many readers may already have. That is, if there is so much variation in the concept of knowledge even between members of the same culture, how can these people ever communicate with one another? If they were always using the word "knowledge" in a different way to one another, it would be exceedingly difficult for them to understand each other and misunderstandings would be far more common-place than they seem to be. In fact, the objection goes, people rarely seem to misunderstand each other when making attributions of knowledge, and appear to proceed as though they understand each other perfectly well. If CVK is true, there ought to be some explanation of this phenomenon[83].

The first thing to note is, again, that I am not claiming that each individual has a different concept to every other individual, so that we should expect constant miscommunication every time the word "knowledge" is used. I am saying only that there is a large amount of variation. Still, the objector is right in thinking that we should expect miscommunication to occur quite often, given that the variation is fairly large. The explanation for why people seem to communicate so well when discussing knowledge despite conceptual variation is that although the intension of these concepts is

83 Sorin Baiasu once made this argument in conversation with me. See also Brown (1999).

different, their extension – or at least what people *believe to be* their extension – is largely the same. Take two people A and B. A defines knowledge as reliably produced true belief. B defines knowledge as rightly held true belief. In most everyday circumstances, when a person forms a belief rightly – by considering criticisms, looking for evidence, considering alternatives and so on – they also do so via a reliable process. It is only in a small number of rarely occurring cases that the extensions of the two concepts diverge. That this is so is reinforced by the fact that the most influential counter-example to the reliability analyses of knowledge was BonJour's (1980, 62) case of reliable yet irresponsible clairvoyance – a case quite far removed from ordinary situations. It is the fact that the extensions of the two concepts largely overlap which produces the illusion that A and B understand one another perfectly in their discussions involving the concept of knowledge. In fact, since A and B have different concepts of knowledge, if neither of them has clarified what they mean, the two misunderstand each other, but the misunderstanding does no harm because of the overlapping extensions. This, then, is the explanation for the appearance of perfect communication.

The picture I wish to defend is therefore this. People quite often mean different things to one another by "knowledge", owing to the fact that there are many variations among people's concepts of knowledge, even within the same culture. Despite this, very rarely is there any clear miscommunication in discussions about knowledge, because the extensions of the concepts of most people overlap[84].

It is not enough to respond to objections to CVK, I must also marshal some arguments in its favour. To this I now turn.

3. The Argument from Philosophical Disagreement

The first argument involves four claims. First, there is a large amount of disagreement in philosophy about the meaning of "knowledge". Second, there is no theory neutral way of deciding who is right. third, the best explanation of these facts is that philosophers are trying to analyse different concepts. Having established that philosophers have different concepts of "knowledge" to one another, I argue that since there is no reason to suppose that the philosophical community is idiosyncratic in this respect, it is reasonable to expect that the wider community is the same – that there is no ordinary

84 I assumed here that A and B have fairly well defined concepts of knowledge, and I suspect that this is not the case for many people. I suspect that many people have an idea of what sorts of things to use the word "knowledge" for, but don't have anything like an implicit *definition*. I leave this aside for now.

concept of knowledge.

Anyone familiar with the literature on the analysis of knowledge will not need telling that there is a large amount of disagreement about it, but I list here seven different analyses all of which have been defended in the literature. It should be noted throughout that these are purported analyses of what "knowledge" *means*, not only necessary and sufficient conditions:

> *JTB*. S knows that P if and only if (a) S believes that P, (b) S is justified in believing that P, (c) P is true (Plato, 1973 Ayer, 1936).
>
> *NFE*. S knows that P if and only if (a) S believes that P (b) S is justified in believing that P, (c) P is true, (d) S's justification contains no false evidence (Clark, 1963; Mcgrew and Mcgrew, 2006).
>
> *ND*. S knows that P if and only if (a) S believes that P, (b) S is justified in believing that P, (c) P is true, and (d) There are no defeaters for S's justification (Lehrer and Paxson, 1969).
>
> *CT*. S knows that p if and only if the fact that p is causally connected in an "appropriate" way with S's believing p (Goldman, 1967).
>
> *RT*. S knows that P if and only if (a) It is true that P, (b) S believes that P, and (c) S's belief that P results from a reliable belief forming process (Goldman, 1995)[85].
>
> *TT*. S knows that P if and only if (a) It is true that P, (b) S believes that P, (c) if in the nearest possible worlds in which P is not true, S no longer believes that P (Nozick, 1981).
>
> *ST*. S knows that P if and only if (a) S believes that P, (b) P is true, and (c) In all nearby worlds in which S believes that P, P is true (Sosa, 1999).

These are just some of the definitions which have been offered. There is also a great divide between those who require that a person must be aware of reasons for thinking that their belief is true and those who deny that requirement (BonJour, 1980; Fumerton, 2006; Mcgrew, 2006; Bergman, 2011; Greco, 2011). Moreover, philosophers not only offer differing definitions of knowledge, but they

85 Goldman's final analysis is far more complicated.

even disagree explicitly about the extensions of the concept. BonJour (1980) denies that a reliable clairvoyant that has no reason to believe he is a clairvoyant can know anything by using his clairvoyant powers. Greco (2006), however, maintains that the clairvoyant can gain knowledge through his special power. Goldman (1976, 772-773) denies knowledge to a man looking at a barn in a field, *who believes* that he is looking at a barn in a field *because* there are many barn facades around. McGrew (2006, 18) claims that the man has knowledge. Plantinga (1993, 35) denies that in general a belief can be known to be true if it is true "by accident". Mcgrew (2006, 15-16) distinguishes the kind of accident involved in the original Getteir cases from other kinds of accident and holds that only the former are a barrier to knowing. I take this to establish my claim that there is substantial disagreement in philosophy about the meaning of "knowledge".

My second claim is that there is no theory neutral way of deciding who is right. According to the conceptual analyst, the target is the implicit rule we all follow in classifying things as "knowledge". The rule is, by their own admission, implicit and not the sort of thing we can 'read off' just by reflecting on the matter. It is also quite a different sort of thing to, for example, a biological specimen, which we can put on a Petri dish and look at as long as we like. We have no such access in the case of the implicit meaning of "knowledge". The standard means of solving this problem is through the use of thought-experiments. Our intuitions about thought-experiment cases can show us how we would classify cases and through the meticulous study of these cases, we are able to hypothesize, test and gradually refine our analysis (Jackson, 1998). The problem with this methodology in the case of knowledge is that, whilst there are a great many very clear cases of knowledge about which almost everyone agrees, every viable analysis in the literature, including those listed above, is consistent with all of the uncontroversial cases. The only way to distinguish between the different analyses is by designing more complex thought-experiments, and philosophers usually disagree about the correct response to more complex thought-experiments, as they do with the clairvoyant case, the barn facade case and others. Thus, the picture is that most analyses can handle all of the clear cases but each extrapolates from those cases in different ways (Swinburne, 2001) and there is seemingly no uncontroversial way to decide which extrapolation is correct.

I doubt that much of this will be controversial, but what will be controversial is my claim that the best explanation of these facts is that philosophers have different concepts of knowledge and so are trying to analyse different concepts. The only way I am aware of to argue that some hypothesis is the best explanation of data is by comparing that hypothesis to others. One explanation more

favourable to the traditional conceptual analyst is that philosophers disagree about the correct analysis because it is an exceedingly difficult matter. On this hypothesis, philosophers all have the same concept of knowledge, but because it is so hard to produce a correct analysis, they end up disagreeing a lot. The reason it is so difficult, it will be argued, is because the meaning of "knowledge" being sought is something we understand only implicitly. We unconsciously follow a rule which tells us when to classify something as knowledge and when not to, but we are not explicitly aware of what this rule is. To uncover the rule is to provide the correct analysis and this can be exceedingly difficult (Fumerton, 1983, 489). Call this the Difficulty hypothesis.

The Difficulty hypothesis, unlike CVK, does not explain why philosophers disagree over the *extension* of the concept. If what we are doing is trying to make an implicit rule which we usually follow explicit then one would not expect disagreements over whether a given case is a case of knowledge, because our implicit understanding of the rule should yield the same classifications, on the assumption that we share the same rule. CVK, by contrast, has a ready explanation. Philosophers disagree about which cases are cases of knowledge because they have different concepts. A defender of the Difficulty hypothesis could save it by maintaining that sometimes we misapply our implicit rule, saying of a case that it fits the rule when it does not really. Due to the extent to which philosophers disagree over cases, however, such misapplication would have to be fairly widespread (it is not just one or two cases!), and in any case an explanation is required as to why we misapply the rule in any given case. Philosophers have sometimes invented such explanations in the process of "explaining away" the intuitions of their opponents, but these further explanations introduce substantial complication into the Difficulty hypothesis. CVK provides the far simpler explanation.

Another issue with the Difficulty hypothesis is this. Supposing that it is difficult to make explicit a rule which we implicitly follow, one wonders just how difficult it can reasonably be thought to be. It might be difficult enough that the analyses we initially proposed were refuted fairly straightforwardly by some counter-examples we had not thought of, as in Getteir's examples. But can it be so difficult as this: that not only did we get it wrong to begin with, but hypotheses about the correct analysis diverge further and further away from one another as they develop, with some analyses accommodating some intuitions while shunning others, and vice versa for other analyses in such a way as to produce seemingly *intractable* disagreement[86]?

86 See Shope (1983) for a documentation of this.

Lastly, the most decisive consideration in favour of CVK over the difficulty hypothesis it seems to me is this. Philosophers have clearly articulated what they mean by "knowledge" in all of the different ways I have listed above. Whether or not, for example, Reliabilism is the correct analysis of the concept shared by most people, what seems clear is that Goldman proposes it as the analysis of his own concept, and that those who reject Reliabilism deny that it is their concept[87]. The philosophers who have proposed these analyses at the very least believe that those analyses are the correct accounts of their own concept. What better evidence is there that two people have different concepts than each person's having stated what they take their concept to be, and those stated concepts being different? I propose that the simplest explanation of the fact that philosophers have stated different concepts; the fact of substantial disagreements about the correct meaning of "knowledge"; and the fact that there is no neutral method of resolving the disagreements is not that finding the correct analysis of the uni-vocal ordinary meaning is very difficult, but that philosophers have different concepts of knowledge[88].

Now, having gotten that far, I see no reason to regard the philosophical community as idiosyncratic in this respect. In producing their analyses of knowledge, philosophers have reflected on counter-examples and other proposed definitions, and refined their analyses in the ways which struck them as intuitively correct. So far as I can see, there is no property of this method or the philosophical community itself which makes the philosophical community likely to have many different conceptions of knowledge whilst the wider community agrees uni-vocally. In light of this, I tentatively conclude that the wider community is much like the philosophical one – that CVK is true.

4. The Argument from Surveys

The argument from philosophical disagreement is by no means conclusive. It depends on my controversial claim about the best explanation of various facts about the discipline and on the assumption that the philosophical community is not relevantly different to the wider community. It is possible to bolster that argument with a second and more direct argument – one which uses survey data to argue that CVK is true. There has been plenty of empirical work done in recent times assessing the extent of variation in the concept of knowledge *between* cultures. Some of this work

87 Goldman (2007) actually says that first and foremost, his analysis is an analysis of what his own meaning.

88 A similar argument is found in Alston (2005) about "justification". In a way, this paper is an extension of Alston's point about "justification", which I find plausible, to the concept of knowledge.

has suggested very great differences (Weinberg, 2001), but more recent work has emphasized a degree of agreement (Nagel, 2013; Kim & Yuan, 2015; Seyedsayamdost, 2015; Turri, 2017). What has not been recognized, however, is that the data in these very same studies shows substantial variation in the concepts of knowledge of participants from the same culture. The studies provide evidence for CVK. I will simply present each study and note the places where conceptual variation is indicated.

In a much discussed study, Weinberg (2001) found significant differences in the intuitions of Westerners compared to East Asians when they were presented with this variant of a Gettier Case:

The Buick Case

> Bob has a friend, Jill, who has driven a Buick for many years. Bob therefore thinks that Jill drives an American car. He is not aware, however, that her Buick has recently been stolen, and he is also not aware that Jill has replaced it with a Pontiac, which is a different kind of American car. Does Bob really know that Jill drives an American car, or does he only believe it?

The vast majority of Westerners had the intuition that Bob does not know, whilst the majority of East Asians said just the opposite – that Bob does know. The contrast was even more pronounced when comparing the intuitions of Westerners to Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi participants (Weignberg, 2001). The results are shown below:

The Buick Case	**Really Knows**	**Only Believes**
Westerners	26.00%	74.00%
East Asians	53.00%	47.00%
Southern Asians	61.00%	39.00%

Figure 1: Buick Case Intuitions

Notice here that 26% of Westerners attributed knowledge whilst 74% chose “only believes”. The majority of participants went with “only believes” but 26% is not a small minority of people seemingly exhibiting responses indicative of a different concept of knowledge to the other 74%.

Another case of crucial importance in the debate about the analysis of knowledge was a case put forward by Lehrer:

TrueTemp Case

> One day Charles was knocked out by a falling rock; as a result his brain was “rewired” so that he is always right whenever he estimates the temperature where he is. Charles is unaware that his brain has been altered in this way. A few weeks later, this brain rewiring leads him to believe that it is 71 degrees in his room. Apart from his estimation, he has no other reasons to think that it is 71 degrees. In fact, it is 71 degrees.

The vast majority of Philosophers thought that the TrueTemp Case was intuitively not a case of knowledge. Even Goldman and Alston, figureheads of RT, took the TrueTemp Case to present a very serious problem for their analyses. Weinberg (2001) found that most Westerners share that same intuition, but a significantly greater percentage of East Asians share it:

TrueTemp Case	**Really Knows**	**Only Believes**
Westerners	32.00%	68.00%
East Asians	12.00%	88.00%

Figure 2.: TrueTempt Case Intuitions

The statistically significant difference disappears, however, if the TrueTemp Case is changed slightly. If, instead of a rock causing changes to Charles' perceptual system, the entire of Charles' community undergoes those changes, the percentage of East Asians reporting that Charles 'only believes' falls significantly:

Community TrueTemp Case	**Really Knows**	**Only Believes**
Westerners	20.00%	80.00%
East Asians	32.00%	68.00%

Figure 3: Community TrueTemp Case Intuitions

These findings suggest that East Asians' knowledge attributions are sensitive to considerations about the wider community in a way which Westerners' attributions are not (Beebe, 2012,5). Again, the key point for my purposes is not the cross cultural difference but the within-culture difference. In the first trial 32% of participants chose “really knows” as against 68%, and in the second trial the split was 20%-80%. The people attributing knowledge are in the minority, but they are not a negligible minority.

In perhaps the largest scale study so far, Stich et al (2016) surveyed 245 participants from the US, India, Japan and Brazil finding that the substantial majority of participants denied knowledge in the Gettier cases presented whilst affirming knowledge in standard "non-Gettiered" cases of justified true belief. These results lead the authors to hypothesize a "*underlying innate and universal core folk epistemology*" (Stich et al, 2016, 8) such that people of all cultures possess a concept of knowledge which requires more than justified true belief. That may or may not be, but Stich et al's (2016) results also reveal differences within the US when participants are presented with these Getteir cases:

Gettier/Hospital Case

Paul Jones was worried because it was 10 pm and his wife Mary was not home from work yet. Usually she is home by 6 pm. He tried her cell phone but just kept getting her voicemail. Starting to worry that something might have happened to her, he decided to call some local hospitals to ask whether any patient by the name of "Mary Jones" had been admitted that evening. At the University Hospital, the person who answered his call confirmed that someone by that name had been admitted with major but not life-threatening injuries following a car crash. Paul grabbed his coat and rushed out to drive to University hospital. As it turned out, the patient at University Hospital was not Paul's wife, but another woman with the same name. In fact, Paul's wife had a heart attack as she was leaving work, and was at that moment receiving treatment in Metropolitan Hospital, a few miles away.

Gettier/Trip Case

Luke works in an office in New York with two other people, Victor and Monica. All winter Victor has been describing his plans to go to Las Vegas on his vacation, even showing Luke the website of the hotel where he has reservations. When Victor is away on vacation, Luke receives a very nice email from Victor together with photos of Victor posing in front of Las Vegas landmarks. When he gets back to work, Victor talks a lot to Luke about how much fun he had vacationing in Las Vegas. However, Victor didn't really go on the trip; he has just been pretending. His tickets and reservations were cancelled because his credit card was maxed out, and he secretly stayed home in New York, very skillfully faking the photos he sent Luke. Meanwhile, Monica just spent a weekend vacationing in Las Vegas, but kept this a secret from all her co-workers.

Stich et al (2016) asked participants two questions about these cases. They first asked participants whether the protagonist of the case has knowledge. They then asked which of these two was the more accurate description: (i) "[Protagonist] knows that [relevant proposition]," and (ii) "[Protagonist] feels like [s]he knows that [relevant proposition] but [s]he doesn't actually know [this].". In the hospital case, 30% of participants attributed knowledge and 15% chose (I) in answer to the second question. In the trip case, 40% of participants attributed knowledge and 25% chose option (I). These results once more indicate that even within the same culture, there exist non-negligible variations in people's concepts of knowledge.

Cullen (2010) criticized Weinberg's cross-cultural findings on the grounds that participants had to choose between 'really knows' and 'only believes'. 'Really knows', Cullen argues, might suggest to the participants a very strong concept of knowledge and they might understand the question 'does Charles *really* know?' as a question about whether Charles can be absolutely certain. Participants might understand the concept of 'really knowing' differently to the concept 'knowing'. To see whether this was so, Cullen replicated Weinberg's study using both the Buick Case and the TrueTemp Case. Cullen's study had two stages. He first presented the cases and gave Weinberg's two non-dichotomous options, "Really knows" and "Only Believes". He then retested the same cases using the dichotomous options - "knows" and "does not know".

Concerning the Buick Case, Cullen found that almost exactly like Weiberg's study, 71% of participants opted for "Only Believes" when given the non-dichotomous options. When given the dichotomous options, however, subjects were substantially more likely to attribute knowledge - 42% chose "knows"when given dichotomous options, whilst only 29% chose "really knows" given non-dichotomous options (Cullen, 2010).

The difference was even more pronounced concerning the TrueTemp Case. Cullen found that only 28% of participants responded "really knows" given non-dichotomous options, whilst 57% of participants chose "knows" given dichotomous options. Participants were twice as likely to attribute knowledge given dichotomous options as opposed to non-dichotomous ones (Cullen, 2010)[89].

Yet, the within culture difference is even more pronounced in Cullen's study. As mentioned, 42% of

89 Cullen's paper contains a penetrating critique of the methods of experimental philosophy. It is actually very difficult to gain insight into lay concepts using survey methodology. One reason for this is that participants do not typically grasp why they are being asked questions about the bizarre cases they are being asked about, and this can have a distorting influence on the answers that they give.

Western participants in Cullen's study reported that the subject of a Gettier Case had knowledge. Philosophers have taken it for-granted since Gettier's (1963) paper that subject's in Gettier Cases intuitively do not know, and this was the chief refutation of the traditional justified, true belief analysis of knowledge. Yet, 42% of the participants in Cullen's study do not share that intuition. Similarly, the majority of philosophers took the subject in the TrueTemp Case intuitively not to have knowledge[90], and yet in Cullen's study 57% of participants affirm that the subject of the case *does* know. Cullen's findings thus suggest great differences between the intuitions of Philosophers and those of a large number of non-philosophers. Moreover, 42% is just barely a minority and 57% just barely a majority, suggesting once more that there are variations in the concepts of knowledge of non-philosophers, even concerning cases which philosophers took to be uncontroversial.

In fact, even the studies which demonstrate substantial cross-cultural consistency in intuitions indicate that a sizeable minority of Westerners dissent from the intuition that Gettier Cases are not cases of knowledge. In Nagel's (2013) study, 31% of participants from the 'white' ethnic group attributed knowledge in Gettier cases with 69% not doing so[91]. Starsman and Friedman (2012) distinguish between cases in which a subject forms a belief on the basis of authentic evidence and cases in which the belief is formed on the basis of apparent evidence. Authentic evidence is evidence which is 'informative about the world' (Starsman and Friedman, 2012, 7), whereas apparent evidence merely appears to be. They give this example:

Piggy Bank Case

> Corey puts a coin dated 1936 into his piggy bank and therefore believes that his piggy bank contains a 1936 quarter. Although the coin is later removed by his room mate his belief remains true because the piggy bank contains a different, previously unnoticed 1936 quarter.

In the authentic evidence version of the case, Corey puts a genuine 1936 quarter into his piggy bank. In the apparent evidence version, Corey puts a coin in the piggy bank which looks like a 1936 coin but is actually a 1938 coin. Starsman and Friedman (2012) claim that both types of case are such that most philosophers would say that they are not cases of knowledge. At the very least, cases of apparent evidence are much like the Sheep in the Field and Clock Cases discussed earlier. In any

90 As I have said, this intuition was even shared by Goldman the most well-known proponent of Reliabilism.

91 Of course, a person who is not in the ethnic group Nagel labels 'white' may still be from the west and particularly from the US. It is also possible that someone from the 'white' group is not from the west. The percentage of knowledge attribution from other ethnic groups ranges from 27% for 'black' to 64% for 'other' (Nagel, 2013) – and these are all decently sized percentages, although the number of participants in each group is not very large.

case, participants attributed knowledge 67% of the time in the authentic evidence case and 30% of the time in apparent evidence cases (Starsman and Friedman, 2012, 7). Given this work, it seems difficult to deny that a substantial body of the wider population do not share the intuitions Philosophers have about cases which have proved pivotal in the debate[92]. Moreover, we see yet again that the most common response of participants is far from a gaping majority indicating once more conceptual variations in the general population.

Wright (2010) appears to have found similar results while using the TrueTemp Case to investigate whether the order in which thought-experiments are presented has an effect on the intuitions participants have (see the next section). When TrueTemp is preceded by a clear case of knowledge, 40% of participants attributed knowledge. When TrueTemp is preceded by a clear case of non-knowledge, 55% of participants attributed knowledge. Lastly, when TrueTemp is preceded by another controversial case (the Fake Barn Case), 26% of participants attributed knowledge. The relevant points here are, first, that much like in Cullen's study, a substantial body of participants attributed knowledge in the TrueTemp Case, contra the majority of philosophers – and Internalist Philosophers in particular. These results do seem to suggest that a substantial portion of the population have an externalist conception of knowledge, although more detailed work is needed to support this hypothesis. Second, the percentage of knowledge attribution in each case leaves a sizeable number of participants not attributing. When TrueTemp is preceded by a clear case of non-knowledge, knowledge attribution rates are almost half and half!

In Cullen's study, 43% of participants denied that the TrueTemp Case was a case of knowledge. When asked why they denied it, the majority of those participants gave clearly Internalist explanations:

> (1) Charles only “believes” because he’s got no reason to think he’d be spot on, it’s just a guess as far as he’s concerned. Perhaps if he’d been noticing on occasion after occasion that he’s guessing the right temperature, then he would get to the stage where [we] could say “he knows”.
>
> (2) Charles’ belief is influenced by a sub-conscious activity in his brain. For his belief to become knowledge, he would have to become aware that he has some kind of crazy human

92 This is overlooked by most researchers in this area, perhaps because most of the studies in which the data can be found have focussed on other hypotheses.

thermometer power, and thus know that his brain can tell the temperature. Now it is just a strange, instinctive belief.

Cullen writes that ,"*almost all subjects explicitly cited the internalist intuition that in order to count as knowing that p, one must be aware of one's reasons for believing p, in support of their responses*" (Cullen, 2010, 16). 67% of participants, attributed knowledge, suggesting that they did not share the Internalist requirements on knowledge. A number of Philosophers have held that ordinary language contains both of these senses of 'knowledge' (Swinburne, 2001).

This concludes my presentation of the within culture data. It should be clear from what has been said that in every study mentioned, whenever there has been a majority response made by participants, there has always been a non-negligible number of participants who dissent. In some cases, the minority almost reaches 50%. How should we explain this fact? In a different context, Nagel (2012, 22) notes that the fact that many lay people dissent from the philosophically standard intuitions may be the result of them misunderstanding the cases. She notes that Gettier cases may be 'taxing to follow' and that participants do not have the motivation that professional philosophers have to read the case closely. This might result in them only picking up the gist of the story and thereby responding in a way that they might not have if they had read more thoroughly. We might adapt this same explanation for why intuitions are sometimes divided. It is not that people have different concepts of knowledge. They have the same concepts, but they misunderstand the cases, or they fail to correctly apply their own implicit concept[93].

It is always possible when using surveys that participants misunderstand what they are being asked to comment on, but the Buick case is not really that taxing. I think that S owns an American Car because I've seen her Buick. That Buick has since been replaced by S with another American Car. Participants could misunderstand the case, as Nagel notes, if they don't really care and are just skim reading. Yet, the dissenting population in some of these studies is quite large, ranging from 25% - 67% depending on the case and the study and one would not expect so many participants to misunderstand or misread the thought-experiments. Moreover, Nagel's own study contains a comprehension question, which should help weed out participants who are not paying attention, yet she still finds many people attributing knowledge in Gettier Cases (35% in one survey. Nagel (2013, 6)) and still finds the within culture variation that I have been trying to bring out[94].

93 This seems to be a variant of the Difficulty hypothesis discussed earlier.

94With respect to the finding that many people attribute knowledge in the TrueTemp Case, Nagel

Although it may be possible to provide explanations for each particular study as to why there is apparent conceptual variation without conceding that it is actual, it seems to me that, again, the simplest and most explanatory hypothesis is that apparent conceptual variation is actual conceptual variation, and that CVK is true.

The important question remaining is, how great is the conceptual variation within, for example, the English speaking Western culture? There has not been enough detailed work to tell. The majority of empirical studies conducted have focussed on variants of the classic Getteir cases and the TrueTemp case. The fact that there is considerable variation in responses to these cases indicates variations in both whether justified true belief is sufficient for knowledge and whether a person needs to be aware of a reason for their belief in order to know it to be true. There are, however, many other thought-experiments which remain unexamined and these might reveal greater or lesser variation. I suspect that, if variation arises even about Gettier cases, which philosophers took to be absolutely decisive, variations will only be more prominent in response to more controversial thought-experiments.

5. Scepticism and The Conceptual Variation Hypothesis

Let us return now to Scepticism and ordinary talk about knowledge. Many philosophers have tried to criticize sceptical arguments by claiming that they make use of a definition of knowledge which is non-ordinary. The sceptic allegedly defines knowledge in a non-standard way and then concludes that we cannot know anything (Greco, 2011, 124-127; Goldman, 1995, 33-57, ; Hill, 1999).

In support of CVK I have given two arguments – that from philosophical disagreement and that from surveys. I do not think that either argument by itself makes a strong case for CVK, but I submit that both arguments taken together indicate that CVK is true. Of course, it would be better to have more detailed survey work on conceptual variation which involves larger sample sizes and more thought-experiments, but the evidence we do have points in the direction of CVK.

(2012) argues that the case, as presented, is under-described in comparison to Lehrer's original and that this leaves the case open to interpretation in various ways. It isn't clear how presenting the fully described case would influence the results, since the fully described case is such that even Reliabilist Philosophers could admit that it is not a case of knowledge since it is not then an instance of a reliably produced true belief.

If CVK is true the above criticism of Scepticism makes no sense. It cannot be a criticism of the sceptic's argument that he uses the word "knowledge" in a non-ordinary way because if CVK is true there is no ordinary way – there are many different ways, which are more or less common. The sceptic's definition is therefore just one among the many different definitions. But this point apparently cuts both ways. It is true that the sceptic cannot be criticized for using a non-ordinary definition, but it is equally true that the sceptic, in defining "knowledge" his way, may easily argue for a conclusion which is not at odds with any one of our beliefs about what we know. Since there is no ordinary definition, he cannot claim that his is it, and we cannot claim that it isn't. He cannot therefore confidently assert that all our knowledge attributions are false and we cannot confidently assert that he is unable to show this. He may show it for some people, and not for others.

I suggest that it would be an unsatisfying deflation of Scepticism to let the issue rest there. The great sceptical writings of philosophy must surely get at more than the bland point that *if* you share one of the many definitions of "knowledge" bandied about in society, some of your beliefs are false; and if not, not. The Conceptual Variation Hypothesis suggests, therefore, that neither the sceptic nor his opponents should understand the issue as one of whether ordinary knowledge claims are literally true[95]. My suggestion is that we instead try to see what the sceptic means by his words, not worrying about whether he is using words in an "ordinary" way, and then try to evaluate his argument for soundness and significance.

Appendix B. Some Comments on Methodology

Here I have assessed various accounts of when we should and should not hold beliefs. In my terms, I have assessed various epistemic policies. This brings us to an important issue. How does one properly decide which policies are correct? The method philosophers typically use in discussions of the question is the one invented by Plato – test theories by evaluating the plausibility of their implications (their plausibility according to us!). Here is one of Plato's uses of the method in a discussion of justice:

> Well said, Cephalus, I replied: but as concerning justice, what is it?--to speak the truth and to

95 This is the most common interpretation of the issue (Cohen, 2011; Bergman, 2011; Greco, 2011; Goldman, 1995; Fogelin, 1994; Prichard, 2011)

> pay your debts--no more than this? And even to this are there not exceptions? Suppose a friend when in his right mind has deposited arms with me and he asks for them when he is not in his right mind, ought I to give them back to him? No one would say that I ought or that I should be right in doing so, any more than they would say that I ought always to speak the truth to one who is in his condition.
>
> You are quite right, he replied.
>
> But then, I said, speaking the truth and paying your debts is not a correct definition of justice.
>
> Quite correct, Socrates (Plato, 2010, 595).

The method is explained most lucidly by Goodman in his discussion of how we are to decide on the correct rules of inference:

> How do we justify a deduction? Plainly by showing that it conforms to the general rules of deductive inference.... Analogously, the basic task in justifying an inductive inference is to show that it conforms to the general rules of induction.
>
> Yet, of course, the rules themselves must eventually be justified. The validity of a deduction depends not upon conformity to any purely arbitrary rules we may contrive, but upon conformity to valid rules.... But how is the validity of rules to be determined? ... Principles of deductive inference are justified by their conformity with accepted deductive practice. Their validity depends upon accordance with the particular deductive inferences that we actually make and sanction. If a rule yields inacceptable inferences, we drop it as invalid. Justification of general rules thus derives from judgments rejecting or accepting particular deductive inferences.
>
> This looks flagrantly circular. I have said that deductive inferences are justified by their conformity to valid general rules, and that general rules are justified by their conformity to valid inferences. But this circle is a virtuous one. The point is that rules and particular inferences alike are justified by being brought into agreement with each other. A rule is amended if it yields an inference we are unwilling to accept; an inference is rejected if it violates a rule we are unwilling to amend. The process of justification is the delicate one of making mutual adjustments between rules and accepted inferences; and in the agreement

> achieved lies the only justification needed for either (Goodman, 1955, 66-67).

In Plato's discussion, he applies the method to discussions about justice, and in Goodman's discussion he is talking about rules of inference. The same method is used in epistemology as a means of discussing standards of reasonable belief. A standard is rejected if it has too many implausible implications that we are not prepared to swallow. We might, on the other hand, be happy to live with one or two implausible implications if a given standard is overwhelmingly appealing in other respects. We might say with Goodman, that the process is one of making mutual adjustments between standards for reasonable belief and judgements about what is and it not reasonable, and when we reach a balance between the two we arrive at a successful theory.

The method is not *just* that. One's views about the correct epistemic standards must cohere not just with one's judgements about what is and isn't reasonable, but also with *all* of one's other commitments, where these commitments might be moral, metaphysical, logical, scientific, etc. As DePaul puts it:

> the method of reflective equilibrium directs the philosopher to... (I) reflect upon her beliefs and the logical and evidential interconnections among her beliefs, (ii) to try to construct "theories" that are intuitively appealing on their own and that account for various categories of beliefs, for example, judgements about right and wrong, epistemic judgements [etc], and (iii) to resolve such conflicts as are uncovered in the course of these reflections and efforts at theory construction on the basis of what comes to seem most likely to be correct as a result of still further reflection (DePaul, 1998, 298-299).

That is pretty much the method that I use here.

Objection. Obviously, the whole method is guided solely by the philosopher's beliefs, commitments and judgements. That might lead some people to think that that is a rather silly method for thinking about anything. Indeed, it is easy to imagine someone outside of philosophy – perhaps someone used to methods which are allegedly more "objective" in other areas – who finds the method of reflective equilibrium completely ridiculous. DePaul (1998) imagines just such a reaction to his characterization of the method.

Reply. What is the alternative to Reflective Equilibrium characterized by (I), (ii) and (iii) by

DePaul? Each person already has, like it or not, philosophical beliefs; beliefs about how we should act and how we should believe; about what humans can achieve in scientific investigation; about whether there is a God and what they are like, and so on. Those people also have a raft of more plain beliefs that they take fore-granted in everyday life. Reflective Equilibrium is the attempt to bring all of those beliefs into a neat and coherent system or way of thinking about the world. Moreover, it isn't like you are trapped in a cage of your own beliefs. The philosopher is free to (and probably should) incorporate the insights of other philosophers, or the data of science, or any other such things, but all of that is just more Reflective Equilibrium; it is incorporating things that the philosopher judges to be important and relevant. When the method succeeds, the result is a system of beliefs that is more credible than the one you started with, in virtue of its increased coherence. So, using the method is far better than doing nothing at all and staying at the pre-reflective level.

Objection. A persistent objector will remain unsatisfied by that. It is all good to make the method of Reflective Equilibrium sound more rigorous by talking about how it can incorporate "the data of science" and "the insights of other philosophers". Those parts aren't the ridiculous parts. The ridiculous parts are the parts which are most salient in this work, namely, rejecting a policy of belief because the author's opinion is that it has absurdly implausible implications. That is ridiculous because it is not "objective" enough, so the thought might go.

Stich (2001) calls this kind of reliance on the philosopher's judgement "Intuition Driven Romanticism" and claims that it groundlessly (and naively) assumes that our mere opinions are somehow a reliable guide to the truth. It assumes that "*knowledge of the correct epistemic norms is implanted within us in some way, and with the proper process of self-exploration we can discover them*" (Stich, 2001, 627)[96]. Against the view he objects: "*what reason is there to think that the output of [this strategy] has real normative force?*" (Stich, 2001, 628). That is, why think that my judgements about, for example, what are and are not plausible epistemic norms, have any baring at all on whether the norm in question is correct? "*Why, in short, should we take any of this stuff seriously*?" (Stich, 2001, 628)[97].

His question is made salient by the fact that there are logically possible people who will have very different judgements to mine about the acceptability of the implications of a given theory, and different reactions to thought-experiments aimed at highlighting those implications. If those people

96 He cites Plato as an early defender of this way of thinking, and not without some justice.
97 DePaul (1998) struggles hard to turn back this criticism, but seems to admit by the end of the paper that he has no answer to it.

used my method of relying on their judgements about thought-experiments to assess a set of epistemic standards, they would arrive at very different conclusions to mine. Given that fact, why, Stich says, should I think that my judgements are particularly important? This problem is only made more acute by the empirical evidence he cites in the very same paper, which shows that there really are many *actual* people who have all sorts of different epistemic standards and form and revise their beliefs by very different norms (Stich, 2001, 629-639)[98]. The conclusion Stich draws is:

> In light of this... Intuition Driven Romaticism seems a rather bizarre way to determine the correct epistemic norms. For it is difficult to see why a process that relies heavily on epistemic intuitions that are local to one's own cultural and socioeconomic group would lead to genuinely normative conclusions. Pending a detailed response to this problem, we think that the best reaction to the High-SES, Western philosophy professor who tries to draw normative conclusions from the facts about "our" intuitions is to ask: What do you mean "we"? (Stich, 2001, 642)

Reply. If I thought that there were objective truths, "out there" which determine my epistemic duties, I suppose it would be silly to expect that I could discover such truths by relying on my own plausibility judgements. But I don't think that. It is up to us to decide what our epistemic duties are, or, how I would prefer to put it, which epistemic policies we want to adopt. It is up to each person to decide. There are, obviously, better and worse ways to decide, even if there is no absolutely true way to decide. Any sensible anti-realist will admit that much (Lycan, 2019).

Thus the philosopher considers various policies and weighs them against his other commitments and the criticisms/insights of his dialectical partners. He tries to arrive at a more coherent view than he started with, and so to work-out which epistemic policies he will accept. Of course, he needn't, and perhaps even shouldn't, do just that. There is no a priori reason why he can't do other things. He can offer constructive help to others, by helping them to see the implications of their own policies or views more generally, and he can explore alternative ways of thinking to his own – I did this here with the Pyrrhonian sceptic – and see what can be said for them. In this way, although the philosopher can't answer your philosophical questions for you, he can lay out all of the various answers, restlessly exploring all of them as far as he can (Shand, 2017). It might be nice to have something "more rigorous" or "objective", but you can't always get what you want.

98 See Stich (2001) for a fascinating overview of the relevant data. See also my own Appendix A, in this work.

Back to the data. Stich's data shows that people often do react differently to thought-experiments in this area and so that people really may prefer different epistemic policies. That by itself is no objection to my methods. Anyone with different opinions to mine is perfectly welcome to join the conversation about which epistemic policies we should decide on, and that person may or may not be convinced by an argument which relies on my judgements about the plausibility of the implications of various proposals. There are, fortunately other kinds of argument which might convince them. I might try to show that the epistemic standard he accepts is in conflict with other things that he believes. For instance, I might show that his ethics of belief entails that he ought not to believe that there is a God, and that he believes that there is a God. It is then open to him to revise one of the two. Obviously he might abandon his belief that there is a God and retain his ethic of belief and so remain unconvinced. Indeed, he may or may not be convinced by any argument I can offer him, plausibility judgements or no, but that is not an objection to my using such an argument. It is a mere summary of the limits of Philosophy[99].

References

Aikin, S. (2010). *Epistemology and the Regress Problem*. Routledge.

Aikin, Scott (2007). Evidentialism for everyone. *Think* 5 (15):37-44.

Alston, William (2005). *Beyond "Justification": Dimensions of Epistemic Evaluation*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

André Gallois (1993) Is global scepticism self-refuting?, Australasian Journal of Philosophy, 71:1, 36-46

Annas, Julia & Barnes, Jonathan (eds.) (2000). *Sextus Empiricus: Outlines of Scepticism*. Cambridge University Press.

Armstrong, D. M. (1973). *Belief, Truth and Knowledge*. Cambridge University Press.

Armstrong, D. M. (1973). *Belief, Truth and Knowledge*. Cambridge University Press.

Ashton, N., (manuscript). Rethinking Epistemic Relativism.

Ayer, A. J. (1936). *Language, Truth and Logic*. London: V. Gollancz.

Baghramian, M., (2015), "Relativism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, available at https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/relativism/#RelAboTruAleRel

Bailey, Alan (2002). *Sextus Empiricus and Pyrrhonean Scepticism*. Oxford University Press.

99 I'm inclined to think that there is really nothing wrong with reflective equilibrium as a philosophical method. See Lycan (2019) for a compelling defence.

Barnes, J. (2007). The Toils of Scepticism. Cambridge University Press.

Bealer, G. (1999). A theory of the a priori. *Nous*, 33(s13), 29–55.

Beebe, James (2012). Experimental Epistemology. In Andrew Cullison (ed.), *The Continuum Companion to Epistemology*. Continuum. pp. 248-269.

Bender, J. (1989). *The Current State of the Coherence Theory.* Springer.

Bergmann, Michael (2011). Externalist responses to skepticism. In John Greco (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook on Skepticism*. Oxford University Press. pp. 504—32.

Bergmann, Michael (2011). Externalist responses to skepticism. In John Greco (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook on Skepticism*. Oxford University Press. pp. 504—32.

BonJour, L, (2004). In Search of Direct Realism. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 69 (2): 349-367.

BonJour, L. (1985). The Structure of Empirical Knowledge. Harvard University Press.

BonJour, L. and Sosa, E. (2008). *Epistemic justification*. Malden, Mass. [u.a.]: Blackwell.

BonJour, Laurence (1980). Externalist Theories of Empirical Knowledge. *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 5 (1):53-73.

BonJour, Laurence (1980). Externalist Theories of Empirical Knowledge. *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 5 (1):53-73.

BonJour, Laurence (2009). *Epistemology: Classic Problems and Contemporary Responses*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers

Boyd, R., 1981. “Scientific Realism and Naturalistic Epistemology,” in P. Asquith and R. Giere (eds.), *PSA 1980*, (vol. II), East Lansing MI: Philosophy of Science Association, pp. 613–662.

Brogaard. B (2013) Phenomenal Seemings and Sensible Dogmatism. In Tucker, C. (2013). *Seemings and justification*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Broughton, J. (2009). The Method of Doubt. Princeton University Press.

Brown, Harold I. (1999). Why Do Conceptual Analysts Disagree? *Metaphilosophy* 30 (1&2):33-59.

Bunge, M. 1961. The weight of simplicity in the construction and assaying of scientific theories. *Philosophy of Science*, 28, 162-171.

Burns, Aaran (2017). A phenomenal conservative perspective on religious experience. *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 81 (3):247-261.

Burns, Aaran (2018). Can I Know that Anything Exists Unperceived? *Logos and Episteme* 9 (3):245-260.

Byerly, T. Ryan (2012). It Seems Like There Aren't Any Seemings. *Philosophia* 40 (4):771-782.

Carter, Adam (2016). *Epistemology and Relativism*. Available at: https://www.iep.utm.edu/epis-rel/

Chisholm, Roderick (1998). 11 The Myth of the Given. In Alcoff Linda (ed.), *Epistemology: The*

Big Questions. Blackwell. pp. 169.

Christensen, David (1994). Conservatism in epistemology. *Noûs* 28 (1):69-89.

Chudnoff, E. (2010). The nature of intuitive justification. Philosophical Studies, 153(2), 313–333.

Clark, M. (1963). Knowledge and Grounds: A Comment on Mr. Gettier's Paper. *Analysis* 24 (2):46-48.

Clarke, Thompson (1972). The Legacy of Skepticism. *Journal of Philosophy* 69 (20):754.

Clifford, W.K., (1999), "The Ethics of Belief," in T. Madigan (ed.) *The Ethics of Belief and*

Cling, Andrew D. (2008). The epistemic regress problem. *Philosophical Studies* 140 (3):401 - 421

Cognition, 115(3): 491–503. doi:10.1016/j.cognition.2010.02.003

Cohen, S. (2000). Contextualism and skepticism. *Nous*, *34*(SUPPL. 1), 94-107.

Cohen, S. (2011). Ascriber Contextualism. In Greco, J. (2011). *The Oxford handbook of skepticism*. 1st ed. Oxford [u.a.]: Oxford Univ. Press.

Cohen, Stewart (2000). Contextualism and Skepticism. *Philosophical Issues* 10 (1):94-107.

Conee, Earl and Feldman, Richard (2004) Evidentialism, Oxford University Press.

Crick, F. 1988. *What Mad Pursuit: a Personal View of Scientific Discovery.* New York: Basic Books.

Cullen, Simon. 2010. "Survey-Driven Romanticism." *Review of Philosophy and Psychology* 1.

Cullison, A. (2010). What are seemings? *Ratio*, 23(3), 260–274.

DePaul, M. (1998). Why bother with reflective equilibrium? MR DePaul and W. Ramsey (1998).

DeRose, in K. and Warfield, T. (1999). *Skepticism*. 1st ed. New York: Oxford University Press.

DeRose, Keith (1995). Solving the skeptical problem. *Philosophical Review* 104 (1):1-52.

Douven, I., 2002. "Testing Inference to the Best Explanation," *Synthese*, 130: 355–377.

Fogelin, R.(2004). The Skeptics Are Coming! The Skeptics Are Coming!. In Sinnot-Armstrong. W (2004). *Pyrrhonian Skepticism*. : Oxford University Press.

Fogelin, Robert J. (1994). *Pyrrhonian Reflections on Knowledge and Justification*. Oxford University Press.

Fumerton, R. (2006a). Epistemic internalism, philosophical assurance and the skeptical predicament. In T. Crisp, M. Davidson, & D. Vander Laan (Eds.), *Knowledge and reality: essays in honor of Alvin Plantinga*. Dordrecht: Springer.

Fumerton, Richard (2007). Epistemic Conservatism: Theft or Honest Toil? In Tamar Szabo Gendler & John Hawthorne (eds.), *Oxford Studies in Epistemology: Volume 2*. Oxford University Press.

Fumerton, Richard A. (1983). The paradox of analysis. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 43 (4):477-497.

Fumerton. R (1995). *Metaepistemology and Skepticism* . Boston: Rowman and Littlefield.

Gaiman, N. (2017). Norse Mythology. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Gettier, E. (1963). Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?. *Analysis*, 23(6), p.121.

Ginet, Carl (1985). Contra Reliabilism. *The Monist* 68 (2):175-187.

Ginet, Carl (1990). Justification: It Need Not Cause But It Must Be Accessible. *Journal of Philosophical Research* 15:93-107.

Glock. H. J. (2017). Impure Conceptual Analysis. In Overgaard, Soren & D'Oro, Giuseppina (2017). *The Cambridge Companion to Philosophical Methodology*. Cambridge University Press.

Goldman, A. (1995). *Epistemology and cognition*. 1st ed. Cambridge, Mass. [u.a.]: Harvard Univ. Press.

Goldman, A. (1995). *Epistemology and cognition*. 1st ed. Cambridge, Mass. [u.a.]: Harvard Univ. Press.

Goldman, A. (2007). Philosophical Intuitions: Their Target, Their Source, and Their Epistemic Status, *Grazer Philosophische Studien*, 74: 1–26.

Goldman, A. I. (1967). "A Causal Theory of Knowing." *Journal of Philosophy* 64: 357-72.

Goldman, A. I.. (1976). "Discrimination and Perceptual Knowledge." *Journal of Philosophy* 73: 771-91.

Goldman, Alvin I. (1999). Internalism exposed. *Journal of Philosophy* 96 (6):271-293.

Gomes, Anil (forthcoming). Skepticism about Other Minds. In Diego Machuca & Baron Reed (eds.), *Skepticism: From Antiquity to the Present*. Bloomsbury Academic

GOODMAN, N (1955). *Fact, Fiction and Forecast*. Harvard University Press.

Greco, J. (2007). *_Putting Skeptics in Their Place: The Nature of Skeptical Arguments and Their Role in Philosophical Inquiry_*. Cambridge University Press.

Greco, J. (2011). Skepticism about the External World. In Greco, J. (2011). *The Oxford handbook of skepticism*. 1st ed. Oxford [u.a.]: Oxford Univ. Press.

Greco, J. (2011). Skepticism about the External World. In Greco, J. (2011). *The Oxford handbook of skepticism*. 1st ed. Oxford [u.a.]: Oxford Univ. Press.

Greco, John (2006). Virtue, Luck and the Pyrrhonian Problematic. _Philosophical Studies_ 130 (1):9-34.

Greco, John (2007). *_Putting Skeptics in Their Place: The Nature of Skeptical Arguments and Their Role in Philosophical Inquiry_*. Cambridge University Press.

Grice, H. (1989). *Studies in the Way of Words*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Harman, Gilbert (1999) “Pragmatism and Reasons for Belief” in *Reasoning, Meaning, and Mind.*

Hill, C. (1999) Process Reliabilism and Cartesian Scepticism. In DeRose, K. and Warfield, T. (1999). *Skepticism*. 1st ed. New York: Oxford University Press.

Hill, C. (1999) Process Reliabilism and Cartesian Scepticism. In DeRose, K. and Warfield, T. (1999). *Skepticism*. 1st ed. New York: Oxford University Press.

Huemer, M. (2007). Compassionate phenomenal conservatism. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research,* 74(1), 30–55.

Huemer, M. (2009). When is parsimony a virtue? Philosophical Quarterly, 59, 216–236.

Huemer, M. (2013). Phenomenal Conservatism Uber Alles. In Tucker, C. (2013). *Seemings and justification*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Huemer, M. (2018). *Phenomenal Conservatism | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. [online] Iep.utm.edu. Available at: http://www.iep.utm.edu/phen-con/#SH3d [Accessed 27 Jun. 2018].

Huemer, Michael (2001). *Skepticism and the Veil of Perception*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

Huemer, Michael (2005). *Ethical Intuitionism*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Huemer, Michael (2006). Phenomenal Conservatism and the Internalist Intuition. *American Philosophical Quarterly* 43 (2):147-158.

Huemer, Michael (2011). Phenomenal conservatism and self-defeat: a reply to DePoe. *Philosophical Studies* 156 (1):1-13.

Hume, David. *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. Clarendon Press, Oxford, U.K., 2000, edited by Tom L. Beauchamp. (EHU)

JackLyons. Perception and Basic Beliefs. OxfordUniversityPress,NewYork,2009.

Jackson, Frank (1998). *From Metaphysics to Ethics: A Defence of Conceptual Analysis*. Oxford University Press.

Kaplan, M. (2000). To What Must an Epistemology be True?. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 61(2), p.279.

Kaplan. M. (2011). Austin's Way with Skepticism. In Greco, J. (2011). *The Oxford handbook of skepticism*. 1st ed. Oxford [u.a.]: Oxford Univ. Press.

Kaplan. M. (2018). *Austin's Way with Skepticism*. 1st Ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kim, Minsun, & Yuan Yuan, 2015, “No Cross-Cultural Differences in the Gettier Car Case Intuition: a Replication Study of Weinberg et al. 2001”, *Episteme*, 12(03): 355–361. doi:10.1017/epi.2015.17

Klein, P. D. (2000). Why Not Infinitism? *Epistemology* 5:199-208.

Lammenranta, M. (2008). the pyrrhonian problematic. In John Greco (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Skepticism*. Oxford University Press. pp. 9—33

Lammenranta, Markus (2011). Skepticism and Disagreement. In Diego E. Machuca (ed.), *Pyrrhonism in Ancient, Modern, and Contemporary Philosophy*. Dordrecht: Springer. pp. 203-216.

Leary, Stephanie (2017). In Defense of Practical Reasons for Belief. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 95 (3):529-542.

Lehrer, K and Paxson, T. (1969). 'Knowledge: Undefeated Justified True Belief'. *Journal of Philosophy*, 66: 225-37.

Lehrer, Keith (2000). _*Theory of Knowledge*_. Westview Press.

Lycan, William G. (1985). Epistemic value. *Synthese* 64 (2):137 – 164.

Lycan, William G. (1988). *Judgement and Justification*. Cambridge University Press.

Lycan, William G. (2012). Explanationist rebuttals (coherentism defended again). *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 50 (1):5-20.

Lycan, William G. (2012). Explanationist rebuttals (coherentism defended again). *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 50 (1):5-20.

Lycan, William G. (2013). Phenomenal Conservatism and the Principle of Credulity. In Chris Tucker (ed.), *Seemings and Justification: New Essays on Dogmatism and Phenomenal Conservatism*. Oxford University Press. pp. 293-305.

Lycan. W. G. (2019). *On Evidence in Philosophy*. Oxford University Press.

Machery, Edouard ; Stich, Stephen ; Rose, David ; Chatterjee, Amita ; Karasawa, Kaori ; Struchiner, Noel ; Sirker, Smita ; Usui, Naoki & Hashimoto, Takaaki (2016). Gettier Across Cultures. *Noûs* 50 (4).

Markie, Peter (2005). The mystery of direct perceptual justification. *Philosophical Studies* 126 (3):347-373.

Markie. P (2013). Searching for True Dogmatism. In Tucker, C. (2013). *Seemings and justification*. New York: Oxford University Press.

McGrath. M. (2013) Phenomenal Conservatism and Cognitive Penatration: The "Bad Basis" Counterexamples. In Tucker, C. (2013). *Seemings and justification*. New York: Oxford University Press.

McGrew, Timothy (1995). *The Foundations of Knowledge*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

McGrew, Timothy & McGrew, Lydia (2006). *Internalism and Epistemology: The Architecture of Reason*. Routledge.

Moretti, Luca (2015). Phenomenal Conservatism. *Analysis* 75 (2):296-309.

Moser, P. K. (2000). Skepticism, Question Begging, and Burden Shifting. *The Proceedings of the Twentieth World Congress of Philosophy* 5:209-217.

Nagel, J. (2013), et al. Lay denial of knowledge for justified true beliefs. *Cognition*.

Nottelmann, Nikolaj (2013). The deontological conception of epistemic justification: a reassessment. *Synthese* 190 (12):2219-2241.

Nozick, R. (1981), *Philosophical Explanations*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Nozick, R. (1981), *Philosophical Explanations*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Oakley, I. T. (1988). Scepticism and the diversity of epistemic justification. *Philosophical Quarterly* 38 (152):263-279.

Oakley, I. T. (1988). Scepticism and the diversity of epistemic justification. *Philosophical Quarterly* 38 (152):263-279.

Oakley, I.T. (1976). An Argument for Scepticism concerning Justified Beliefs. *American Philosophical Quarterly.* Vol. 13, No. 3, pp. 221-228

Other Essays, Amherst, MA: Prometheus.

Overgaard, Soren & D'Oro, Giuseppina (2017). *The Cambridge Companion to Philosophical Methodology*. Cambridge University Press.

Peirce, C.S. 1958. Some consequences of four incapacities. In Selected writings, ed. P. Wiener, 39–72. New York: Dover.

Plantinga, A (1967). *God and Other Minds*. Cornell University Press.

Plantinga, A. (1993). *Warrant and Proper Function*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Plantinga, Alvin (2000). Warranted Christian Belief. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Plato (ed.) (1973). *Theaetetus*. Oxford University Press UK.

Plato. Jowett, B. (ed.) (2010). *Dialogues of Plato: Translated Into English, with Analyses and Introduction*. Cambridge University Press.

Pollock, J. L. and J. Cruz. 1999. Theories of Knowledge. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Popkin, Richard H. (2002). *Skeptical Philosophy for Everyone*. Prometheus Books.

Popkin, Richard H. (2002). *Skeptical Philosophy for Everyone*. Prometheus Books.

Poston, Ted (2008). Internalism and externalism in epistemology. *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy.*

Pritchard, D (2011). Sensitivity, Safety and Antiluck Epistemology. In Greco, J. (2011). *The Oxford handbook of skepticism*. 1st ed. Oxford [u.a.]: Oxford Univ. Press.

Pryor, James (2000). The skeptic and the dogmatist. *Noûs* 34 (4):517–549.

Reed, Baron (2007). The Long Road to Skepticism. *Journal of Philosophy* 104 (5):236-262.

Rescorla, Michael (2009). Epistemic and dialectical regress. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 87 (1):43 – 60.

Rinard, Susanna (2018). Believing for Practical Reasons. *Noûs*.

Robert J. Fogelin (1999) The Sceptic's Burden, International Journal of Philosophical Studies, 7:2, 159-172, DOI: 10.1080/096725599341866

Russell, Bertrand (1946). *History of Western Philosophy*. Routledge.

Salmon, Wesley C. (1957). Should we attempt to justify induction? *Philosophical Studies* 8 (3):33 - 48.

Seyedsayamdost, Hamid, 2015, "On Gender and Philosophical Intuition: Failure of Replication and Other Negative Results", *Philosophical Psychology*, 28(5): 642–673.

Shope, Robert K. (1983). *The Analysis of Knowing: A Decade of Research*. Princeton: New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Silins, Nicholas (2014). Experience Does Justify Belief. In Ram Neta (ed.), *Current Controversies In Epistemology*. New York, USA: Routledge. pp. 55-69.

Skene, M. (2011). Seemings and the possibility of epistemic justification. Philosophical Studies, 163(2), 539–559.

Skyrms, Brian (1966). *Choice and Chance*. Belmont, Calif., Dickenson Pub. Co..

Sosa, E. (1999). How to Defeat Opposition to Moore. *Philosophical Perspectives*. 13.141-54.

Stace, W. T. (1934). The refutation of realism. *Mind* 43 (170):145-155.

Starmans, Christina & Ori Friedman, 2012, "The Folk Conception of Knowledge", *Cognition*, 124(3): 272–283. doi:10.1016/j.cognition.2012.05.017

Stich, Stephen (1988). Reflective equilibrium, analytic epistemology and the problem of cognitive diversity. *Synthese* 74 (3):391-413.

Stoerig, Petra. 1997. "Phenomenal Vision and Apperception: Evidence from Blindsight." *Mind and Language* 12: 224–37.

Strawson, P. F. (1952). *Introduction to Logical Theory*. Routledge.

Stroud, B. (2008). *The significance of philosophical scepticism*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Stroud, Barry (2004). Contemporary pyrrhonism. In Walter Sinnott-Armstrong (ed.), *Pyrrhonian Skepticism*. Oxford University Press. pp. 174--187

Swinburne, Richard (1986). *The Evolution of the Soul*. Oxford University Press.

Swinburne, Richard (1997). *Simplicity as Evidence of Truth*.

Swinburne, Richard (2001). *Epistemic Justification*. Oxford University Press.

Swinburne, Richard (2004). *The Existence of God*. Oxford University Press.

Swinburne, Richard (2011). Evidence. In T. Dougherty (ed.), *Evidentialism and its Discontents*. Oxford University Press.

Tooley. M (2013). Michael Huemer and the Principle of Phenomenal Conservatism. In Tucker, C. (2013). *Seemings and justification*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Tucker, C. (2010). Why open-minded people should endorse dogmatism. Philosophical Perspectives, 24(1), 529–545.

Tucker, C. (2013). *Seemings and justification: New Essays on Dogmatism and Phenomenal Conservatism.* Oxford University Press*. pp. 293-305.*

Turri, John, 2017, "Knowledge Attributions in Iterated Fake Barn Cases", *Analysis*, 77(1): 104–115. doi:10.1093/analys/anx036

Unger, Peter (1974) "An Argument for Skepticism,"*Philosophic Exchange:* Vol. 5 : No. 1 , Article 3. Available at:http://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/phil_ex/vol5/iss1/3

Van Fraasen, B., 1989. *Laws and Symmetry*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Vogel, Jonathan (1990). Cartesian Skepticism and Inference to the Best Explanation. *Journal of Philosophy* 87 (11):658-666.

Vogel, Jonathan (1997). Skepticism and Foundationalism: A Reply to Michael Williams. *Journal of Philosophical Research* 22:11-28.

Vogel, Jonathan (2004). Skeptical arguments. *Philosophical Issues* 14 (1):426–455.

Weinberg, J., Nichols, S. and Stich, S. (2001). Normativity and Epistemic Intuitions. *Philosophical Topics*, 29(1), pp.429-460.

Weinberg, Jonathan M. ; Nichols, Shaun & Stich, Stephen (2001). Normativity and epistemic intuitions. In Sosa, E. Kim, J, Fantl, J and McGrath, M. (2008) *Epistemology: An Anthology.* Blackwell Publishers Ltd.

Wieland, Jan Willem (2013). Is Justification Dialectical? *International Journal for the Study of Skepticism* 3 (3):182-201.

Williams, Michael (1991). *Unnatural Doubts: Epistemological Realism and the Basis of Scepticism*. Blackwell.

Williams, Michael (2001). *Problems of Knowledge: A Critical Introduction to Epistemology.* Oxford University Press.

Williams, Michael (2004). The Agrippan argument and two forms of skepticism. In Walter Sinnott-Armstrong (ed.), *Pyrrhonian Skepticism*. Oxford University Press. pp. 121--145.

Williams, Michael (2007). Why (Wittgensteinian) Contextualism Is Not Relativism. *Episteme* 4 (1):93-114.

Williams, Michael (2015). The Agrippan Problem, Then and Now. *International Journal for the Study of Skepticism* 5 (2):80-106.

Wright, Jennifer C., 2010, “On Intuitional Stability: the Clear, the Strong, and the Paradigmatic”,