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**'HINGE' PROPOSITIONS AND THE RADICAL SCEPTICAL  
PARADOX**

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APRIL 2000**

**A Thesis Submitted to the University of St. Andrews for the  
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**



Th D 626

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FOR MY MOTHER AND FATHER

*"If you do know that here is one hand, we'll grant  
you all the rest."*

Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §1.

*"None of us can think or act without the acceptance  
of truths, not intuitive, not demonstrated, yet  
sovereign."*

John Henry Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*.

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## PREFACE & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A substantial portion (if not all) of this thesis has been presented either externally at philosophy conferences up and down the country, or internally within departmental seminars or at our postgraduate discussion group in St. Andrews – the so-called ‘Southgait Group’. Where possible, I have noted the external presentations next to the relevant part of the thesis and thanked members of the audiences at those conferences accordingly. Particular thanks must go, however, to the members of the Southgait Group.

The group was set up in the autumn of 1996 to discuss certain philosophical issues – in particular, issues in the philosophy of language, truth and epistemology – that a number of the postgraduate students in the Logic and Metaphysics department were interested in. The line-up has changed over the years, but has essentially comprised (besides myself) some sub-set of the following group of people: Lars Binderup, Lars-Bo Gundersen, Patrick Greenough, Jesper Kallestrup, Patrice Philie, Paul Markwick and Sven Rosenkranz. I cannot emphasise enough my gratitude to the members of this group. In the friendly - albeit, at times, heated - atmosphere of the regular Thursday meetings, our work was presented without fear of reproach, except that of the purest intellectual variety. Not only did my own work benefit, but I also learnt a great deal about the topics pursued by the other members of the group - Meta-Ethics from Lars; Modal Epistemology and Dispositions from Lars-Bo; Vagueness and the Liar Paradox from Patrick; Realism and Anti-Realism from Sven; Modality and Reference from Jesper; and Necessity from Patrice. More important than their intellectual contribution to my work, however, is their personal contribution. I count them all as great friends who made my time in St. Andrews such tremendous fun.

Thanks must also go to the members of my review committee who enabled me to get to this stage in the first place. This comprised of Crispin Wright (my supervisor), Peter Sullivan, Leslie Stevenson and, latterly, Katherine Hawley. Their comments, suggestions and support have proved invaluable. Crispin, in particular, deserves a

special mention.

Back in the academic year of 1995-6, I attended a series of seminars given by Crispin entitled 'Advanced Epistemology' which largely dealt with the sceptical paradox. It was these seminars - coupled with the intensity and clarity of their exposition - which inspired me to get more involved with the debate surrounding radical scepticism. It was, for instance, in those seminars that I first heard Crispin's ingenious "maundering argument". Although this is an argument that, as a reader of this thesis will recognise, I have reservations about, I still believe it to be one of the finest examples of analytic philosophy in the literature. Accordingly, whilst at St. Andrews I have had the good fortune to not only be supervised by an outstanding philosopher, but also one who defines the debate into which I have entered (indeed, it is difficult to think of more than a handful of philosophical debates where Crispin's contribution has *not* had a defining influence). Of course, such a situation could have its drawbacks, but only if the person in question lacked the kind of intellectual generosity that Crispin exhibits. I understand that those lectures (since given at Columbia University) will eventually make it into print as a book on scepticism. This should prove quite an event.

Another 'thank-you' must also go to the bodies that funded this research. In the first instance, I was funded by a University of St. Andrews Postgraduate Scholarship, but, in my final year (once the St. Andrews funding had finished), the Royal Institute of Philosophy came to my rescue, awarding me a Jacobsen Fellowship. If it had not been for their intervention, finishing this thesis would have been much more difficult.

Outside of philosophy, the preparation of this thesis has been aided by the support of my friends and family. As to the former, I would particularly like to thank Tom Cromie, my flat-mate for a significant segment of my studies in St. Andrews, and my fiancée, Mandi ('the sceptic') Digance, who is unable to hear me utter a serious philosophical statement without responding with some wisecrack or other. I cannot recommend such irreverence enough. As to my family, I would like to thank my mother and father - to whom I dedicate this thesis - for their unstinting support and financial

sacrifice in helping me to at least *attempt* to achieve my ambitions. This is all the more remarkable given that (at least at first) they had little idea of what it is that, as a philosophy postgraduate, I actually do, let alone what a doctorate in philosophy is good for! I'm sure that, like many professional philosophers themselves, they are still none the wiser as regards the latter concern.

**Duncan Pritchard**

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**April, 2000**

## THESIS ABSTRACT

Implicit in much of the contemporary literature on scepticism is the contention that the radical sceptical paradox rests upon the joint incompatibility of four main intuitions. First, that we do know much of what we take ourselves to know. Second, that we do not know the denials of sceptical hypotheses. Third, that knowledge is ‘closed’ under known entailment (the ‘Closure’ principle). And, fourth, that our knowledge claims are not indexed to contextual standards. When incompatible intuitions meet in this way, something must give. For example, one school of thought responds to scepticism by denying Closure, whereas another actively endorses a contextualist thesis about knowledge. In contrast, scepticism invites us to give up our intuition that we know most of what we believe, whilst (what I call) the ‘Moorean’ line maintains that we can know the denials of radical sceptical hypotheses after all.

Despite this way of expressing the matter, however, this thesis argues that the issue is not merely one of four competing views since the sceptic has in fact an upper-hand here provided he can establish that the argument he proposes does indeed have the form of a paradox. Ideally, then, an anti-sceptical strategy should not only have the resources to block the sceptical paradox, but also be able to motivate its anti-sceptical interpretation of our epistemic concepts over and above the sceptic’s sceptical interpretation. With this in mind, an anti-sceptical theory that both disarms the sceptical paradox *and* incorporates an *intuitive* epistemology is thus desirable. Note, however, that one can achieve this end *without* developing a fully-fledged epistemological view. It will be enough if one can motivate the broad essentials of an epistemological theory in a manner that is sufficient to meet the sceptical paradox in the required fashion.

A central component of this thesis is the Wittgensteinian notion of a “hinge” proposition, which is, roughly, a proposition which one may legitimately believe even though one lacks sufficient reflectively accessible grounds to support that belief. Although

this notion is central to the discussion - in that the propositions that the sceptic focuses upon are hinge propositions – it is argued that the standard *internalist* reading of hinge propositions, which has them as unknowable posits of a language-game, is fatally flawed. In contrast, an *externalist* interpretation of hinge propositions is argued for that can be used to resurrect the Moorean response to scepticism in a more palatable guise. The thesis thus claims that the sceptic has offered no *a priori* reason for thinking that we lack knowledge of the denials of sceptical hypotheses and thus - since the Closure principle is retained and contextualism denied - that there is no *a priori* reason for thinking that we do not know most of what we believe.

This view is made intuitive by being set within an account of our usage of epistemic terms that emphasises a certain interesting class of cases in which a claim to know can be both true and yet improper for *non-social* reasons. In this way, our intuition that we cannot properly claim knowledge of hinge propositions is accounted for without thereby conceding – with the standard reading of this notion - that hinge propositions are unknowable. Moreover, further support for the view is offered by comparing it to other anti-sceptical accounts and highlighting the advantages that it offers. For example, it is shown how one can retain the Closure principle provided one distinguishes between an internalist version of Closure and Closure itself. Furthermore, it is argued that one can capture the core insight that drives a contextualist epistemology without thereby endorsing contextualism, by simply paying careful attention to the manner in which the propriety conditions for knowledge claims can fluctuate in response to contextual factors.

# THE SCEPTICAL PARADOX \*

## Chapter One

### §1. The Sceptical Tradition.

Crudely put, radical scepticism is the view that a significant class of our beliefs lack sufficient epistemic sanction. As a consequence, since sufficient epistemic sanction (however that is to be defined) is essential for knowledge, the sceptic maintains that we lack knowledge of a wide range of propositions which we believe. In this thesis I shall concentrate on those forms of scepticism which attack the epistemic sanction of our empirical beliefs in general, rather than also concerning myself with perhaps the most disturbing form of scepticism that is directed at reason itself. Less disturbing though it may be, such 'empirical' scepticism is scepticism enough. Were the bulk of our beliefs in empirical matters (about, for instance, the external world and the physical objects that exist therein) to lack the requisite epistemic sanction, then this would be a devastating intellectual result. It would represent an uncrossable breach, condemning our everyday inquiries to, at best, a Quixotic status.

Although today we are perhaps most inclined to think of scepticism as a hurdle which any adequate epistemological theory must clear, at its inception in classical thought sceptical concerns were motivated by altogether different factors. Indeed, contrary to the instrumental role that scepticism plays in the contemporary epistemologico-sceptical enterprise, the first school of sceptical thought - that of the Pyrrhonian scholars and comprising Sextus Empiricus [1933-49] - advanced scepticism not as a means of developing an epistemology as such but rather in order to promote the broadly *ethical* aims of determining the right way to live. Their scepticism largely focused upon what they saw as the unreliability of sense-experience; that, for example, the same tower could appear radically different to two different observers, or that a

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\* Material from this chapter was presented as part of a paper entitled 'Scepticism, Rationality and "Hinge" Propositions' at the University of Edinburgh's 'Language, Logic and Mind' conference in April 1998. My thanks go to the audience that day, and especially, Analisa Coliva, Mike Martin, Timothy Williamson and Ben Young. The core elements of this chapter are due to be published under the title 'Meta-Epistemological Constraints on Anti-Sceptical Theories' in *Facta Philosophica* [Pritchard 2001].

straight stick could look bent when placed under water. Rather than attempting to unify these contradictory experiences, however, the Pyrrhonian scholars maintained that we should *embrace* them. The ‘dogmatic’ stance of claiming knowledge with complete conviction should, they argued, be replaced by a neutral attitude (*epoche*) which involved the suspension of judgement (*isosthenia*) and which would eventually lead to a tranquil and untroubled state of mind (*ataraxia*). Given this ethical dimension to the classical variant on scepticism, it is clear that the conclusion of sceptical thought was not meant to be regarded as nihilistic as such, but rather as a means by which one saw beyond the need for an epistemic buttress for one’s beliefs. If scepticism were indeed true, then this would, perhaps, constitute the best manner in which one could live with its paradoxical conclusions.<sup>1</sup>

Despite its intrinsic interest, however, it is not this ethically driven form of scepticism that I shall be directly concerned with in this thesis. Instead, I will be focusing upon the modern instrumental variant on classical scepticism because, as I shall now explain, it is this latter form of scepticism that poses the more pressing intellectual challenge.

It is standard practice to attribute this change in the way in which the sceptical project is conceived to René Descartes’ Meditations on First Philosophy [1641], and in this respect I shall not be deviating from the conventional wisdom. Certainly, one clear difference between Cartesian scepticism and its classical counterpart is that Descartes’ motivation for advocating a sceptical doubt was not ethical at all, but rather *methodological*. That is, rather than trying to inspire belief (or, perhaps better, ‘non-belief’) of a certain sort, his concern was with the rigorous evaluation of one’s beliefs as a means of establishing a satisfactory epistemological method.

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<sup>1</sup> For the main classical texts in this regard, see Sextus Empiricus [1933-49] and Diogenes Laertius [1925]. Translations of Sextus Empiricus can also be found in Annas & Barnes [1985]. There are a number of excellent discussions on this historical dimension of the sceptical problem. Of particular interest are Naess [1968]; Stough [1969]; Popkin [1979]; Annas & Barnes [1985]; Hookway [1990, chapters I-V]; and Hutchinson [1998]; but see also the collections of essays in Burnyeat, Barnes & Schofield [1980] and Burnyeat [1983]. Fogelin [1994; cf. 1999] is one writer who has developed a form of neo-Pyrrhonian scepticism which meets some of the main objections to the view. For discussion of this modern variant on the classical position, see M. Williams [1999a].

Descartes lived in a time in which many of the received 'truths' had been found wanting - most notably, the astronomical contention, bolstered by the authority of the Church, that the earth was immovable - and so sought a method by which we were able to distinguish those beliefs which would (rightly) stand the test of time from those which would not. It was to this end that he proposed his 'method of doubt', whereby (or so he claimed) he subjected *every single one* of his beliefs to radical scrutiny. As he puts the matter:

Suppose we had a basket full of apples and were worried that some of them were rotten. How would we proceed? Would we not begin by tipping the whole lot out and then pick up and put back only those we saw to be sound? [Descartes 1985, II, §324]

By testing each and every one of his beliefs, Descartes maintained that he could identify those beliefs that were secure from the 'rot' of doxastic prejudice. The tests that Descartes used were, in the first instance, the same as those initiated by the Greek sceptics (who were enjoying a revival of interest at the time). For example, he utilises a familiar argument from error which has a direct parallel in the tenth "mode" advocated by Sextus Empiricus [1933-49, I] - a technique designed to achieve the suspension of belief. Since, Descartes [1985, I, pp. 115-6] argues, the procedure of appealing to authority has led us astray in the past, hence we ought to be cautious about accepting truths on the basis of such received wisdom. Moreover, just like the Greek sceptics, Descartes also notes the 'relativity' of sense-experience, the fact that putatively the same object can be observed in different ways by different observers.

Although Descartes begins his sceptical quest with the classical sceptical arguments, however, he does not confine himself to them. For even if one doubts the testimony of others and therefore limits oneself to individual sense-experience, there is nothing in the classical model that is sufficient to directly support *radical* scepticism. After all, the troublesome elements of the 'relativity' of experience reside in the fact that, in abnormal circumstances, divergent judgements are made by otherwise 'reliable' sources. But this is not enough to call sense-experience *as a whole* into question since this argument is consistent with the thought that, in ideal circumstances, such divergence (at

least for all practical purposes) disappears.<sup>2</sup> Descartes thus seeks something more radical in order to underpin his scepticism, and thereby adduces the 'dreaming' argument and the 'evil demon' argument.

Sextus Empiricus also propounds a dreaming argument, but the sceptical use that he puts this argument toward is entirely different to that proposed by Descartes. He notes:

Sleeping and waking, too, give rise to different impressions, since we do not imagine when awake what we imagine in sleep, nor in sleep what we imagine when awake; so that the existence of our impressions is not absolute but relative, being in relation to our sleeping or waking condition. [Sextus Empiricus 1933-49, I, §104]

Sextus' use of the dreaming argument, unlike that put forward by Descartes, merely adduces considerations concerning dreaming as a means of reinforcing the idea that experience is relative and therefore not necessarily a reliable guide to the nature of reality. In Descartes' writings, in contrast, the argument has less to do with the relativity of experience than with the fact that we are unable to adduce a definitive criterion - a "sure sign" - which would indicate that we are awake and not dreaming [cf. Hookway 1990, chapter III, section 3]. As Descartes puts the matter:

[...] I see plainly that there are never any sure signs by means of which being awake can be distinguished from being asleep. The result is that I begin to feel dazed, and this very feeling only reinforces the notion that I may be asleep. [Descartes 1985, II, p. 13]

Descartes argues that since there are no features of our experience which allow us to definitively distinguish our waking experience from dreaming, it follows that we should suspend all our sensory judgements, even when they are undertaken in "ideal" circumstances. The classical doubt concerning how experience can be 'relative' is thus replaced by a more subversive doubt suggesting that we lack grounds for believing that experience is *any* guide to the nature of reality at all, no matter what the quality of that experience is. It is important to recognise how radical a suggestion this is. If there are no such distinguishing features - and if such a distinguishing mark is a prerequisite for any

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<sup>2</sup> Fogelin [1999, p. 171] puts the point by saying that whereas the focus of Cartesian scepticism is the *impossibility* of knowledge in general, the focus of Pyrrhonian scepticism is merely each particular knowledge claim taken individually.

belief based on sensory experience being accorded a sufficient epistemic sanction - then it would seem to follow that *no matter how 'reliable' our experience in other respects is*, it is still going to be of no use to us in forming epistemically sanctioned beliefs. Accordingly, whereas one could conceivably meet the classical arguments for the 'relativity' of experience by fixing upon paradigm cases of experience where there is knowledge and then working outwards to the more problematic cases, this would be no response to the Cartesian dreaming sceptic since on this view there are no such paradigm cases to which one could appeal.

The radical nature of Cartesian scepticism is further enhanced by the related 'evil genius' ("*malin génie*") argument. For whereas the dreaming argument merely attacks our sensory experience whilst leaving our knowledge of *a priori* matters (such as mathematical truths) intact, the hypothesis that we may be systematically deceived by a supernatural being hits at the heart of even our *a priori* knowledge. And just as I seem to lack a conclusive reason for denying the possibility that I may be dreaming, so, *a fortiori*, I seem to lack a conclusive reason for denying this hypothesis also. It is important to note that although Descartes' *malin génie* hypothesis has a parallel in today's more secular times with the 'brain-in-a-vat' (BIV) hypothesis [Putnam 1981, chapter 1; cf. Pollock 1987, pp. 1ff.] which states that you may be a BIV being 'fed' experiences (perhaps by a scientist or a computer), the Cartesian formulation of this sceptical hypothesis is nevertheless a little stronger in scope. After all, it is essential to the Cartesian argument that the genie in question should have God-like powers, unlike a mere scientist who is constrained by the usual physical and practical limitations. Moreover, although it may be possible (though I think unpersuasive) to argue that a BIV would have completely different experiences to an embodied individual, given that the evil demon has, by stipulation, supernatural powers, this retort would be out of place here.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The relationship which these two sceptical arguments bear to one another is neatly brought out in Hookway [1990, pp. 57-8]. Though not relevant here, a further difference between the *malin génie* argument and the BIV hypothesis is that the former, but not the latter, can be used to support a dualistic theory of the mind.

Of course, Descartes is no sceptic. As far as he is concerned he is simply testing our beliefs so that they might be re-established on firmer ground. But given the problems facing his own theistic reconstruction of the epistemological architecture, it is inevitable that the Cartesian solution to scepticism will wane in importance in comparison with the Cartesian sceptic that has been created. And since the Cartesian sceptic is more demanding than his classical counterpart, we now have a grander sceptical problem on our hands - one which places onerous demands on any potential response. For example, whereas the Pyrrhonic sceptics only demanded that there be grounds in favour of a belief which were superior to the grounds against it, Descartes demands *certainty*. As a result, whereas a Pyrrhonic sceptic might allow that there are indeed good grounds for belief whilst retaining an *agnostic* stance, the Cartesian sceptic adopts a position more akin to complete *atheism* as regards the epistemic status of the beliefs in question.<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, since the classical sceptics were content to live-out their scepticism, it followed that they were not in the business of questioning all of our beliefs; not even all of our empirical beliefs.<sup>5</sup> Descartes, in contrast, exhibits no reluctance in proposing arguments - notably the dreaming argument and the evil demon argument - which bring *all* of our empirical judgements into question, and which do so *all at once*. He writes:

So, for the purpose of rejecting all my opinions, it will be enough if I find in each of them at least some reason for doubt. And to do this I will not run through each of them individually, which would be an endless task. Once the foundations of the building are undermined, anything built on them collapses of its own accord; so I will go straight for the basic principle on which *all* my previous beliefs rested. [Descartes 1985, II, p. 12, *my*

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<sup>4</sup> Although this is a common construal of the relationship between the Cartesian demand for certainty and the Pyrrhonian demand for overriding grounds - advanced, for example, by Klein [1981] - it is not universally accepted. Fogelin [1994; 1999] and M. Williams [1988; 1991; 1999], for instance, maintain that both demands issue from the same source - in the *infallibilist* requirement that our beliefs be immune to error. If this is so, then the contemporary sceptical debate has greatly exaggerated the differences between these two views in this respect. I will not be pursuing this exegetical issue here, however, since I believe that it is peripheral to the dialectic of this chapter. I will be discussing infallibilism in chapter three.

<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the focus of perhaps the most famous ancient sceptical argument - 'Agrippa's trilemma' - is not knowledge at all as such, but rather the propriety, or otherwise, of *claims* to know. Accordingly, the widespread possession of knowledge is, in principle at least, consistent with the success of a sceptical argument of this sort. (This is one reason why it is largely irrelevant to ask, as many commentators have done, whether the classical sceptic is capable of 'living' his scepticism [cf. Burnyeat 1980]). For the argument itself, see Diogenes Laertius [1925, vol. 2, p. 501 (IX, 88)].

*italics*].

The demand for certainty and the unrestricted nature of the sceptical doubt are not, however, the only ways in which Descartes' method of doubt strengthens the force of the sceptical argument. By conceiving of scepticism in a *methodological* fashion, Descartes also self-consciously separated the importance of a sceptical argument from any role that it might play within a philosophical *position*. Whereas a common retort to classical forms of scepticism turns on the putative 'unliveability' of the doubts in question,<sup>6</sup> this sort of response would not assuage the Cartesian sceptic. If one cannot meet the sceptical challenge, instrumentally conceived, then it is no defence (at least not in itself), to aver that scepticism leads to absurdity, since, on the Cartesian picture, it is designed to do just that. Descartes' insistence in calling all of our beliefs into question all at once falls out of this element of his reasoning. It is only if one regards one's scepticism in this instrumental way that it would be coherent to self-consciously pursue such a subversive form of doubt.

This instrumental facet of the Cartesian project is, I believe, its most important element. For whereas the demand for certainty is highly contentious, what does seem above reproach is the claim that we ought to be able to meet the sceptical problem in the abstract, as it were, independently of its plausibility when located within a position of a certain sort. Although Descartes does not explicitly recognise it as such, to treat scepticism in this way is to pay it the compliment of regarding it, at least in its strongest guise, as a *paradox*. The difference between a paradox - an argument proceeding from intuitive premises and intuitive reasoning to an unintuitive and unacceptable conclusion<sup>7</sup> - and an argument against a particular position, is that there is very little in the way of burden of proof placed on the proponent of a paradox (possibly only that they show that they *are* offering us a paradox). On this conception of the dialectic, the

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<sup>6</sup> Diogenes Laertius [1925] reports (in a satirical vein) that Pyrrho himself, despite his avowed indifference to the world about him, could not avoid being caught out from time to time (such as when a fierce dog alarmed him).

<sup>7</sup> I owe this general characterisation of the core notion of a paradox to Cargile [1979]. See also, Sainsbury [1988].

sceptic, rightly understood, merely helps himself to reasoning and premises which we would all freely assent to and shows how, collectively, they lead to absurdity. Descartes' project thus proceeds by giving the sceptic a free hand to construct such paradoxes with our beliefs in the hope that in doing so the sceptic will highlight where, in our doxastic superstructure, we should make the appropriate modifications. If it should then transpire that we are unable to modify our epistemology so as to meet the sceptical threat, then there will be no alternative open to us other than to accept the sceptical conclusion and thereby consign our supposedly rational activity of belief-formation to absurdity. Furthermore, given that the sceptical paradox which the Cartesian sceptic constructs is meant to arise out of premises and reasoning which are supposed to be entirely natural and intuitive, any modification that we do make to evade this paradox is going to face an up-hill struggle to show how it is an adequate response to the sceptical threat, rather than merely being an *ad hoc*, and unjustified, anti-sceptical manoeuvre.<sup>8</sup>

## §2. The Sceptical Paradox.

This facet of modern scepticism - that it can be presented in the form of a paradox - imposes distinctive burdens upon those engaged in the sceptical debate. In particular, since a paradox depends for its cogency only upon the intuitiveness of the reasoning and the premises employed, it would be irrelevant to offer the retort that one cannot coherently propose the argument. If one is committed to the premises and the reasoning involved, then one is thereby committed to the conclusion of the argument - no matter how counterintuitive it may be. The sceptical paradox should not, then, be thought of as an argument proposed by the sceptic for a certain conclusion, but rather as a conflict within our own epistemic concepts which it is incumbent upon us to resolve.

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<sup>8</sup> I do not mean to say by these remarks that I do regard Descartes' doubts as intuitive (we shall see whether or not equivalent treatments of scepticism are intuitive in due course), only that they are presented in such a way as to be understood as having this certain peculiar character. Of course, the Pyrrhonians also claimed to be advocating doubts which were entirely intuitive (i.e., non-dogmatic), but this is insufficient to support the radical paradoxical conclusion put forward by the Cartesian sceptic because of the limitations that they placed on the scope of their doubt. For discussion specific to Descartes' project, see Kenny [1968]; B. Williams [1978]; and Cottingham [1986].

Accordingly, it follows that one's anti-scepticism should not depend upon *ad hominem* criticisms against an imagined sceptical opponent. Following Crispin Wright [1991, p. 89], I shall refer to this constraint on our dealings with the sceptic as the "*adversary*" constraint.

One of the effects of the adversary constraint is that it directly counts against a number of influential treatments of scepticism. For example, a standard line against the sceptical argument is to accuse it of meaninglessness. This may be so, of course (it depends upon the criterion you adduce to determine what counts as meaningful), but this charge is irrelevant (at least in itself) to the subversive consequences of the sceptical paradox. In the first instance, the problem with this approach resides in the location at which the meaninglessness is posited. After all, it cannot be that the argument itself is meaningless since each component of that argument turns on claims which (supposedly at least) we are all willing to make. What is meaningless about the sceptical doubt, then, can only be the *conclusion* of the sceptical argument. But once the sceptical argument has run this far it is difficult to see how saying that the conclusion is meaningless can constitute anything more than a closing of the barn door after the horse has bolted. Of course the sceptical conclusion is incoherent (that is what gives scepticism the appearance of paradox); does it add anything positive to this negative up-shot of the sceptical argument to say that it is meaningless as well? That I do not know a significant class of propositions that I think I know is surely bad enough - how does the claim that it is meaningless to say that this is so help?

Where these 'semantic' responses to scepticism go wrong is in thinking of the sceptic as a philosophical opponent. If the sceptical debate were a matter of two opposing positions battling it out for supremacy, then it would indeed constitute a potentially fatal criticism of the opposing view to contend that the conclusion of its argument is meaningless. But in the face of a paradox which turns on premises and reasoning which, at least initially, we would all accept, to make this claim is to do

nothing to advance the anti-sceptical cause.<sup>9,10</sup>

A second constraint on our dealings with scepticism is the *diagnostic* constraint [cf. Wright 1991, p. 89]. If the sceptic is indeed offering us an argument which, *prima facie*, has the form of a paradox, then it follows that any response to scepticism that involved an appropriate revision in our epistemic concepts must be able to also explain why the sceptical reasoning seemed so compelling. Without such a diagnosis of scepticism it would remain a mystery as to why we were initially duped by the sceptical argument. Furthermore, absent such a diagnosis, the sceptic would be in a position to move to second-order and question the grounds upon which we regard ourselves as knowing that this anti-sceptical interpretation of our epistemic concepts, as opposed to the sceptical interpretation, is the correct one. As we shall see below, such second-order scepticism, if inadequately responded to, can be just as dangerous as its first-order cousin.

Indeed, meeting the diagnostic constraint is necessary even if one is able to show that the sceptic is not, in fact, offering a sceptical *paradox* at all but rather misusing our epistemic concepts intuitively understood. For even if scepticism were to rest on a mistake (and thus could be resolved without the need for any epistemological revisionism), it would still remain that one must account for the undoubted phenomenology of scepticism. Even if it is indeed a trick, it must be admitted that it is a good one.

The adversary constraint is rather different in this respect, since it only applies to

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<sup>9</sup> The conventional wisdom is that there are two philosophical camps that are inclined to argue against the sceptic in this way. On the one hand, there is the 'ordinary language' camp which comprises, according to most commentators at least, Austin [1961; 1962] and Moore [1925; 1939; 1959a; 1959b] (although, as I shall make clear below, I think there is some cause to doubt whether Moore should be thought of as responding to the sceptic in this way). Later exponents of this strategy include Cavell [1979]; Stroll [1994]; and Shelley [1998]; all of whom detect a similar train of thought in Wittgenstein [1969]. The other camp in this respect includes those of a broadly verificationist mind, such as, for instance, Carnap [1967]. For discussion of both of these anti-sceptical schools of thought, see Stroud [1984, chapters 3 & 5]; and M. Williams [1991, chapter 1]. Note that this 'semantic' response to scepticism is very different from the more contemporary form of anti scepticism which is often accorded the same title and which hinges upon a commitment to the thesis of semantic externalism. This proposal shall be briefly considered in its own right below.

<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, although, for ease of expression, I shall talk in this thesis of "the sceptic", one should not interpret these remarks as indicating that I have *anyone* in mind.

sceptical paradoxes *qua* paradoxes. Suppose, for example, that the sceptic is simply misusing our epistemic concepts even under an intuitive construal. It would then follow that what the sceptic is proffering is not a paradox at all but merely an argument for a certain conclusion. Not only could one treat such an argument as *endorsed* by a certain proponent (after all it arises out of a certain theoretical stance which one does not endorse), one could go further and simply treat it as a *reductio* of the sceptic's position and thus, since it has been distinguished from one's own view, disregard it with impunity.

The same distinction applies to the third constraint on proper responses to the sceptical argument - the *impasse* constraint [cf. Wright 1991, pp. 89-90]. This states that it is not necessary for the sceptic to demonstrate that the contested beliefs lack sufficient epistemic sanction. Instead, all the sceptic need show is that our belief that the sceptical conclusion is false lacks sufficient epistemic sanction. In other words, that, as far as one knows, scepticism could indeed be true. Significantly, however, this constraint only has teeth if the sceptical argument *does* indeed have the form of a paradox.

We saw one version of this challenge above. Suppose we fail to offer a diagnosis for the undoubted attraction of scepticism, then it will always be open to the sceptic to move to second-order and query the epistemic status of our belief that our interpretation of the epistemic concepts is licensed over our opponent's sceptical interpretation. Crucially, however, and perhaps despite initial appearances, the sceptic's second-order doubt is just as pressing as its first-order cousin.

That this is so can be seen by considering the following argument. Take it that the conclusion of a 'strong' sceptical argument would simply be that we lack knowledge of every member of a (significant) class of propositions. That is, that the epistemic agent, *a*, lacks knowledge, *K*, of each member of the contested propositions,  $\{\emptyset_1, \dots \emptyset_n\}$ :<sup>11</sup>

'Strong' Scepticism (SA<sub>S</sub>):  $\neg Ka \{\emptyset_1, \dots \emptyset_n\}$

Given the epistemic significance of the class of propositions in question coupled with

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<sup>11</sup> As with all the formalisations here, unless otherwise stated I shall assume them to be indexed to a particular time.

the supposition that there is nothing special about the epistemic agent in question (nor the situation that he is in), radical scepticism will ensue. Now imagine an interpretation of our epistemic concepts that undermined the *a priori* grounds that the sceptic adduces to support his claim that we lack knowledge of each member of a wide class of propositions. If one's second-order belief that the non-sceptical interpretation is the correct one itself lacks sufficient epistemic sanction, then one can construct a 'weak' sceptical argument which argues that, for all one knows, the conclusion of the 'strong' sceptical argument could well be true. That is, which denies that one knows that the 'strong' sceptical conclusion is false:

'Weak' Scepticism (SA<sub>W</sub>):  $\neg Ka \neg [\neg Ka \{\emptyset_1, \dots \emptyset_n\}]$

Intuitively, the monikers accorded to these two sceptical conclusions are entirely accurate since the latter conclusion does indeed seem to be weaker than the former. We can show, however, that this is not the case. To begin with, we can simplify 'weak' scepticism by eliminating the double negation that appears therein without any loss:

SA<sub>W</sub>:  $\neg Ka [Ka \{\emptyset_1, \dots \emptyset_n\}]$

'Weak' scepticism thus reduces to a lack of second-order knowledge of the contested propositions.

Moreover, the following epistemic principle seems highly intuitive in this context:

I<sub>K</sub>:  $Ka [\emptyset] \leftrightarrow Ka [Ka [\emptyset]]$ <sup>12</sup>

This is the 'Iterativity' principle, which states that if one knows a proposition,  $\emptyset$ , then one knows that one knows that proposition, and *vice versa*. Right-to-left, the principle is entirely mundane since it simply reflects the 'Factivity' of knowledge; that  $K [\emptyset]$  entails  $\emptyset$ . Left-to-right is, of course, a little more contentious, since many philosophers have argued that there are a number of situations in which one can indeed know a

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<sup>12</sup> In order to avoid unnecessary complications, the formulation of each epistemic principle in this thesis will assume, where applicable, that the subject *does* have the requisite belief in the consequent proposition.

proposition whilst lacking such second-order knowledge. I shall be investigating such complaints in a later chapter, for now I just want to work with our first intuitions as regards epistemic principles. In this case, the intuitions are entirely on the side of the Iterativity principle since, even if it is not universally valid, it does seem to be *generally* valid. Consequently, absent a fuller discussion, we have *prima facie* grounds for believing that at least some restricted version of this principle will be found to be sound and so employable by the sceptic. The manner in which the sceptic would like to use this principle should be obvious. Insofar as we have this principle in play, then we can directly reduce second-order ‘weak’ scepticism to its first-order ‘strong’ cousin and so eliminate the dialectical difference between the two forms of scepticism:

SA<sub>W</sub>:  $\neg Ka \{ \emptyset_1, \dots \emptyset_n \}$

It follows then that, *pace* detractors of the I<sub>K</sub> principle, meeting the sceptic requires more than merely resisting first-order scepticism. Rather, it also requires that one be able to meet the charge that, for all one knows, the sceptical conclusion might be true.<sup>13</sup>

One of the implications of the *impasse* constraint is that it is not enough to meet a sceptical paradox by simply revising one’s understanding of the epistemic concepts in such a way that the paradox is blocked. Since this is consistent with one’s lacking knowledge that one’s construal of the epistemic concepts is superior to the sceptic’s interpretation (especially since it is alleged to be the sceptic who is using the ‘intuitive’ construal), it will be equivalent to the conclusion of weak scepticism and thus tantamount to strong scepticism. One must not only block the sceptical paradox, then, but also offer an account (and meeting the diagnostic constraint will play a large part in this) of why one’s revisionism itself possesses sufficient epistemic sanction.

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<sup>13</sup> For a similar account of the workings of the *impasse* constraint, see Wright [1991, p. 89n]; for discussion, see Throop [1998]. One way in which one could get the desired result without getting into the Iterativity debate is by ‘modalizing’ the argument such that it relates to whether or not certain propositions are *knowable*. Construed in this fashion, the Iterativity principle simply becomes the claim that if  $\emptyset$  is knowable (by a certain agent at a certain time), then it is also knowable (by that agent at that time) that the agent knows  $\emptyset$ . Since this is a much weaker claim than the Iterativity principle expressed here, so it is, *prima facie* at least, less prone to the standard critique. For an interpretation of dreaming scepticism along these ingenious lines, see Wright [1991]. I ignore such a construal here because, as I shall argue below, the sceptic’s use of the Iterativity principle in this regard is entirely in order.

If, on the other hand, one is able to show that the sceptical argument is not, in fact, a paradox, but that it instead rests upon a misconstrual of our epistemic concepts intuitively understood, then the *impasse* constraint is very easily met. For it would then follow that one can regard the sceptic's argument as merely a *reductio* of a certain erroneous understanding of our epistemic concepts and thus unproblematically retain the first-order knowledge that the sceptical argument was attacking. The same is true, of course, of a revisionist response to the sceptical paradox as well, but this is where the similarity ends. For insofar as there is no paradox to respond to, it follows that the sceptic has not made a case for believing that his sceptical interpretation of our epistemic concepts should be preferred over our own non-sceptical interpretation. Accordingly, if one shows that there is no paradox to meet then the second-order sceptical argument falls at the same hurdle as the first-order argument. Our intuitive construal of the epistemic concepts is, after all, not scepticism-inducing, and thus the sceptic has offered no reasoning which would impugn our epistemic concepts so conceived at first *or* second-order.

To re-cap then, of the three constraints on anti-sceptical strategies so far canvassed - the adversary, diagnostic and *impasse* constraints - if one is able to show that the sceptical paradox is not, in fact, a paradox at all, then it is only the diagnostic constraint that imposes any substantive restriction on your theory. Before presenting the fourth, and final, constraint on our dealings with the sceptic, it is worthwhile considering one infamous anti-sceptical strategy which appears - depending on how you interpret his remarks - to offend against each and every one of the constraints that have been adduced thus far. The argument I have in mind here is the "common-sense" response to the sceptic proposed by G. E. Moore [1925; 1939; 1959a; 1959b].

Crudely put, the sceptic argues as follows (we shall consider the workings of the sceptical paradox in more detail in a moment):

$$\begin{array}{l} \neg Ka [\neg SH] \\ Ka [O] \rightarrow Ka [\neg SH] \\ \hline \neg Ka [O] \end{array}$$

The sceptic argues that an epistemic agent, *a*, fails to know, *K*, the denial of the sceptical hypothesis, *SH*, but that if he knows the everyday proposition, *O*, then he must know the denial of the sceptical hypothesis. It follows, via *modus tollens*, that the agent does not know the everyday proposition. And since this argument can, in principle at least (it depends upon the force of the sceptical hypothesis at issue), be run with almost *any* everyday proposition, radical scepticism is right around the corner.

The opposing move in this respect - commonly known, for reasons that shall soon become apparent, as the *Moorean* move - is to respond to this *modus tollens* argument by arguing *modus ponens*:

$$\begin{array}{l} \text{Ka [O]} \\ \text{Ka [O]} \rightarrow \text{Ka } [\neg \text{SH}] \\ \hline \text{Ka } [\neg \text{SH}] \end{array}$$

Since, Moore argues, it cannot be right that I lack knowledge of the everyday proposition, then, given the obvious validity of the sceptical argument, the only conclusion that the right-minded epistemologist can draw is that I *do* have knowledge of the denial of the sceptical hypothesis after all.

It is in this vein that Moore claimed that, *contra* the sceptic, he knew certain propositions which were typically thought to be open to sceptical doubt, propositions such as that he lives on the earth which has existed for many years past; that he has never been far from it; that there are many people who are in the same situation as he is in these respects [Moore 1925]; and, most notoriously of all, that he has two hands and thus that there are two 'external' objects in the world [Moore 1939]. His argument for this last claim - his *proof* no less - is simply to gesture with his one hand and say 'Here is one hand', and then gesture with the other and say 'And here is another'.<sup>14</sup> Since two external objects exist, so does an external world. He regards this as being a perfectly "rigorous" proof and reminds us that

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<sup>14</sup> Viewed from a contemporary perspective one might be inclined to consider Moore's 'proof' as invoking a theory of perception along the lines of direct realism. Though this may make the position more appealing, such an interpretation would obviously conflict with Moore's oft-stated commitment to sense-data (and thus an indirect theory) [cf. Stroll 1994, chapter 5].

[...] we all of us do constantly take proofs of this sort as absolutely conclusive proofs of certain conclusions - as finally settling certain questions, as to which we were previously in doubt. [Moore 1939, p. 147]

To illustrate this he gives the example of proving that there are at least three misprints on a page. To settle this question we simply look for one, then another, and then another. If this is an adequate 'proof' of the contested proposition in this context, then why should the displaying of one's hands be deficient in response to the sceptic? So Moore answers the sceptical challenge by straightforwardly *affirming* various contested propositions along with the empirical grounds he possesses which justify this belief. He also offers a further *cameat*: that, at the very least, the truth of these propositions is more certain than the soundness of any sceptical argument which is intended to counter our belief in them.<sup>15</sup>

When faced with Moore's putative 'refutation' of scepticism one gets the feeling that he has passed the sceptical challenge by in some way; that the debate has not even been engaged. On the surface of things, one might think that the source of this dissatisfaction lies in the fact that Moore tries to rebut the sceptic by utilising instances of knowledge that the sceptic has just brought into question. In itself, however, this need be no stumbling-block to Moore's approach, in that it could quite plausibly be argued that the sceptical doubt is incoherent from the outset and so should not be taken at face-value as presenting us with a *paradox* in the first place. Indeed, many commentators have taken this to be the point of Moore's assertions in this respect. On this 'ordinary language' interpretation the contention is that one should not respond to the sceptic on the sceptic's terms but rather re-claim the epistemic operator for its usual

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<sup>15</sup> It is actually a moot point whether Moore saw himself as answering the sceptic at all, let alone offering an *argument* against scepticism [cf. Baldwin 1993], but many commentators, including, most famously, Wittgenstein [1969], have conceived of Moore's remarks in this way. Of the two cited papers upon which Moore's reputation as an anti-sceptic was largely established [Moore 1925; 1939], the first was written in response to an invitation to provide a *personal statement* (and therefore not necessarily a *validation*) of his position, whilst the second is regarded by some as being an attempt at a refutation of *idealism*, not scepticism, in that Moore was only aiming to prove the *existence* of an external world, not also that we have any *knowledge* of it. (I leave it to the reader to decide whether this distinction is entirely plausible). To add to the confusion, in the latter paper Moore notes that although he knows the premises of his 'proof', he cannot prove them [Moore 1939, p. 150]. Nevertheless, the interpretation of Moore offered above is widely endorsed. See Stroud [1984, chapter 3]; Wright [1985]; M. Williams [1991, pp. 40-5]; and Stroll [1994, *passim*].

*practical* use.<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately, this interpretative manoeuvre lacks any real credibility since Moore is quite explicit about the fact that he regards his use of the word “know” as being for a perfectly legitimate *philosophical* purpose (and thus not confined by ordinary linguistic practice).<sup>17</sup> Moreover, the fact that he attempts to prove the existence of so theoretical an entity as an “external world” surely illustrates that he is accepting at least the *prima facie* legitimacy of philosophical questions concerning our justification for such belief.

In any case, even under this construal, Moore’s line of argument would still flounder. Consider, for instance, the manner in which Moore’s arguments relate to the adversary constraint. Although the “ordinary language” line of thought that these interpreters of Moore have in mind does not represent him as accusing the sceptic of uttering a meaningless doubt (and so contravening the adversary constraint in the standard fashion), they still regard him as responding to an embodied foe. This is because to conceive of Moore’s *modus ponens* move as sufficiently anti-sceptical is to assume that he has elucidated the manner in which the sceptic has misconstrued our epistemic concepts. For if Moore had shown that the sceptical argument was not a paradox - that, for instance, it is just not intuitive to think that we lack knowledge of the denials of sceptical hypotheses - then it would be entirely legitimate to argue against one’s sceptical *opponent* in this *modus ponens* manner. Arguing as Moore does would simply highlight how the sceptical *position*, in virtue of its use of an erroneous conception of our epistemic concepts, leads to absurdity. Unfortunately, however, Moore has failed to show any such thing and so he lacks any license to make such a move.

Moreover, since, as matters presently stand, Moore has merely offered a conception of our epistemic concepts which, supposedly, evades scepticism, *without also indicating how this construal is validated over and above the sceptic’s interpretation*, he also

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<sup>16</sup> Such is the ‘ordinary language’ interpretation to Moore’s arguments, viewed as being, stylistically speaking, on a par with Austin’s approach [Austin 1961; 1962]. For such an interpretation of Moore, see Ambrose [1952]; Malcolm [1952]; and the discussion offered by Stroud [1984, chapter 3].

<sup>17</sup> Moore makes this point in a letter to Malcolm which is published in Malcolm’s paper ‘Moore and Wittgenstein on the Sense of “I Know”’, reprinted in Malcolm [1977, p. 174].

offends against the *impasse* constraint. That is, even on the supposition that Moore is offering us a *revision* of our epistemic concepts (as opposed to simply showing us where the sceptic went wrong in his characterisation of them), he still has to face the spectre of second-order scepticism. This inability, on Moore's part, to meet the second-order sceptic is reflected most keenly in a related claim that Moore makes - that, at worst, his anti-scepticism is at least as well-founded and certain as the sceptic's doubt. The idea is that the sceptic is unable to do enough to shake our conviction in the everyday propositions that he calls into question once we remind ourselves of this support. But given that Moore has not adduced grounds for believing that the sceptical paradox is not, after all, a paradox, this *caveat* is of no help to him since it simply leaves his anti-scepticism at the mercy of a second-order sceptical threat. In line, again, with the *impasse* constraint, unless Moore is able to justify his anti-sceptical interpretation of our epistemic concepts over the sceptic's interpretation, then the sceptic wins the game by default. And the same will be true of any anti-sceptical manoeuvre that responds to the sceptical paradox *qua* paradox by *simply* making the *modus ponens* move described above.

In general, the inadequacy of Moore's anti-scepticism *vis-à-vis* these two constraints arises out of the fact that he has failed to show that the sceptical argument is not, after all, a paradox. Indeed, I think this captures the essence of where Moore goes wrong. Instead of *showing* us how the sceptic is misusing our epistemic concepts, Moore simply takes this for granted and goes directly to motivating his anti-sceptical conclusion.<sup>18</sup> And, as we might expect, a significant part of the problem here is that Moore pays no heed to the diagnostic constraint - he only *reacts* to scepticism without also exploring its motivation.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> This is not to say that if Moore had shown that the sceptical argument was not a paradox then his response would hold, since I think there are other problems with his approach. In particular, for reasons that I shall discuss in a later chapter, I believe that Moore's *claim* to know is, in this context, dubious.

<sup>19</sup> There are other aspects of Moore's anti-sceptical arguments that are of interest but which are not directly relevant here. One close candidate for inclusion is his remarks on the need for scepticism to offer grounds, rather than acquiescing in mere possibility [Moore 1959b, especially, pp. 219-221; cf. Wittgenstein 1969, §§4, 12, 122, 323, 458 & 519; Stroll 1984, chapter 4]. Unfortunately, in Moore this complaint is largely impotent at troubling the more sophisticated forms of scepticism since these are the varieties that *do* offer grounds for their doubt.

The final constraint that I want to motivate support for here - the *epistemic* constraint - requires a far more in-depth treatment than the previous three. Essentially, this constraint demands that, just as it is obviously incumbent upon any radically sceptical argument that it show, on *a priori* grounds, that a significant class of beliefs *lack* sufficient epistemic sanction, so any plausible response to a sceptical argument must be able to *resurrect*, if only in principle, that epistemic sanction by showing how no such *a priori* argument succeeds. So stated, the constraint seems so obvious as to not be worth elucidating, but, as we shall see in a moment, certain approaches to scepticism do seem to fall foul of it. Before we turn to a consideration of these approaches, however, it is worthwhile being clear as to why the epistemic constraint is formulated in such a coy manner. Why not, for instance, demand that any answer to the sceptic should actually *show* that our beliefs are, in the main, sufficiently epistemically supported?

The reason for this is subtle, and it requires appreciating the underlying nature of the sceptical contention. Consider, for example, the BIV sceptical hypothesis. Clearly, it is entirely uncontentious to claim that, were this hypothesis to be true, then we would lack knowledge of much of what we believe. No-one would argue with such a contention since, *ex hypothesi*, sceptical scenarios are *defined* such that they are situations in which, in general, we lack knowledge. Note, however, that the sceptical argument is not meant to be an *empirical* argument. At no point is the sceptic actually claiming that we are BIVs, or even that there is a significant likelihood that we might be. Instead, the sceptical point is far more artful and involves maintaining that whether or not one is in fact a BIV is irrelevant, for even if we are not BIVs (even if, for example, the world is pretty much as we take it to be), still, that we cannot effectively rule-out sceptical hypotheses indicates that we do not know very much. That is, the sceptical attack is **not** an empirical attack on the *truth* of our beliefs (at least not in the first instance), but rather an *a priori* attack on the *epistemic* status of those beliefs.

Understanding this element of the sceptical charge has interesting consequences. In the first instance, it follows that in the assessment of the sceptical argument one is entitled to assume that one is *not* the victim of a sceptical scenario. Since everyone

agrees that if one were the victim of such a scenario then the sceptical conclusion would be correct, radical scepticism is only a substantive claim if it applies even in cases where we are not subject to such a predicament. If one can show that, providing the sceptical hypotheses at issue are far-fetched (that is, not only false, but unlikely to be true), one knows much of what one takes oneself to know, then one has met the epistemic constraint, so described above. For the sceptical claim is meant to rest upon *a priori* concerns that apply no matter what empirical conditions actually obtain. Accordingly, if one can demonstrate that this is not so - that whether or not the sceptical conclusion applies rests upon certain empirical conditions obtaining - then one will have met the epistemic constraint. Of course, this will be consistent with one, as a matter of fact, not knowing very much, since it is consistent with one actually being the victim of such a sceptical scenario. Nevertheless, that it is *empirically* possible that one might be subject to a sceptical hypothesis does not itself justify scepticism. We can all agree with this without thereby conceding that, in non-sceptical cases, we do not know very much.

Although this may seem, at first blush at any rate, to strengthen the anti-sceptic's case by removing a burden of proof from him, the relief is, as we shall soon see, noticeably short-lived. This is because good sceptical arguments offer the very considerations needed to make these arguments relevant no matter what environment (sceptical or non-sceptical) one happens to be in. In effect, then, this consideration merely reminds the anti-sceptic that his goal is only to undermine the sceptic's *a priori* arguments - he does not also have to show that sceptical hypotheses are *empirically* false.

With this in mind, one might wonder why the epistemic constraint is to be thought of as a constraint on our dealings with the sceptic when all it seems to do (potentially at least) is relieve a theoretical burden from the anti-sceptic's shoulders. The reason for this is that certain philosophers engaged in this debate appear to believe that one can answer the sceptical debate by showing even less than that there is no *a priori* argument for believing that our beliefs lack, in the main, sufficient epistemic sanction. Of course, it is going to be difficult to find a philosopher who actually explicitly *advertises* this fact, but as I now hope to show, one can, perhaps, discern such a stance in

one view currently popular in the literature.

So far I have either talked innocuously (to my mind) in terms of the sceptic attacking the “sufficient epistemic sanction” of our beliefs, or assumed that this will translate into a dispute about knowledge. However, it might be argued that what is really at issue here is in fact not knowledge at all but rather some weaker epistemic notion such as justification. Wright, drawing upon a view he ascribes to Russell, is one commentator who has explicitly endorsed the latter option. He has argued that if scepticism were focused purely on knowledge then one could harmlessly concede the truth of the conclusion to the radical sceptical argument. He writes:

There is not necessarily any lasting discomfort in the claim that, contrary to our preconceptions, we have no genuine knowledge in some broad area of our thought - say in the area of theoretical science. We can live with the concession that we do not, strictly, *know* some of the things we believed ourselves to know, provided we can retain the thought that we are fully justified in accepting them. [Wright 1991, p. 88]

Wright calls just such a concession - dropping the demand for knowledge in favour of a demand for fully justified belief - the “Russellian Retreat” [cf. Russell 1912, chapters I-II]. If the sceptical argument were able to count against our justifications in this sense then this would indeed be a radical result, but merely attacking our knowledge is not enough.

There is some initial plausibility in the claim that if we are fully justified in believing a certain class of beliefs then this ought to be sufficient to meet the sceptical threat. The plausibility of the position diminishes, however, once we follow through the implications of the thesis.

Knowledge is true belief plus some epistemic component. Whatever this component is, we now know, thanks to Edmund Gettier [1963], that it is not justification (although justification may, of course, play a significant role).<sup>20</sup> Suppose we call this element of the ‘K’ operator that is sufficient, with true belief, for knowledge, “warrant” [cf. Plantinga 1993a]. Furthermore, in order to get an initial grip on his stance here, let us take it that it is the preservation of *warrant* for our beliefs that Wright has in mind in his

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<sup>20</sup> I offer an extended discussion on the epistemological significance of Gettier counterexamples to the traditional tripartite account of knowledge in chapter three.

formulation of the Russellian Retreat. Now ask yourself this question. Is it plausible to imagine a response to radical scepticism which showed that we had *warrant* for a large class of beliefs which did not thereby show that we also had, in the main, *knowledge* of the propositions believed? That is, that held that we satisfied the epistemic component of our putative knowledge entirely, it is just that, through no (epistemic) fault of our own, the truth-condition did not oblige? Clearly, the plausibility of this scenario depends upon ascertaining just what this elusive epistemic component of knowledge is that can be radically divorced from the truth in this way. After all, one would imagine that if hardly any of our beliefs were true then it is far from plausible that they could, nevertheless, be in the main warranted, since whatever warrant is, it is at the very least supposed to aid us in the tracking of the truth.<sup>21</sup> It would be odd, then, that we could fulfil the criteria for possession of warrant without this thereby having any effect whatsoever on our ability to track the truth. Indeed, is not the thought that our beliefs are, in general, warranted little comfort if the possession of such warrant is consistent with *most* of our beliefs being false?

Now one might think that this is a little unfair since Wright was not suggesting that our beliefs could be mostly false and yet still warranted, only that showing that they were warranted would be enough to meet the sceptic, *whatever* the truth-values of the beliefs involved. But now the problem should be manifest. Were our beliefs to be warranted *and* true, then it would follow that we would have knowledge after all and thus that Wright's concession to the sceptic counts for nothing. That is, we face a dilemma. On the assumption that warrant could coexist with widespread falsity, we have a situation in which (insofar as it is coherent at all) the possession of warrant can do nothing to stave off scepticism. Alternatively, on the assumption that our warranted beliefs are true, then we have the knowledge which we claimed to forgo after all and

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<sup>21</sup> This point is a little obscured in the text cited from above by how Wright shifts from considering radical scepticism (which concerns the epistemic status of *most* of our beliefs), to scepticism about a *specific* area of our thought (such as "theoretical science"). We can perhaps admit (though I shall raise some doubts below) that in terms of a particular area of inquiry justified beliefs are the best we can hope for. But to admit this is not thereby to concede that an illustration that our beliefs are, in the main, justified would answer the radical sceptic whose doubts affect the epistemic status of our beliefs across the whole gamut of discourses.

thus the Russellian Retreat is unnecessary.

Of course, Wright did not express his point in terms of warrant, but rather justification, and one might think that the source of the conflict here lies in our decision to use the stronger epistemic notion. Although it may be incoherent to suppose that an epistemic notion that would be sufficient, with true belief, for knowledge, could coexist with widespread falsity, it may not be nearly so problematic to suppose that a weaker notion such as justification might. Accordingly, it could well be that most of our beliefs are justified and, as it happens, mostly true, without it also being the case that most of what we believe we also know. Indeed, this would thus explain why the Russellian manoeuvre is a "Retreat". By implicitly recognising that justification is weaker than warrant, Wright is being true to the thought that conceding scepticism about knowledge means conceding that, even if one's beliefs were, as it happens, mostly true, it would not follow that the "fully justified" ones were, therefore, candidates for knowledge. Instead, the weakness of the justification operator ensures that this privileged status for our beliefs is lost entirely.

But now the difficulty is to see how this epistemic notion could be used to answer the sceptical charge. After all, we have now reduced the goals of our anti-scepticism such that we are only attempting to show that the contested beliefs have justification. We are not also attempting (even in principle) to show that they have a proper epistemic justification - the sort of truth-tracking justification that would, in ideal circumstances (at least), translate into knowledge. Would it really provide any solution to scepticism to be able to show that our beliefs possess such a property? So although dropping the characterisation of justification in terms of warrant may evade the worries over the supposed consistency of mainly warranted beliefs being mainly false, in doing so it simply highlights how *insufficiently* epistemic the 'justification' operator is. Accordingly, if Wright were to attempt to meet the sceptical paradox merely with such a weak notion of justification, then the worry would be that this response to scepticism would be entirely consistent with a failure to meet the epistemic constraint.

In any case, Wright's account would have to face two important problems. First,

even though the possession of justification makes a weaker demand on the epistemic status of one's beliefs than warrant, it is still far from uncontentious to say that one's beliefs could be *mostly* justified and true and yet not be also instances of knowledge. After all, Gettier counterexamples only show that there are an important class of peripheral cases in which the tripartite model of knowledge is inadequate, they do not also show that, *in general*, knowledge and justified true belief come apart. Accordingly, one would expect mostly justified true beliefs to be also, in the main, instances of knowledge, and thus we are back with the original problem which we saw with warrant. Now if Wright construes justification in such a way that, even granted wholesale truth in our beliefs, it is able to come (almost) completely apart from knowledge, then it seems that he owes us an explanation of just why his account of the notion is so divergent from the standard line. Indeed, Wright seems to be implicitly weakening justification beyond even the usual post-Gettier standards, and thus making his supposed schema for responding to scepticism in terms of justified belief seem all the more questionable.

The second problem facing Wright's account is that on the supposition that hardly any of the propositions which we believe are known, then upon what is the justification we are deemed to possess for these beliefs to depend? The point is that, typically, what justifies our beliefs is our knowledge. For instance, suppose that a certain epistemic agent is justified in believing that Oswald shot Kennedy because he has heard highly regarded testimony that indicates that this is the case. Furthermore, suppose that this proposition is true but that he does not know it because of some defect in the evidence that he possesses (suppose, for instance, that he puts a high premium on the conclusions of the Warren Commission even though, as it happens, that Commission had been rigged). If we are to ask ourselves what it is that justifies this agent's beliefs, then is not the natural thought simply that it is what he *knows* that plays this role? That, for instance, he is justified in believing this proposition because he *knows* that the testimony of newspapers, Congressional Committees and forensic scientists are reliable sources of information? And if we are not to cash-out the subject's justified

belief in terms of knowledge at *any* juncture, then just what is it that is supporting this justification? Is it really so plausible that one might have justified beliefs based on other justified beliefs and so forth, without knowledge playing *any* significant role in the equation? Again, the only way to make this line of thought coherent is to consider justification to be an even weaker epistemic notion than we may at first have thought, and this raises the further question of why we should consider a response to the sceptic cashed-out in terms of justification to be of any use against a sceptical attack.<sup>22</sup>

If this line of reasoning is correct then the Russellian Retreat will be in danger of becoming an irrelevant stance to take in the face of scepticism because it constitutes a retreat too far. Moreover, since warrant seems to be an epistemic notion which, if employable in defence of one's beliefs against the sceptical attack at all (i.e., if it has all the epistemic strengths that justification lacks), must be such that, in the main, it attaches itself to true beliefs, then, accordingly, an illustration that most of one's beliefs are warranted would thereby be an illustration that most of what one believed one also knew. It follows that any adequate response to the sceptical challenge must involve the conclusion that the sceptic has given us no *a priori* reason for thinking that we lack *knowledge* of the contested propositions, and this is just what the epistemic constraint demands. The sceptical debate is thus primarily a debate about knowledge, not some weaker notion such as justification.<sup>23</sup>

In any case, the assertibility conditions for a claim to be warranted in believing that P and a claim to know that P *will* covary. That one could not be in a position to claim knowledge of a proposition without being in a position to claim to be warranted

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<sup>22</sup> For a development of this line of reasoning which argues that *all* evidence that might support the justification one has for one's beliefs is knowledge, see Williamson [1997]. For my own part, I think that Wright may have just over-stated his case. For what does seem to be true is that there may be certain epistemically central discourses where one is unable to coherently *claim* knowledge even though one can claim justified belief. As I shall argue in a later chapter, however, the rules governing coherent assertion of knowledge are apt to mislead us as to when our beliefs do in fact have the epistemic status we accord to them.

<sup>23</sup> Or at least, we have cause to be sceptical about the prospects for any anti-sceptical strategy cashed-out in terms of justification. Were it to transpire that no response to the sceptic was available which functioned using the knowledge operator, then one might wish to reconsider this line of argument in order to see if anything can be done to enhance its prospects. Nevertheless, a response cashed-out in terms of knowledge is still going to be desirable and since I believe such a response is available, I shall not concern myself with this approach further.

in believing that proposition ought to be obvious. That being in a position to claim to be warranted in believing a certain proposition is *ipso facto* to be in a position to claim knowledge of that proposition is perhaps not so clear. The residual reluctance to assent to this equivalence in assertibility conditions rests, I submit, upon a failure to distinguish between warrant, as defined above, and mere justification. For whereas it may be coherent to claim justification whilst prescind from a claim to know, whatever reason one might have for not claiming knowledge of a certain proposition will, perforce, be a reason for doubting that the epistemic sanction for one's belief in that proposition is sufficient for knowledge and therefore able to support warrant. Accordingly, insofar as one responds to the sceptic with a claim to be warranted in believing the contested propositions, then one could just as easily rephrase the claim in terms of knowledge.<sup>24</sup>

It ought to be clear that the epistemic constraint will impose demands on one's anti-sceptical approach regardless of whether one is able to show that the sceptic's argument rests upon an unintuitive construal of our epistemic concepts. After all, if it can be shown that the sceptical paradox rests upon an erroneous use of our concepts then this will be of little comfort if, as it happens, our *intuitive* reading leaves our beliefs without sufficient epistemic support and thus fares no better than the sceptical interpretation. It is, therefore, necessary that one be able to determine that there are no *a priori* reasons for thinking that one lacks knowledge of the contested propositions, regardless of the dialectical situation with respect to whether or not the sceptical argument is construed as a paradox. That said, however, meeting the epistemic constraint ought to be a great deal easier if one can show that the sceptical 'paradox' is a hoax. For whereas the revisionist has to both disarm the paradox *and* recover the epistemic grounding of our beliefs in such a way that it meets a reconstructed version of scepticism at second-order, the non-revisionist need only meet the sceptical argument in a manner that preserves the epistemic sanction of our beliefs - he need not also worry

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<sup>24</sup> Note that I have put the point much stronger here than I need to. All I require is the claim that insofar as a statement such as 'Most of my beliefs are warranted' is assertible, then so is a corresponding statement expressed in terms of knowledge, such as 'Most of what I believe I also know'.

about a second-order sceptical threat.

The most interesting facet of the epistemic constraint is that it disqualifies, from the outset, a whole range of approaches to scepticism. Consider, for instance, Hilary Putnam's [1981] influential argument relating to BIV scepticism that turns on the hypothesis that we might be BIVs being 'fed' our experiences by a benevolent scientist. Putnam advances a form of semantic externalism such that what our words refer to is constrained by what their usage is causally connected to. If this is so, however, then simply in virtue of understanding the thought that I might be a BIV I can know that I cannot be in such a predicament. This is because if I were a BIV then my use of the term 'vat' would no longer refer to vats. Accordingly, the statement "I am a BIV" is false *whenever* it is uttered, for it is both false when one is an embodied agent and also false when one is in fact a BIV (since it would then refer to something very different to what it refers to when we are not BIVs). As Putnam expresses the matter:

Although the people in that [BIV] possible world can think and 'say' any words we can think and say, they cannot (I claim) *refer* to what we can refer to. In particular, they cannot think or say that they are brains in a vat (*even by thinking 'we are brains in a vat'*).

[...] It follows that if [...] we really are brains in a vat, then what we now mean by 'we are brains in a vat' is that *we are brains in a vat in the image* or something of that kind (if we mean anything at all). But part of the hypothesis that we are brains in a vat is that we aren't brains in a vat in the image [...] So, if we are brains in a vat, the sentence 'We are brains in a vat' says something false (if it says anything). In short, if we are brains in a vat, then 'We are brains in a vat' is false. So it is (necessarily) false. [Putnam 1981, pp. 8-15].

If this line of reasoning is plausible, then we can dismiss, *a priori*, one particular sceptical argument that is based on the BIV hypothesis.

Unfortunately, however, even if one were to allow Putnam's argument in this respect (which is itself independently contentious<sup>25</sup>), there would still be a substantive sceptical threat to be faced. This is primarily because in order to make the connection needed between the subject's understanding of the thought that he might be a BIV and the necessity that such understanding can only have come about if the subject were indeed not a BIV, Putnam has to assume that there has been a *complete* causal

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<sup>25</sup> An extensive literature has been devoted to evaluating the efficacy of Putnam's BIV argument. Of most interest in this context are the articles by Brueckner [1986; 1992a]; Wright [1994; cf. Wright 1997; 1998, section 10; 2000a]; Forbes [1995]; Warfield [1998]; and Hale & Wright [1999].

detachment between the subject and the vats referred to in the subject's thought. This requires him to make two crucial modifications to the standard form of the BIV sceptical scenario [cf. Brueckner 1986, p. 152].

First, he has to assume that the agent has *always* been envatted. If this were not so then the subject could nevertheless have had the requisite causal contact to vats prior to being envatted, and therefore understand the thought whilst a victim of this scenario. Second, it is also essential that Putnam drop the usual reference to a benevolent (or otherwise) scientist. If there were indeed such an individual operating this virtual environment, then it would be possible that the subject's causal relationship with vats could have been effected indirectly (i.e., via the scientist's experience of an 'outside' world). Accordingly, Putnam suggests that the agent has come to be in this situation in virtue of "some kind of cosmic coincidence" which has nothing to do with "intelligent creators or designers" [Putnam 1981, p. 12].

These modifications to the scenario have important ramifications since they create the epistemic space within which the sceptic can both accept the proof whilst resurrecting his stance. Indeed, all they need to do is return to offering the original (unmodified) BIV hypothesis. If this sceptical argument is effective at all, then (as I outline below), it calls the epistemic sanction of the bulk of our everyday beliefs into question. Maybe our belief that we have not always been envatted by dint of a "cosmic coincidence" would remain intact, but this is little consolation in the face of such rampant scepticism. Putnam's proof thus fails as an anti-sceptical strategy because it is consistent with there being *a priori* grounds for holding that our beliefs lack, in the main, sufficient epistemic sanction.<sup>26</sup>

That said, however, one might think that there may be a more general strategy available to the semantic externalist here of showing that the meaning of our words is in

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<sup>26</sup> It is actually somewhat unfair to criticise *Putnam* for this failing since his avowed intention in offering the proof was not to meet the sceptical challenge as such, but rather to show that a certain view about the "mind/world relationship" [Putnam 1981, p. 6] - which assumed a doctrine he termed "metaphysical realism" - was erroneous. (For a discussion of Putnam's 'proof' with this in mind, see Hale & Wright [1999]). Nevertheless, it is important to highlight this feature of his argument in order to dispel the thought - as expressed in, for instance, Warfield [1998] - that his proof may be able to offer the basis for a substantive response to the sceptic.

some way dependent upon the wholesale truth of our beliefs. Donald Davidson has, for instance, put forward a number of arguments - (the centrepiece of which is his "omniscient interpreter" argument [Davidson 1977; 1983]) - which are meant to show that, *a priori*, most of our beliefs must be true, or, as he puts, that "belief is by its nature veridical" [Davidson 1983, p. 314]. What Davidson does not show, however, is that the relationship that obtains between our beliefs and the facts is such that it will support widespread knowledge as well. Hence, any form of scepticism which demanded (or presupposed) that most of one's beliefs are false would be met by Davidson's arguments, but not thereby any radically sceptical argument which merely focused on the *epistemic* status of one's beliefs. As Michael Williams has expressed the matter, Davidson's argument merely amounts to an illustration of

[...] the presupposition of Cartesian thought-experiments: namely that the content of our beliefs remains invariant even under massive change of truth-values. So whereas the sceptic assumes that, even if our beliefs were all false, they would still be the same beliefs, Davidson shows that they could not be, because of the interdependence of truth and meaning. If a Cartesian nightmare were to come true, we would have beliefs with different content, but still mostly true. [M. Williams 1991, p. 315; cf. M. Williams 1988-9]

But since the sceptical argument is an attack on our *knowledge*, and having true beliefs is not sufficient for knowledge, merely highlighting this supposition is not going to be enough to meet the sceptical challenge.<sup>27,28</sup>

The tactic of attempting to meet the sceptical challenge by showing that most of our beliefs must be true does have, however, a distinguished history. Indeed, Descartes' own "benevolent God" hypothesis - that God, being good, would not deceive us into believing falsely - represents just such a strategy [Descartes 1641, Fifth Meditation]. This

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<sup>27</sup> Note also the parallel between Davidson's response to scepticism and Putnam's BIV argument. I do not mean to claim here that Davidson is unaware of the fact that his anti-sceptical line is unable to meet the strongest forms of scepticism, since he admits at one point that his solution to the sceptical paradox "leaves the conditions for knowledge untouched" [Davidson 1983, p. 317; cf. Rorty 1986; Davidson 1990]. Moreover, it ought to be noted that Davidson's argument (as with Putnam's) marks a very important contribution to the wider debate about meaning and belief. It is only when it is applied to the sort of epistemic scepticism at issue here that it becomes implausible. For more on Davidson's approach to radical scepticism, see Pritchard [1998].

<sup>28</sup> Of related interest here is the manner in which the kind of semantic externalism that Putnam - see especially, Putnam [1975] - and Davidson argue for may be thought to entail a certain scepticism about first-person authority, a concern encapsulated in the so-called 'McKinsey' paradox (see McKinsey [1991]). For discussion, see Davidson [1987]; Burge [1988]; Boghossian [1989; 1997]; Brueckner [1992b]; Brown [1995]; Wright [1997; 2000a; cf. Hale 2000; Sainsbury 2000; Suárez 2000; Wright 2000b]; and Davies [1998].

is the epistemic equivalent of the sort of “occasionalism” popularised in the seventeenth and eighteenth-century by philosophers such as Malebranche, whereby all causal powers are deemed to be contingent upon God’s agency since on the Cartesian view God plays the role of being the *guarantor* of the veracity of our beliefs. The problem is that this hypothesis is perfectly consistent with a sceptical argument that purported to show, on *a priori* grounds, that in general our beliefs lack sufficient epistemic sanction. After all, what has been claimed is only that most of my beliefs are true, not also that the relationship between my beliefs and the truth is, epistemically speaking, an appropriate one. Indeed, given the serendipity involved here, it might be thought that what Descartes is doing is simply replacing one completely unacceptable form of scepticism (the *malin génie* hypothesis), with another which is more conducive to our goals. More conducive though it may be, however, it is still scepticism.<sup>29</sup>

Note that this point is contiguous with that made earlier about how the most sophisticated forms of scepticism do not rest on the assumption of widespread falsity in order to achieve their ends. Take Descartes *malin génie* hypothesis, for instance, the idea that a demon is systematically, and unbeknownst to us, affecting the veracity of our beliefs. The sceptical force of this hypothesis (if there is any) does not reside in the *truth* of the hypothesis, but rather in the relevance it is held to have for the epistemic sanction of our beliefs; that is, whether or not it is able to undermine our knowledge. Accordingly, since everyone agrees that were this hypothesis to be true we would know hardly anything, so the real message of the sceptical challenge in this respect is that *even if this hypothesis were completely false*, one would still know very little.

### §3. The Basic Form of the Sceptical Paradox.

As we have seen, the sceptical argument is to be construed in terms of the conjunction of *prima facie* intuitive reasoning and premises which leads to a paradoxical conclusion which calls the bulk of our knowledge into question. Despite the numerous specific and

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<sup>29</sup> The very fact that widespread truth in one’s beliefs is not sufficient to meet epistemic scepticism constitutes an argument against a very crude form of reliabilism that is unable to make a distinction between beliefs that are guaranteed to be true and knowledge.

diverse manners in which these sceptical premises are motivated it is possible to represent the general schematic form of the sceptical paradox. Taking 'Ka [Ø]' to mean that the subject, *a*, knows the proposition, Ø, and 'SH' to refer to a suitable sceptical hypothesis (we shall consider examples in a moment), the basic sceptical premise is that we do not know that the sceptical hypothesis at issue is false. That is:

(1)  $\neg Ka [\neg SH]$  Sceptical Premise.

The next step in the formation of the paradox is to highlight how instantiations (represented schematically here as 'O') of a wide class of everyday propositions entail the falsity of the sceptical hypothesis. Since this relationship between the everyday propositions and the negation of the sceptical hypothesis is meant to be knowable *a priori*, we can therefore uncontentiously allow the sceptic the following second premise:

(2)  $Ka [O \rightarrow \neg SH]$  Knowledge of a Conceptual Truth.

The sceptic then assumes, for *reductio*, that we have knowledge of the everyday proposition in question:

(3)  $Ka [O]$  Assumed for *Reductio*.

At this point in the proceedings the sceptic draws on an important epistemic principle, namely the principle of 'Closure'.<sup>30</sup> This says that if you know a proposition, *p*, and know that this proposition entails a second proposition, *q*, then you also know *q*. This can be formally expressed as follows:

$K_C: \{Ka [\emptyset] \ \& \ Ka [\emptyset \rightarrow \Pi]\} \rightarrow Ka [\Pi],$

Although this principle has (as we shall see below) been questioned, it does have a high

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<sup>30</sup> There are those who claim that one can construct radical sceptical arguments without utilising the Closure principle. Brueckner [1994b], for instance, echoing a principle advocated by the Pyrrhonian sceptics, has argued that one can get the same sceptical effect by using a principle which states that one's grounds should "favour" one's belief in the everyday proposition over the sceptical proposition. Aside from the fact that this line of argument is not going to work with a 'threshold' notion such as warrant (at least as it is defined here), Wright [1998, section 3] has shown that such a principle assumes the Closure principle in the first place. That said, Wright [1985; 1997; 1998, sections 3 & 4; cf. Wright 2000a] himself is one commentator who has argued against the centrality of the Closure principle to the sceptical argument, claiming instead that what is at issue is in fact a related principle which he refers to as "Transmission". We shall consider such a stance in a later chapter.

degree of initial plausibility. It seems extremely counterintuitive that I might, for instance, know that I am sitting here now (in St. Andrews), and also know that this entails that I am not imprisoned on Alpha Centauri, without thereby also knowing that I am not imprisoned on Alpha Centauri. In any case, for the time being we shall take this principle as valid since it is clearly intuitive and this is all that the sceptic needs (in the first instance) in order to motivate his paradox. With this principle in play, the sceptic can derive, from lines (2) and (3), the claim that one does know the denial of the sceptical hypothesis after all:

(4)  $Ka [\neg SH]$  Closure ('K<sub>C</sub>'), 2, 3.

But since this conflicts with the sceptical premise advanced as line (1), so it follows that the sceptic can straightforwardly generate a contradiction and so motivate the denial of the assumption; that one knows the everyday proposition:

(5)  $\neg Ka [\neg SH] \ \& \ Ka [\neg SH]$  & Introduction, 1, 4.  
 (6)  $\neg Ka [O]$  *Reductio Ad Absurdum*, 3, 5.

And given that O ranges over a wide range of everyday propositions and that it is of no consequence who the epistemic agent is here, it follows that radical scepticism quickly ensues.

Consider, for instance, "external world" [EW] scepticism, which is scepticism about our knowledge of an objective world that has a character independently of our 'subjective' experience of it. In this case the argument runs as follows, where the sceptical hypothesis at issue is that there does not exist an external world, and 'O' refers to any proposition which assumes the existence of an external world (such as a belief about a specific physical object). The basic sceptical premise is thus that one does not know that it is false that there is no external world, or, equivalently, that one does not know that there is an external world, and the rest of the argument follows as before:

(1)  $\neg Ka [EW]$  'EW' Sceptical Premise.  
 (2)  $Ka [O \rightarrow EW]$  Knowledge of a Conceptual Truth.  
 (3)  $Ka [O]$  Assumed for *Reductio*.  
 (4)  $Ka [EW]$  Closure ('K<sub>C</sub>'), 2, 3.  
 (5)  $\neg Ka [EW] \ \& \ Ka [EW]$  & Introduction, 1, 4.  
 (6)  $\neg Ka [O]$  *Reductio Ad Absurdum*, 3, 5.

Of course, the interesting element of the sceptical argument is how support is motivated for the premise, but once this premise is in play the sceptic only needs the relatively uncontroversial Closure principle in order to get the paradox required. After all, what else might be questionable here? For example, given the patent truth of line (2), questioning this line of the argument can only play right into the sceptic's hands.

The most famous sceptical hypothesis is, of course, Descartes' *malin genie*, but, as we saw above, this hypothesis has, in the contemporary literature, been superseded by the less supernatural BIV scenario. As noted earlier, this states that you do not know that your brain is not currently envatted with your 'experiences' fabricated by a benevolent scientist stimulating your neural lobes.<sup>31</sup> In this case, we would get the following sceptical argument, where the sceptical hypothesis at issue is that the agent is presently a BIV, and 'O' refers to any proposition which is inconsistent with the agent's being a BIV (such as that he is currently seated):

(1)	$\neg Ka [\neg BIV]$	'BIV' Sceptical Premise.
(2)	$Ka [O \rightarrow \neg BIV]$	Knowledge of a Conceptual Truth.
(3)	$Ka [O]$	Assumed for <i>Reductio</i> .
(4)	$Ka [\neg BIV]$	Closure (' $K_C$ '), 2, 3.
(5)	$\neg Ka [\neg BIV] \ \& \ Ka [\neg BIV]$	& Introduction, 1, 4.
(6)	$\neg Ka [O]$	<i>Reductio Ad Absurdum</i> , 3, 5.

A similar argument will result for most sceptical hypotheses. Consider, for example, the 'Russellian Hypothesis' that the universe came into existence a few moments ago replete with the apparent traces of a distant ancestry, which encapsulates a certain sort of scepticism about the past. Since this sceptical hypothesis is inconsistent with most of our beliefs, it follows that if the sceptic could help himself to the reasoning employed here and the appropriate version of the sceptical premise, then he could effect the sceptical conclusion that most of our everyday beliefs (which assume the truth of the Russellian Hypothesis) lack sufficient epistemic sanction.

Exceptions to this schema are those sceptical hypotheses that turn on dreaming.

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<sup>31</sup> This characterisation of the BIV argument is significantly different to that proposed by Putnam since, as we noted in the last section, he needed to place certain restrictions on the scenario in order to run his argument.

The problem here is that, unlike the BIV scenario or the Russellian Hypothesis, the sceptical hypothesis that one is presently dreaming does not sever the ætiological link between the subject and the world. For instance, I cannot be both standing here and be a BIV, but I could be both standing here and still be dreaming. Although there are some everyday propositions which are inconsistent with my dreaming (such as propositions about my *agency*), it remains that many are not and thus that there isn't going to be an obvious way in which one can pick an 'O' proposition in order to generate the paradox.<sup>32</sup> However, although most of what I believe is not incompatible with my dreaming, my *knowledge* of what is believed is. That is, although it is not the case that standing here now entails that I am not dreaming, it is the case that my *knowing* that I am standing here now entails that I am not dreaming, since dreaming is a defeater for one's knowledge in this regard. Accordingly, if we are to run a counterpart of the above argument then we are going to have to make a few changes.

Before we do this, however, it is necessary to be clear as to *what* sceptical hypothesis is at issue here. After all, the sceptical worry cannot just be that I may be dreaming, since this possibility will hardly be sufficient to licence radical scepticism. It could well be, for instance, that I can, in general, tell my dreaming state apart from my waking state (is this not usually the case?), and thus the sceptic would not be able to motivate his sceptical premise in the first place. The sceptical scenario at issue, then, must be that I am *dreaming\**, where this involves dreams in the sense that so concerned Descartes - dreams which are phenomenologically indistinguishable from waking experience such that, in principle, there is no way of telling them apart.

With this in mind, let us take the relevant sceptical hypothesis to be that the agent is currently dreaming\* [ $\neg D$ ], and 'O' to be, as usual, a proposition which is

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<sup>32</sup> That said, to a lesser extent one might worry that similar considerations apply to the BIV hypothesis as well. After all, although such a hypothesis is inconsistent with most of my beliefs about, say, my body, it need not be inconsistent with most of my 'non-bodily' beliefs (that, for example, St. Andrews is roughly sixty miles east from Edinburgh). Accordingly, the worry might be that it is only the epistemic status of a restricted range of everyday beliefs that is *directly* impugned by BIV scepticism. For my own part, I think that such scepticism would directly call enough of our beliefs into question to qualify as a radical sceptical argument. Nevertheless, if the reader remains unconvinced, then he should simply regard the BIV argument as modified along the lines suggested for dreaming scepticism.

inconsistent with the sceptical hypothesis - for example, that the agent knows that he is currently standing (i.e.,  $Ka [St]$ ). Accordingly, we get the following argument:

- |     |                                       |                                     |
|-----|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| (1) | $\neg Ka [\neg D]$                    | 'D' Sceptical Premise.              |
| (2) | $Ka \{Ka [St] \rightarrow \neg D\}$   | Knowledge of a Conceptual Truth.    |
| (3) | $Ka \{Ka [St]\}$                      | Assumed for <i>Reductio</i> .       |
| (4) | $Ka [\neg D]$                         | Closure (' $K_C$ '), 2, 3.          |
| (5) | $\neg Ka [\neg D] \ \& \ Ka [\neg D]$ | & Introduction, 1, 4.               |
| (6) | $\neg Ka \{Ka [St]\}$                 | <i>Reductio Ad Absurdum</i> , 3, 5. |

The trouble with this conclusion is that it seems at least one step away from full-blown radical scepticism. That one lacks second-order knowledge of any particular everyday proposition may be unfortunate, but, in itself, this does not seem to *automatically* mean that one lacks first-order knowledge of that proposition. Conceivably, it may be that there are many propositions which we know but which we do not know that we know.

As we saw above in regard to the *impasse* constraint, however, provided it is legitimate to make use of the Iterativity principle - that if one knows a proposition,  $\emptyset$ , then one knows that one knows  $\emptyset$ , and *vice versa* - then we *will* be able translate this lack of second-order knowledge into a lack of first-order knowledge:<sup>33</sup>

- |     |                |                             |
|-----|----------------|-----------------------------|
| (7) | $\neg Ka [St]$ | Iterativity (' $I_K$ '), 6. |
|-----|----------------|-----------------------------|

As I remarked earlier, I shall be exploring some of the objections made to this principle in a later chapter. For the time being, however, since we are supposed to be working, in the first instance at least, with our epistemological intuitions, it ought to be uncontentious to take this highly intuitive principle for granted.<sup>34</sup>

#### §4. The Intuitions at Stake.

As with any paradox, the sceptical paradox arises from the conjunction of intuitions (some perhaps less intuitive than others). Accordingly, the key to both answering and diagnosing the sceptical paradox is showing which 'intuition' (or intuitions) is leading us astray. If the answer to scepticism involves highlighting how the sceptical paradox is

<sup>33</sup> Alternatively, one could simply take first-order knowledge of the contested proposition as the assumption at line (3), and then iterate it to the second-order knowledge needed to employ the Closure principle.

<sup>34</sup> Or, at least, its 'modalized' counterpart. See footnote 13.

not actually a paradox at all, then this will also involve illustrating that, contrary to initial appearances, a certain claim (or set of claims) which we took to be intuitive was not actually intuitive at all.

By stating each of the intuitions at stake in the sceptical argument, we not only get a clearer idea of what is going on in the sceptical debate, we also get a mapping of the anti-sceptical terrain. For insofar as we are highlighting an intuition we are also highlighting something that can be denied as a means of evading the sceptical paradox.

I take the central intuitions at stake here to be the following:

1. The sceptical premise is true.
2. Knowledge is closed under known entailment.
3. We know all sorts of everyday propositions.
4. Attributions of knowledge are not indexed to a context; they apply universally.<sup>35</sup>

As we saw above, the sceptical paradox gets under way by seizing upon a certain pivotal proposition which, it is claimed, we do not know. The sceptic then uses (in line with intuition (1)) this supposedly unobjectionable premise in order to get the paradox up-and-running. Given that knowledge is closed under known entailment - (i.e., that, in line with intuition (2), the Closure principle is sound) - then it naturally follows that we do not know many everyday propositions, so conflicting with intuition (3). Moreover, it does not appear plausible to think, *à la* intuition (4), that the sceptical conclusion is indexed to a certain special context in any way (more on this below), and so we seem compelled to accept the sceptical conclusion in its full generality.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> One might think that there ought to be (at least) one more intuition added to this list - that we *understand* the sceptical argument. After all, many responses to scepticism function by denying this intuition. For the reasons given in §2, however, I shall disregard serious consideration of this possibility. Either such an approach will essentially depend upon the sceptical argument being advanced by an *opponent* (and so abuse the adversary constraint), or, *à la* Putnam and Davidson, it will be unable to hit to the heart of the sceptical argument. In any case, most anti-sceptical strategies of this kind also involve the rejection of one of the other intuitions listed above, and so will be considered by default. Cavell [1979], for instance, not only denies that the sceptical doubt is meaningful, he also maintains the 'Tractarian' position of arguing that there is a "deep human truth" in scepticism, so revealing an affinity with those who deny the third intuition. He writes:

[...] the truth of skepticism, or what I might call the moral of skepticism, [... *is*] that the human creature's basis in the world as a whole, its relation to the world as such, is not that of knowing, anyway not what we think of as knowing. [Cavell 1979, p. 241]

If the denial of the third intuition is exposed as a flawed anti-sceptical strategy then this will dispose of Cavell's position even if it does not directly engage with the other elements of his stance.

<sup>36</sup> As we have just seen, the Dreaming sceptical argument does require a further epistemic rule, Iterativity, and so it may be thought that a further intuition is required which states the intuitiveness of

Denying our first intuition - that the sceptical premise is true - has been, historically, the most popular. (Indeed, until quite recently it was thought to be a prerequisite of a theory of knowledge that it supply a positive result as regards propositions of this sort - that it should show that we *do* know that we are not BIVs, or perpetually slumbering, and so forth). The attraction of this tactic ought to be obvious. Whereas denying one of the other three intuitions listed here merely constitutes a way of *containing* the sceptical argument once it is up and running - either by finding some accommodation of the sceptical conclusion (i.e., denying intuition (3)), or by restricting the scope of its reasoning (i.e., denying either intuition (2) or (4)) - this approach goes right to the heart of the problem by attacking the sceptical argument at its source.

That said, we have already rejected one influential form of this style of response - namely, the Moorean attempt to *reason* one's way to the denial of the sceptical premise. Fortunately, however, this is not the only form that this response takes. For instance, those who maintain that scepticism and realism are inextricably linked are often inclined to believe that by making truth epistemically constrained in some way they can get an acceptable warrant for such hypotheses, and thereby knowledge (traditionally, these thinkers have been coherence theorists). Accordingly, the rejection of this intuition is meant to reflect the rejection of some broader intuition about objectivity. And, as I hope to show in this thesis, this is not the only way to motivate support for the denial of the sceptical premise. The prospects for this anti-sceptical line of argument will be considered in chapters three and four.

The motivations for denying the second intuition, and thus the highly intuitive<sup>37</sup> principle of Closure vary, but the core thought can be found in the *locus classicus* of this approach due to Robert Nozick [1981]. He proposes a subjunctive conditional account of knowledge which holds, in essence, that a subject knows a certain proposition if, and

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this principle. Given the special nature of this requirement in the context of the sceptical debate at large, coupled with the fact that I do not think there is anything contentious about this use of the Iterativity principle in this context, I think we can by-pass this complication.

<sup>37</sup> That this is so is admitted by even its most ardent detractors [e.g. Nozick 1981, p. 242; cf. pp. 205-6]. Nozick [1981, p. 242] even goes so far as to endorse the following conditional: "if our notion of knowledge was as strong as we naturally tend to think (namely, closed under known entailment) then the sceptic would be right."

only if, his belief appropriately ‘tracks’ the truth of that proposition in the nearest possible world in which that proposition is false. Since (as we shall see below) one is unable, *ex hypothesi*, to track the truth (or otherwise) of sceptical hypotheses, it follows that I can never know that they do not obtain. Nevertheless, the knowledge that we take ourselves to have in quotidian contexts is saved since this characterisation of knowledge does not preclude the fact that our beliefs will track these ‘local’ claims sufficiently. So provided we are able to take this account of knowledge as issuing in a fully-fledged refutation of the Closure principle, then we can ‘insulate’ our everyday knowledge from sceptical attack - my lack of knowledge of the sceptical premise need not conflict with my everyday knowledge.<sup>38</sup> The anti-sceptical efficacy of denials of our second intuition will be explored in chapter four.

Of course, as with any paradox, one possibility (perhaps the boldest) of dealing with the situation is to bite the bullet and accept the conclusion (thus denying intuition (3)), perhaps reconstructed in some more palatable form. The idea would be to agree with the sceptic that, strictly speaking, we do not know many of the propositions that we think we know, but further argue that such a conclusion is not yet tantamount to scepticism. The most pressing difficulty that any “non-epistemic” approach of this sort faces is to explain how it meets the epistemic constraint proposed above. Clearly, if the strategy simply maintained that we should continue to believe various propositions even though these beliefs lack sufficient epistemic support, then it would be wholly ineffective as an anti-sceptical strategy. Indeed, as in the classical case considered in §1, this is sometimes the self-conscious intent - to accede to the truth of scepticism and try to live in the light of its devastation. As such, it does not represent a response to

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<sup>38</sup> The other main proponent of this view, Fred Dretske [1970; cf., 1971; 1981a; 1981b; 1991], takes a similar line. He argues for a certain account of knowledge and justification that is responsive to actual “relevant” alternatives in the assessment of a particular claim to knowledge. Thus, in normal circumstances, my claim to know that the creature I see in the zebra pen at the zoo (which looks exactly like a zebra) is sound, even though I lack evidence which would be sufficient to rule-out the *irrelevant* alternative that it is not a cleverly disguised mule that I am looking at. I can therefore know a proposition (that the animal before me is a zebra), know that this proposition entails a second proposition (that the creature I am looking at is not a cleverly disguised mule), without thereby knowing the second proposition. Dretske thus offers an account of knowledge that entails the denial of the Closure principle for knowledge.

scepticism as such, but rather constitutes a means through which we can abide the sceptical conclusion.

The proposal need not, however, be nearly so fatalistic. The effectiveness of the view as an *anti*-sceptical strategy depends upon how sophisticated it is at reconfiguring our conception of the epistemological landscape in response to the sceptical threat such that the lack of direct epistemic support for our beliefs that the sceptic seizes upon need not be any spur for radical sceptical doubt. I will examine what this claim amounts to in chapter two.

One final style of response open to the anti-sceptic is to try to maintain that the sceptical argument, though perfectly valid, is not universally applicable. That is, that the sceptical conclusion only follows in a particular sort of context of inquiry, one which is altogether different, and epistemologically isolated from, the everyday context in which most knowledge claims are made. This 'Contextualist' line denies the final intuition on our list which might be crudely expressed as saying that if scepticism is true anywhere, then it is true everywhere. Although this is not perhaps an 'intuition' in the same sense as the other three, it is meant to be a contention that one would, on reflection, be willing to assent to. The advantage of this view is that one can in principle argue both that one lacks knowledge of much of what one believes *and* that one has knowledge of much of what one believes. For it now follows that one can assert apparently contradictory knowledge ascriptions provided one indexes them to a particular context of inquiry. Moreover, the sceptical premise and its conclusion can be simultaneously allowed even whilst retaining the Closure principle. I will examine the prospects for this account in chapter five.

# NON-EPISTEMIC RESPONSES TO SCEPTICISM\*

## Chapter Two

### §1. Preamble.

Before undertaking an investigation into whether the sceptic has indeed shown that we lack knowledge of the pivotal propositions that can feature as the premise in a sceptical argument - such as the claim that we are not BIVs or not in a state of perpetual slumber - I want to evaluate a distinctive approach to scepticism which does not depend upon such an investigation. Whereas most anti-sceptical approaches endeavour to illustrate that, contrary to appearances, the sceptical paradox employs a false premise or an invalid inference, the strategy that I shall be considering in this chapter makes (essentially at least) no such claim. Rather the point behind this style of response is to both concede the validity of the argumentation offered by the sceptic whilst nevertheless maintaining that the particular sceptical construal of the conclusion of that argument does not follow. The way this is achieved is by conceding that the sceptic has identified a class of basic propositions our belief in which lacks sufficient epistemic sanction, whilst nevertheless contending that this need be no spur for scepticism since such epistemic sanction is, in these cases at least, not required. The charge is thus that the sceptical argument, whilst essentially correct, misses its target because it fails to recognise that certain pivotal beliefs can be entirely legitimate even though they lack, at root, epistemic buttress. Accordingly, I shall refer to such approaches as “non-epistemic” solutions to scepticism.

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\* Material from this chapter was presented at a number of conferences. The first half of the chapter received an outing in April 1998 as part of a paper entitled ‘Scepticism, Rationality and “Hinge” Propositions’ which was presented at the University of Edinburgh’s ‘Language, Logic and Mind’ conference. Analisa Coliva responded. A revised version of that paper - entitled ‘Subverting the Sceptic’ - which also included material that now forms part of the second-half of chapter two, was presented later on in that year at the annual ‘Analytic Philosophy’ conference at the University of Sheffield. Lucy Burroughs responded and Ben Young acted as chair. A more general paper entitled ‘Non-Epistemic Solutions to Scepticism’, which closely resembles the present composition of this chapter, was presented at the ‘Phenomenology and Mind’ conference at the University of Southampton early in 1999. Aaron Ridley acted as chair. Finally, a more polished version of the second-half of this chapter - now accorded the title ‘Scepticism and Dreaming’ - was presented at the ‘Analytic Philosophy’ conference at Oxford University in February 1999. Bill Brewer responded. My thanks go to all the audiences, with special thanks to the chairs, respondents, and Mike Martin, Stephen Mulhall and Timothy Williamson. ‘Scepticism and Dreaming’ is forthcoming in *Philosophia* [Pritchard 2000d].

One might think that there is an entirely direct way of dismissing such a manoeuvre. After all, does not the epistemic constraint demand that any adequate solution to the sceptical paradox must *resurrect*, if only in principle, the epistemic status challenged by the sceptic? Although this is true, however, one cannot dismiss this style of response so easily. For even though the cruder renderings of this strategy may well directly fall foul of this constraint, it is far from clear that the same applies to the more sophisticated versions. This is due to two common features of the non-epistemic response. First, it tends to employ a radically different conception of the epistemological project that is based around the Wittgensteinian notion of a “hinge” proposition. Second, (and, as we shall see, relatedly), by conceding to the sceptic that our basic beliefs lack *direct* epistemic sanction it does not thereby concede that they lack *any* kind of epistemic support. Though this may seem at first to be an implausible distinction, there is a subtle form of argument underlying it. Crudely put, the idea is that a lack of direct epistemic buttress need not entail a lack of indirect or ‘default’ epistemic support. If this is so, then the ‘non-epistemic’ solution to scepticism would, paradoxically, turn out to be offering an epistemic solution after all.

## §2. Wittgenstein on “Hinge” Propositions.

In his final notebooks, published as On Certainty, Wittgenstein [1969] offers a sustained (though fragmentary) examination of a number of epistemological issues. Central to this examination is his conception of a certain type of proposition that performs a peculiar epistemic role. One of the ways in which Wittgenstein characterises this sort of proposition is through the metaphor of the “hinge”:

[...] the *questions* that we raise and our *doubts* depend upon the fact that some propositions are exempt from doubt, are as it were like hinges on which those turn.

That is to say, it belongs to the logic of our scientific investigations that certain things are *in deed* not doubted.

But it isn't that the situation is like this: We just *can't* investigate everything, and for that reason we are forced to rest content with assumption. If I want the door to turn, the hinges must stay put. [Wittgenstein 1969, §§341-3]<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Henceforth, references to On Certainty will be given in the text as ‘OC’. Although the “hinge” metaphor is the dominant metaphor at work in this book, it is accompanied by various other descriptions such as the following: that these propositions constitute the “scaffolding” of our thoughts [OC §211]; that they form the “foundations of our language-games” [OC §§401-3]; and also that they represent the

Wittgenstein argues that it is essential to our practices that certain propositions should perform a framework role that exempts them from coherent doubt. To say that there exists a class of propositions which are in some sense methodologically exempt from doubt poses a direct challenge to any form of scepticism that attempts to question those propositions. Nevertheless, as this quotation intimates, Wittgenstein is not here suggesting that, *contra* the sceptic, there are straightforward epistemic grounds available to warrant the role that these propositions play. Rather the point is that these propositions are exempt from doubt for *wholly* methodological reasons, and what is methodologically grounded is not, of course, *thereby* epistemically grounded. The standard interpretation of the Wittgensteinian thesis in this respect - the interpretation that I shall be focusing upon in this chapter - regards him as straightforwardly arguing that these propositions (at least when taken individually) actually *lack* epistemic sanction. On this reading, when Wittgenstein says that these propositions perform a “peculiar logical role in the system of our empirical propositions” [OC §136; cf. §213],<sup>2</sup> the role he has in mind involves them being exempt from doubt *even despite* their lack of epistemic sanction. If such a claim can be worked through then it has the potential to show that the sceptical doubt is incoherent whilst nonetheless conceding a large part of the phenomenology of scepticism - that the beliefs that the sceptic questions do indeed lack sufficient epistemic support.

The remarks in On Certainty tend to congregate around Moore’s response to the external world sceptic that we considered in the last chapter. Recall that Moore argued that, because he possessed a wide range of evidence to support his belief in this respect,

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implicit “world-picture” from within which we inquire, the “inherited background against which [*we*] distinguish between true and false” [OC §§94-5].

<sup>2</sup> In support of this contention, Wittgenstein offers the observation that the manner in which we acquire our belief in hinge propositions is different to how it arises as regards other empirical propositions. He stresses that we are not explicitly taught hinge propositions but rather “swallow them down” [OC §143] along with the system of beliefs that forms our accepted world-view. Rather than being explicitly grounded in experience, they are rather what is taken for granted in any account of experience. For instance, one might be taught what one can do with one’s hands, or the words with which one may describe them, but it is rare to be told *that* one has two hands [OC §§152-3, 279, 315-17 & 374]. In a similar vein, Wittgenstein insists that hinge propositions are not to be thought of as mere hypotheses but rather as elements within one’s “world picture” [OC §167].

it followed that he *knew* that he had two hands and thus, since hands are physical objects, he *knew* that there is an external world. So whereas the sceptic argues from doubt of a 'general' anti-sceptical proposition, concerning (in this case) the existence of the external world, to doubt of a class of everyday propositions which presuppose the truth of this general proposition; Moore argues from his putative knowledge of one of the contested everyday propositions to knowledge of the general anti-sceptical proposition. The fundamental component of Wittgenstein's critique of Moore is the claim that in arguing in this way Moore has misdescribed our epistemic practice by treating a hinge proposition as if it were just straightforwardly empirical. Wittgenstein focuses upon Moore's claim to know *p*, "I have two hands", in this respect. Moore says that he knows *p* and, furthermore, that his knowledge of this proposition is evidentially supported (he says that he can *see* that he has two hands and so forth). This initial contention that Moore makes is pivotal because once this knowledge claim is secured, the anti-sceptical conclusion follows relatively unproblematically. If one *does* know that one has two hands (and knows that having hands entails that there is an external world), then, intuitively at least, one must know that there is an external world.<sup>3</sup>

What is interesting about Wittgenstein's discussion of Moore is that, rather than focusing on the strength of Moore's case for his knowledge that *p* in the light of the sort of sceptical hypotheses that Moore had in mind, he instead argues that, independently of sceptical concerns, Moore's claim to know *p* is out of place. This is because *p* is, in normal circumstances at least, a hinge proposition, and this means that not only is it indubitable in those circumstances, it is also exempt from an epistemic evaluation.

For instance, Wittgenstein argues that the evidential grounds that Moore adduces to support his knowledge of *p* are entirely irrelevant. What makes *p* certain, and therefore exempt from doubt, is not the fact that it enjoys a high degree of evidential support,<sup>4</sup> but rather that it performs a framework role in normal circumstances. It is

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<sup>3</sup> That is, provided the Closure principle for knowledge is acceptable. At any rate, Wittgenstein is certainly willing to grant this principle a *prima facie* plausibility. As he notes, *pace* Moore, in the very first passage of *On Certainty*, "If you do know that *here is one hand*, we'll grant you all the rest." [OC §1]

<sup>4</sup> Some commentators, such as Stroll [1984, pp. 47-8], do take Wittgenstein to be suggesting that certain propositions are hinges due to their high level of evidential support. Stroll seems to be misled by certain

because  $p$  performs this role that we are unwilling to let anything count against it, since whatever could count against it could be no more certain than  $p$  itself. Equally, however, it is mistaken to think, as Moore does, that evidence counts in favour of this proposition either. As Wittgenstein stresses, if evidence is to be coherently thought of as counting as a ground for belief in a certain proposition, then that evidence must be regarded as being more certain than the belief itself. The trouble is, however, this is not possible in the case of a hinge proposition such as  $p$  because *nothing* is more certain than this proposition. Here is Wittgenstein:

My having two hands is, in normal circumstances, as certain as anything that I could produce in evidence for it.

That is why I am not in a position to take the sight of my hand as evidence for it. [OC §250]

Moore's belief in  $p$  cannot be coherently thought of as grounded by the sight of his hands (as he alleges), since it is not plausible to think that he is more certain of his sight than he is of the existence of his hands. This is illustrated by the fact that if one were to seriously doubt something so certain as whether or not one had hands, then why should one trust the evidence of one's sight? If, in normal circumstances, the former is open to doubt, then so, surely, is the latter [OC §125]. The idea, then, is that we cannot view these sorts of propositions as being on an epistemic par with ordinary empirical propositions that can be both evidentially grounded and coherently doubted. Even though they exhibit the same empirical form (they are contingent and so forth), they perform a completely different epistemic role.

Wittgenstein thus distinguishes between the non-epistemically grounded features of our practices which exempt hinge propositions such as  $p$  from doubt, and those epistemic features which support the use of epistemic terms such as "justified" and "know".<sup>5</sup> In particular, he notes that the practice of acquiring epistemic support for one's beliefs *presupposes* one's acceptance of certain hinge propositions. As a

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locutions that Wittgenstein utilises, especially the phrase "everything speaks for it, and nothing against it" [e.g. OC §§190-1]. As Wittgenstein is keen to point out however, this does not indicate an *evidential* support at all, but rather a kind of *agreement* that this proposition should not be doubted [e.g. OC §166].

<sup>5</sup> As Wittgenstein puts it at one point, " 'Knowledge' and 'certainty' belong to different *categories*" [OC §308].

consequence, one cannot coherently acquire epistemic support for one's belief in a hinge proposition. Moore's mistake thus lies, in the first instance, in his failure to realise that the privileged role that  $p$  plays which makes it exempt from doubt (in normal circumstances) and thereby apparently suitable for his use in a proof of the existence of the external world, is the very sort of role that excludes it from coherently entering into an epistemic evaluation.<sup>6</sup>

By way of illustration of this point, consider Wittgenstein's critique of Moore's choice of  $p$  as an instance of an empirical proposition that entails the existence of the external world. Moore's contention seems to be that *any* empirical proposition which was sufficiently grounded and which entailed the existence of an external world would do, and this, Wittgenstein alleges, reveals a lack of understanding of the sort of epistemic role that a proposition like  $p$  can play. For instance, why does Moore not use a proposition concerning the existence of another planet?:

"Doubting the existence of the external world" does not mean for example doubting the existence of a planet, which later observations proved to exist. - Or does Moore want to say that knowing that here is a hand is different in kind from knowing the existence of the planet Saturn? Otherwise it would be possible to point out the discovery of the planet Saturn to the doubters and say that its existence has been proved, and hence the existence of the external world as well. [OC §20]

It would indeed seem to be ridiculous to try to prove the existence of the external world on this astronomical basis in any way that would convince the sceptic. This provokes the challenge of why this should be so since, absent a relevant distinction between the epistemic status of our beliefs about Saturn and about the existence of our hands, it appears that either of these propositions should be able to serve the purpose equally well. Intuitively, the only relevant difference is that a proposition like  $p$  has *more* evidential support, and thus that it is this feature of our belief that enables it to play the foundational role that Moore had in mind. This contention is problematic, however, since insofar as one regards one's belief in  $p$  as possessing sufficient evidential support, then why should one find the evidential support accorded to one's belief in the

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<sup>6</sup> As Wittgenstein himself puts it, "Moore's mistake lies in this - countering the assertion that one cannot know that, by saying "I do know it." " [OC §521]

existence of Saturn lacking? That is, the evidential distinction between these two propositions reflects, at best, a difference of degree, and therefore fails to explain the apparent difference in *kind* at work here.

Wittgenstein's diagnosis of this situation is to argue that the reason why Moore does not mobilise his belief in the existence of Saturn (or any other non-hinge empirical belief for that matter) in the face of scepticism is precisely because this is a proposition that has *mere* evidential support. His use of *p*, on the other hand, is meant to reflect the fact that there is a class of pivotal propositions which are accorded a degree of certainty which goes beyond an evidential grounding. Moore is not certain of *p* because he has excellent grounds for his belief in *p* (since no item of evidence is certain enough to ground the 'super-certainty' attached to this belief), but rather because the role that this proposition plays in our epistemic practices is such that it lies outwith the arena of epistemic evaluation. This is meant to be illustrated by how doubt of the existence of the planet Saturn is entirely different from doubt concerning the existence of one's hand, where the difference is not simply one of degree (as if the latter were merely supported by a greater amount of evidence):

For it is not true that a mistake gets more and more improbable as we pass from the planet to my own hand. No: at some point it has ceased to be conceivable. [OC §54]

Unlike doubt about the existence of Saturn, doubting whether or not I have hands is, in normal circumstances, utterly incoherent. In the first instance this is because, due to the framework role that hinges play, to doubt this proposition is thereby to doubt *most* of our beliefs (which are less certain than *p*) *all at once* [cf. OC §§370, 490, 613]. In the second, it is because just as nothing can empirically ground belief in this proposition, so nothing can ground *doubt* in it either, since whatever could constitute a ground for doubt would always be more open to doubt than *p* itself. As a result, the doubt of *p*, unlike doubt in the existence of Saturn, would be of an entirely *arbitrary* nature.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, Wittgenstein argues that one cannot, strictly speaking, be accused of making a *mistake* if one doubts a hinge proposition. This is because mistakes are accounted for in terms of *reasons*, but there could be no reasons that would explain one's doubt of a hinge proposition. If, in normal circumstances, one doubted *p*, then, given that such a doubt is necessarily groundless, so one's doubt can only be

Furthermore, Wittgenstein contends that in the unusual circumstances in which  $p$  does play an everyday empirical role which is akin to a proposition about the existence of Saturn, it is entirely irrelevant to the sceptical debate [OC §§23, 347, 349, 387, 412, 483-4, 526, 596 & 622]. An example of such an abnormal circumstance would be where someone has just stumbled out of the debris of an explosion without any feeling of his hands. In such cases,  $p$  fails to perform a hinge role since in these abnormal cases  $p$  would no longer be accorded the degree of certainty that is typically reserved for it. As a result, one could coherently claim knowledge of such a proposition on evidential grounds (one could, for instance, coherently use one's sight in order to check to see that one's hands are still intact). Crucially, however, Moore's claim to know  $p$  is not made in such an abnormal circumstance, for if it were then it would be odd that he should take such a belief to offer sufficient grounds to support his belief in the existence of an external world. Moore is thus caught in a bind. Either his belief in  $p$  is completely certain as he claims, in which case  $p$  is a hinge proposition and so not a candidate for the requisite epistemic evaluation; or  $p$  is a candidate for an epistemic evaluation, in which case it lacks the special property of being a hinge proposition which is treated as absolutely certain.

Wittgenstein expands upon this train of thought by offering the following general remarks concerning what qualifies as a meaningful use of the expression "to know" according to the rules of "normal linguistic interchange" [OC §260]. This is meant to support the contention that saying that one knows a hinge proposition is not analogous to merely asserting something which, though true, is superfluous, but rather akin to someone saying "good morning" in the middle of a conversation [OC §464; cf. OC §350]. In short, it offends against the *grammar* of epistemological claims [OC §§10, 111-2, 116, 151, 243, 347-50, 372, 414, 461, 468-9 & 576].<sup>8</sup>

Wittgenstein argues, for instance, that one can only coherently claim knowledge when one is in a position to say *how* one knows. But since hinge propositions are not

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accounted for in causal terms which eschew the use of reasons (e.g. in terms of a mental disturbance) [OC §§70ff., 155ff., 196, 300-4, 420, 512-6, 647 & 674-5].

<sup>8</sup> For discussion of these constraints, see Kenny [1983, chapter 11], and Stroll [1984, chapter 8].

evidentially grounded, this can never be adequately done [OC §§14ff., 23, 438, 441, 483-4, 550-1, 564, 574 & 576].<sup>9</sup> Imagine, for example, that one attempted to legitimate one's claim to know  $p$  by appealing to the evidence that one has for  $p$ ; regarding what one sees and what one has been told in this respect and so forth. In what way is this explanation to serve any role if all the evidence adduced in support of  $p$  is itself less secure than  $p$ ? As Wittgenstein puts the matter:

One says "I know" when one is ready to give compelling grounds. "I know" relates to a possibility of demonstrating the truth. Whether someone knows something can come to light, assuming that he is convinced of it.

But if what he believes is of such a kind that the grounds he can give are no surer than his assertion, then he cannot say that he knows what he believes. [OC §243]

As we have seen, one of the distinguishing features of a hinge proposition is that nothing (at least in normal circumstances) is more certain than it, and so there is no parcel of evidence available which would be able to serve this supporting function. Accordingly, Wittgenstein remarks that instead of saying that he *knows* a proposition like  $p$ , Moore should have more honestly claimed that such a proposition "stands fast for me" [OC §116; cf. OC §253].<sup>10</sup>

In a related vein, Wittgenstein argues that a claim to know, if it is to be coherent, must be *informative*, and this element is clearly lacking in the case of a hinge proposition. For one thing, insofar as Moore does indeed know  $p$  then (*mutatis mutandis*) everyone else does as well. Accordingly, Moore's use of the phrase "I know ..." is at best misleading since it generates the conversational implicature<sup>11</sup> that Moore has some

<sup>9</sup> Austin makes a similar point in a number of places. See, for example, Austin [1961, pp. 99-100].

<sup>10</sup> In a related fashion, Wittgenstein argues that just as one cannot say how one knows a hinge proposition, so one cannot say how one might go about convincing someone of the truth of a hinge proposition either. For instance, how *does* one persuade someone who, in normal circumstances, doubts whether or not he has two hands? (Imagine, for example, that he concedes that he, and everyone else around him for that matter, seems to see his hands). And if we did convince him, how could we account for this? [OC §§257 & 428] If, in normal circumstances, he does not believe a proposition like  $p$ , then it seems that no amount of empirical evidence (which will, perforce, be less certain than the hinge itself) will, or could, satisfy him. Indeed, Wittgenstein argues that although we can imagine a situation wherein someone acted-out his doubt of a hinge proposition, we could make no sense of such a person (we could not regard this person as rational). The doubt would be regarded as a sign of insanity, misunderstanding, or as being merely rhetorical (perhaps as a joke [OC §463]).

<sup>11</sup> I say more about conversational implicature in chapter three. For now, the reader should simply take this to be any inference which an agent can draw from an assertion (but which need not be entailed by what is asserted) provided that they are entitled to assume that the person making the assertion is honest, co-operative and (at least otherwise) rational.

special access to the epistemic buttress of the embedded proposition.

One way in which Wittgenstein develops this thought is via the contention that the “I” in “I know that *p*” is superfluous [OC §§58 & 587-8]. The qualification implies a set of relations both to knowledge and to a person such that it purportedly adds something extra to the content of the expression “*p*”. But if the certainty accorded to these propositions is common to everyone (at least in normal circumstances) then there is no sense to the idea that Moore has some special knowledge which is unavailable to others, or that he possesses information which he, but not others, have acquired [OC §§84, 100, 401, 462 & 466].<sup>12</sup> To support this contention Wittgenstein points out that ‘I know’ only has a meaning when it is uttered by a person (it would be meaningless if, say, a sign at a zoo claimed that “I know this is a zebra” [OC §588]). And since it is indifferent to the epistemic content of *p* whether or not it is preceded by the claim “I know” so the use of the first-person pronoun is at best misleading.

In general, then, Wittgenstein argues that a coherent assertion of knowledge implies (in the standard case) both that one has sufficient evidential grounds which can support one’s claim (which are more certain than the belief in question), and that these grounds are peculiar to one’s vantage point. Both of these attributes are lacking when one claims to know a hinge proposition.<sup>13,14</sup>

However, that it is incoherent to claim knowledge of a hinge proposition only directly impacts against Moorean anti-scepticism, it does not obviously undermine radical scepticism itself since this is precisely the sort of contention which the sceptic

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<sup>12</sup> A *prima facie* objection to this analysis could be the existence of the sort of ‘subjective’ hinges that Wittgenstein offers. They include propositions like “My name is D. P.” [e.g. OC §§628-9], which are indexed to an individual; propositions such as “I have not been to the moon in the last year” [e.g. OC §§661-2], which are indexed to a certain historical period; and propositions like “I speak English” [e.g. OC §§70 & 486] which are indexed to a certain cultural/geographical location. However, one can generalise these examples in the following way by taking the first to be something like “My name is N. N.”, and, (a more problematic suggestion), consider the second and third types of example as hinges only insofar as they are standardly treated as such in quotidian conversational contexts.

<sup>13</sup> It has been suggested [Stroll 1984, chapter 1; DeRose 1988], that the bulk of these conditions were actually derived from remarks on Moore’s arguments made by Malcolm [1949].

<sup>14</sup> There are obvious parallels between Wittgenstein’s remarks on the epistemic status of hinge propositions and his earlier notes on avowals [Wittgenstein 1953]. For a pertinent discussion, which also includes an assessment of Wittgenstein’s analogous ‘non-cognitive’ claims for avowals and an outline of a ‘criterial’ semantics based upon these Wittgensteinian insights, see Hacker [1972, especially chapters IX & X; cf. McDowell 1982; Wright 1992].

himself is inclined to make. Accordingly, the natural question that one might ask here is why it is that these remarks do not play right into the hands of the sceptic? After all, although Wittgenstein does adduce some grounds for believing that to doubt a hinge proposition is incoherent (since it is both utterly subversive and entirely arbitrary), such considerations are clearly only *pragmatic* in nature. The sceptic can consistently allow that to doubt in the manner that he propounds would result in incoherent conclusions without thereby giving up his claim that, pragmatic considerations aside, one nevertheless *ought* to doubt these propositions. Indeed, this point is further exacerbated by the fact that Wittgenstein, on this interpretation at least, seems to be agreeing with the sceptic that we do not know these propositions. If the only thing that constrains us from doubting them is that it offends against the contingent manner in which our epistemic practices are constructed, then this would seem to constitute an argument for changing the framework of our epistemic practices, not leaving them as they are and thus preserving the hinge role that these propositions are held to play.

This is no direct criticism of Wittgenstein, of course, since he can hardly be held to account for incomplete notebooks. But it does indicate that any use of this hinge proposition thesis must add something substantive to the account in order to turn it from a fledgling idea into a developed anti-sceptical strategy. We will now consider how such an amendment might go.

### §3. "Hinge" Propositions, Non-Factuality and Neo-Humean Naturalism.

One important development of the hinge proposition thesis is due to Crispin Wright [1985], who argues that we can utilise hinge propositions as a means of defusing a standard form of radical scepticism. He focuses on external world scepticism in this respect, offering the following I-II-III reconstruction of the sceptical argument:

- |      |                |   |
|------|----------------|---|
| I.   | E <sub>0</sub> | [A suitable description of the agent's experience.] |
| II.  | P <sub>1</sub> | I have a hand.                                      |
| III. |                |   |
| C    |                | There is an external world.                         |

The anti-sceptic (such as Moore) may be inclined to argue that on the basis of his

experience (the 'data' contained in  $E_0$ ), he is entitled to infer (albeit defeasibly), that he has a hand (as in  $P_1$ ), and thus, since the having of hands entails that there is an external world, deduce that there is an external world (C). In reply, the sceptic notes (with Wright's agreement) that  $E_0$  is only evidence that could support a warrant for one's belief in  $P_1$  provided one *already* has a warrant for one's belief in C. If one's belief in C were to lack an independent warrant, then so too would the  $E_0$ - $P_1$  inference since there would then be no good reason for thinking that experience should be a reliable guide as to physical objects. As a result, it would be question-begging to support one's belief in C on the basis of an  $E_0$ - $P_1$  inference.

Wright illustrates this point by comparing the anti-sceptical argument with the following chain of reasoning:

- |      |        |   |
|------|--------|---|
| I.   | $E_0'$ | Jones has just written an 'X' on that piece of paper. |
| II.  | $P_1'$ | Jones has just voted.                                 |
|      |        |   |
| III. | $C'$   | An election is taking place.                          |

In this example any warrant one might adduce for believing that  $E_0'$  licences a warranted belief in  $P_1'$  (which entails  $C'$ ) is dependent upon the possession of an independent warrant for believing  $C'$ , since without such a warrant for  $C'$  one would have no reason for thinking that  $E_0'$  should be able to support a warrant for belief in  $P_1'$ . As Wright notes, if one were to live in a society in which electoral 'drills' were common, then merely witnessing someone writing an 'X' on a piece of paper would, in itself, be unable to support the claim that an election is taking place, and thus, derivatively, that the person in question had just voted. Accordingly, if one lacks an antecedent warrant for one's belief in  $C'$ , then one lacks a warrant for believing that  $E_0'$  is able to support a warranted belief in  $P_1'$ . Arguing for a warrant for  $C'$  via  $E_0'$  and  $P_1'$  would thus be question-begging.

However, and here is the crux of the matter, unlike the external world case, independent empirical grounds for the type-III proposition *are*, in principle, available in the 'voting' case (we could ask a reliable informant for instance). It is (at least according

to the model that Wright offers us) a peculiar feature of a 'scepticism-prone' type-III proposition like C that the empirical data that might ground warranted belief in this proposition is only fit for the purpose provided one already *assumes* a prior warrant for one's belief in the scepticism-prone proposition. Absent *a priori* grounds for such a warrant (which Wright believes are not forthcoming), there is thus no non-question-begging route to acquiring a warrant for one's belief in the existence of the external world. Consequently, the sceptic contends that our belief in the existence of the external world is not only ungrounded, but also *ungroundable*.<sup>15</sup>

Wright characterises the sceptical thesis in this respect in terms of the *non-factuality* of the contested propositions. He argues for the following characterisation of *factuality*:

F<sub>W</sub>: The members of a class of statements are factual only if it is possible to explain what would constitute cognitive abilities commensurate to the task of acquiring knowledge of, or sufficient reason for believing, statements in that class. [Wright 1985, p. 457]<sup>16</sup>

Given that these propositions are, according to the sceptic, in principle immune to the sort of cognitive abilities cited in F<sub>W</sub>, so it follows that, by the lights of this characterisation of the concept, they are non-factual.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, Wright thinks that this element of the sceptical thesis can actually be used against it.

Wright's idea is that since the sort of propositions that the sceptic doubts fail to be factual, it follows that the sceptic will be unable to criticise our belief in them by virtue of their lack of evidential support. That is, the sceptic wants to censure our claim to know these propositions - he wants to argue that they are factual propositions which,

<sup>15</sup> According to Wright [1985, p. 437; 1991, p. 87n], what applies to external world scepticism will apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to scepticism about the reality of the past (that, for instance, the universe did not come into existence five minutes ago), and scepticism about other minds. Unlike BIV or dreaming scepticism, these two arguments are meant to share with external world scepticism the feature that no independent empirical grounds are *in principle* available for the denial of the sceptical conclusion.

<sup>16</sup> Wright refers to this principle as "P<sub>2</sub>", but, to avoid confusion, I shall call it simply "F<sub>W</sub>". All references to this principle in quotations from Wright's work have had the nomenclature altered accordingly.

<sup>17</sup> Wright claims that a further characterisation of factuality, P<sub>3</sub>, which may be entailed by F<sub>W</sub>, appears to lend itself to anti-realism [Wright 1985, p. 458, & p. 460]. He concedes that F<sub>W</sub> is not obviously analytic of the concept of factuality but argues that it is at least incumbent upon the sceptic to offer a different account of that concept [Wright 1985, p. 456], and, accordingly, proposes that we adopt such a principle as a convention [Wright 1985, p. 461].

he contends, we cannot know - but by doing so he merely highlights the fact that they do not form part of a factual discourse.<sup>18</sup> Here is Wright:

[...] the sceptic contends, first, that treating group I propositions as evidence for group II propositions is justified only if we are justified in holding the corresponding group III propositions; second, that justification (evidence) for the group III propositions can only be achieved by justifying specific group II propositions; hence, third, that justification (evidence) for the group III propositions cannot be achieved at all; hence, fourth, we are unjustified in accepting it; hence, fifth, we are unjustified in treating group I propositions as evidence for group II propositions; hence, sixth, since there is no other conceivable kind of evidence, we are unjustified in holding any group II beliefs. If  $F_W$  is invoked as soon as the third stage of this reasoning is reached, then the move to the fourth stage, and with it the rest of the argument, is flawed by a lacuna. Simply: where non-fact-stating 'propositions' are concerned, the lack of evidential warrant for accepting them need be no criticism of our doing so. And if, on the contrary, we are within our rights, so to speak, in accepting the group III propositions, then our right to assign the evidential value to group I propositions, *vis-à-vis* group II propositions, is also unimpeached. [Wright 1985, p. 458]

The problem is whether, given such a stance and our resultant lack of knowledge of them, it is "within our rights" to believe the type-III ('sceptical') propositions that are being questioned. It is to this end that Wright brings in the notion of a hinge proposition. For Wright this is a non-factual proposition that can be believed with right because it performs a framework role in our practices, even though one is unable, in principle, to acquire a warrant for believing it. Wright thus adopts the core elements of the Wittgensteinian thesis that we saw above, whilst transplanting the account away from factual propositions such as  $p$  onto 'non-factual' propositions like  $C$ .

In itself, of course, this is only half the story since we have yet to be given a criterion for distinguishing hinge propositions from other propositions (such as,

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<sup>18</sup> Although Wright does express his position in this quasi-verificationist manner, we can, I think, get a better grip on his intentions here by characterising his view in terms of a more recent work, Truth and Objectivity [Wright 1992]. According to this developed view, the problem with the type-III propositions that the sceptic wants to doubt is not that they lack content *tout court* (as the verificationist contends), since a discourse which included statements about these propositions would display the appropriate surface syntax and satisfy certain minimal conditions on the truth-predicate in order to be, to employ Wright's terminology, "minimally truth-apt". Rather, their 'non-factuality' consists in the fact that discourses containing such statements would not exhibit "cognitive command". This latter classification demands, in essence, that differences of opinion have to involve some form of cognitive shortcoming on at least one of the sides of the dispute [see Wright 1992, especially chapter 4]. Given that the 'sceptical' propositions are in principle immune to empirical evaluation, so it follows that differences of opinion about these propositions cannot be explained in these 'cognitive' terms, and hence they will not satisfy this classification.

perhaps, 'God exists'<sup>19</sup>) which also fail to satisfy  $F_W$ , but which have no obvious part to play in an anti-sceptical thesis. Furthermore, as we noted above, merely highlighting that hinge propositions play a *de facto* framework role in our practices offers no obvious challenge to the sceptic since he ought to be content to concede this much. What the sceptic is interested in is the normative issue of whether we *ought* to believe these propositions, and a negative reply here is entirely compatible with the thought that our non-belief in these propositions would be impractical.

The crucial point to note about this response to the sceptic is that it concedes the basic sceptical contention: that we do not know these propositions in any standard (epistemic) sense of that term. As such, the position faces a daunting up-hill struggle. This point is somewhat obscured in the passage cited above. When Wright is setting up the sceptical argument he is content to talk as if it were an *epistemic* warrant that was at issue here; a warrant which the sceptic was trying to undermine and which he was trying to rescue. Indeed, by claiming to have discovered a "lacuna" in the sceptical argument, Wright makes it seem as if his schema will offer us a manoeuvre by which we can prevent the sceptical conclusion (which claims to undermine our warrant) from being deduced. No such result is in the offing, however, merely a reconstrual of how we should evaluate those beliefs that lack warrant. The sceptic's argument still goes through, it is just that we are (it is hoped) now in a position to interpret the results of the sceptical doubt in a better light.

Without such an epistemic defence of our belief in the relevant type-III propositions, however, it is far from clear what anti-sceptical moral this strategy has. After all, if we lack empirical grounds sufficient for warranted belief that there is an external world (no matter how this is diagnosed), then it would appear to follow that we thereby lack warrant for our belief in a whole range of  $P_1$ -type propositions which

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<sup>19</sup> There are those who believe that regarding 'God exists' as a hinge proposition may be one way of insulating religious belief from epistemic censure. Indeed, there is some evidence to suggest that Wittgenstein's conception of a hinge proposition was directly influenced by Newman's [1844; 1870] influential lectures in defence of religious belief [cf. Kenny 1992]. I argue that such a "hinge" view is common currency in debates about the rationality of religious belief, and offer a critical evaluation, in Pritchard [2000c].

concern objects in that external world (such as my hands), since our warrant for our belief in this latter class of propositions seem to be dependent (or so the I-II-III argument above maintains) upon the possession of a prior warrant for our belief in the former proposition. As a result, insisting that it is “within our rights” to believe the relevant type-III proposition appears to be beside the point since without an epistemic buttress to this belief the sceptic seems to be home and dry.<sup>20</sup>

A great deal thus needs to be said to work through the supposed anti-sceptical import of this thesis. Wright defers such an account to a later occasion, but remarks that one possibility would be to turn to some form of naturalism such that, at this basic level, “our nature does not [...] provide us with any alternatives.” That is, it could be argued that, “[O]ur ‘hinge’ beliefs are (non-epistemically) superior to the alternatives because, for us, there are no alternatives.” [Wright 1985, p. 468] It is worthwhile, therefore, considering what such a ‘naturalistic’ amendment to Wright’s thesis might look like.

This approach proceeds by taking up Hume’s claim that there are certain beliefs which are both lacking in epistemic support and *irresistible*; the idea being that this feature of the belief’s genealogy will in some way legitimate it. There is actually some textual evidence in *On Certainty* to support this analogy between hinge propositions and the Humean thesis. For just as Wittgenstein maintains that he conceives of certainty in terms that are “beyond being justified or unjustified; as it were, as something animal” [OC §359]; so Hume famously argued that “belief is more properly an act of the sensitive than of the cogitative part of our nature.” [Hume 1739-40, bk. 1, pt. 4, sec. 1, p. 183; cf. Putnam 1992, pp. 172ff.] The claim is thus that we should reconfigure our conception of the epistemological landscape in order to incorporate this idea that our

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<sup>20</sup> This all depends, of course, on the acceptance of the Closure principle, since it is only with this principle in play that a lack of knowledge of the consequent proposition (‘There is an external world’) would translate into a lack of knowledge of the antecedent proposition (‘I have a hand’). But before proponents of the non-epistemic approach rush to deny this principle they should pause to reflect as to why their ‘solution’ to the sceptical predicament should involve making this move. After all, those who advocate the denial of Closure [e.g. Dretske 1970; Nozick 1981] do not also endorse a non-epistemic approach to scepticism. The fear would thus be one of over-kill. In any case, there are numerous problems involved with denying Closure, as we shall see in chapter four. Wright [1997; 1998; 2000a] is one commentator who has explicitly faced this problem, arguing that it is not Closure that should go but a related principle which he refers to as the “Transmission” principle. We shall consider this proposal in more detail in a later chapter.

basic beliefs lie outwith the ambit of epistemic sanction, just as Wright's I-II-III argument shows.

Such an account faces a number of formidable difficulties. For instance, it is incumbent upon a stance of this sort to explain how the fact that a belief is irresistible (and 'naturally' occurring, whatever this is thought to mean), is to have any impact on the sceptical debate, especially since that belief, at least by the lights of this account, *lacks* epistemic support. Moreover, as Edward Craig [1990b, chapter XII] has pointed out, this naturalistic story must amount to more than merely an evolutionary defence of our disregard of radical scepticism. That such disregard is acquired via evolutionary mechanisms will only explain the *utility* (in terms of survival) of ignoring the sceptic (which, I take it, is not in doubt); it will not explain why we are *warranted* in proceeding this way, which is what is needed to meet the sceptical challenge.

Unfortunately, most commentators who endorse this naturalistic version of the non-epistemic response do not engage these issues at all, opting instead for a merely descriptive approach to scepticism. Avrum Stroll [1994, especially chapters 9 & 10], for instance, characterises his account of Wittgenstein as follows:

[Wittgenstein] is not telling us what must be the case, but what is the case. It is this powerful descriptive account that is the basis for the rejection of scepticism ... [Stroll 1994, p. 159]

Unfortunately, Stroll is noticeably silent as to how a mere description of our epistemic practice - and a non-epistemic one at that - is to enforce any normative anti-sceptical conclusions without first begging the question against the sceptic. He is not the only one. A similar train of thought (or the lack of it) can be detected in recent work by P. F. Strawson [1985, chapter 1] and Hilary Putnam [1992].<sup>21</sup>

There is a general point to be made here. If one were in a position to argue that one's actual beliefs were, in the main, epistemically supported, then, *ceteris paribus*, simply describing one's epistemic practices would be sufficient to meet the sceptical

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<sup>21</sup> In a related vein, there are those, such as Moser [1984; 1993; 1999], Foley [1993] and Fumerton [1995; c.f. Fumerton 1998], who, to varying extents, simply concede the essential truth of scepticism whilst nevertheless maintaining that there is a pragmatic (albeit non-epistemic) virtue in disregarding sceptical doubt.

paradox. The sceptic argues that our beliefs lack sufficient epistemic status as a means of enforcing the normative conclusion that one ought not to believe the propositions in question, but this style of sceptical argument is clearly blocked by the presence of epistemic support for one's beliefs. This neat descriptive response to the sceptic is not open to the proponent of the naturalistic strategy, however, since on this account one's actual belief system is *not* epistemically grounded. As a result, the naturalistic response to scepticism - in common with all non-epistemic accounts - falls prey to the *impasse* constraint. Absent an epistemic response to the sceptic at first-order, it is incumbent upon the naturalist to motivate epistemic support for his claim that our supposed epistemic practice of treating these ungrounded beliefs as rightly held is warranted over and above the sceptic's negative evaluation of them. Crucially, however, such second-order epistemic support is not forthcoming.<sup>22,23</sup>

So if a viable anti-sceptical strategy is to be pursued along these purely non-epistemic lines, then it is going to be essential that a second-order epistemic warrant is adduced to support the first-order non-epistemic rejection of the sceptical paradox. Although I have canvassed pessimism so far regarding the prospects for such an account, there are proposals on the table in this respect that we will now consider.

#### §4. 'Subversion' Arguments - Miller and Wright.

Richard Miller [1995] offers an intriguing interpretation of the anti-sceptical thesis that Wright proposed in 'Facts and Certainty'. He argues that the point of Wright's remarks on the notion of a hinge proposition is to highlight the fact that there are certain

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<sup>22</sup> One possible reason for this hiatus in the naturalistic anti-sceptical argument may be an implicit commitment to conceiving of the sceptic as a dialectical opponent who is advancing a *position*. The idea would then be to refute the sceptical proposal by showing how it is unliveable. This is clearly true of Stroll, for instance, since his account is littered with passages such as the following: "[T]he sceptic does not engage in any [...] communal practice, and hence his superstitious worries are not really doubts at all" [Stroll 1994, p. 179]. As we saw in the last chapter under the ambit of the adversary constraint, however, such remarks are completely beside the point. The sceptical paradox loses none of its disquieting force when we realise that the conclusions that it issues in are not only incoherent but also unliveable. If anything, this can only intensify the air of paradox.

<sup>23</sup> Indeed, in a similar vein, it is important to recognise that in rejecting these pragmatic or naturalistic grounds for belief in hinge propositions as anti-sceptical *theses* one does not thereby disqualify them from forming part of a coherent anti-sceptical strategy. Provided that they are allied to an adequately epistemic response to scepticism, then they can provide extra support for the view. I consider such a possibility further below.

propositions which, although ‘non-factual’, constitute “epistemically indispensable resources” [Miller 1995, p. 214], such that doubt of them would lead to a self-subversion of one’s epistemic rationality (the rationality which we employ in order to track the truth).<sup>24</sup> Doubt of a hinge proposition can thus never be rational since all (epistemically) rational belief will “ultimately be based on the[se] minimal assumptions.” [Miller 1995, p. 213] As a result it is unsurprising that these beliefs lack the usual evidential buttress since belief in them is a prerequisite for acquiring such support. Miller thus takes seriously the Wittgensteinian idea that these propositions are immune to the tribunal of empirical evaluation (and are hence, according to Wright’s terminology, non-factual) because they determine the form that this evaluation takes; because belief in them is in some sense a *precondition* of entering into such evaluative activity. Moreover, since belief in these propositions involves no cognitive achievement and we have no choice, epistemically speaking, but to believe them, it follows that such belief can do no epistemic harm. As Miller expresses the matter, believing in a hinge proposition is epistemically responsible “rather as scratching one’s nose is morally responsible, though hardly a moral accomplishment like resisting the temptation to lie.” [Miller 1995, p. 220n]

What Miller adds to Wright’s approach is thus the suggestion that doubt of these propositions, because of their pivotal nature, is *epistemically* non-rational since it leads to self-subversion. As a consequence, Miller is able (in theory at least) both to allow that our belief in these propositions lacks epistemic support and also to rebut the sceptic’s doubt on a principled *epistemic* basis (since it is epistemically non-rational). It therefore has the potential to meet some of the criticisms directed at the neo-Humean accounts that we saw in the last section. In particular, it possesses the resources to meet the

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<sup>24</sup> I take it for granted here that the project of determining what an ‘epistemic rationality’ involves can be coherently spelled-out. Although there have been some notable attempts to elucidate this facet of rationality - such as Foley [1987] - the very idea of such a project has been questioned. There have been two main reasons for this. First, because such accounts tend to assume epistemological internalism, (and therefore seem unable to capture externalist insights) [cf. Plantinga 1993a, *passim*]. Second, because it has proved difficult to characterise, in any stable fashion, the epistemic universality constraints upon which an account of epistemic rationality depends, or at least, characterise them in any way that does not directly lead to scepticism [cf. Adler 1981; Brueckner 1984; Dancy 1985, pp. 12ff.; Hale 1988; Hookway 1990, chapter IX].

*impasse* constraint. Although it would still be true, at first-order, that our most basic beliefs lack epistemic sanction, this would be off-set by the fact that, at second-order, we would be warranted in endorsing an epistemology which, *contra* the sceptic, allowed that our most basic beliefs could lack epistemic sanction.

The theoretical onus of Miller's schema thus turns upon the anti-sceptical efficacy of his 'subversion' claim. Unfortunately, Miller offers no definition of this notion other than that it involves calling into question that which cannot be impugned (i.e., hinge propositions). As it stands this is manifestly circular since hinge propositions have been defined as those propositions which lack direct epistemic sanction but which cannot be doubted on pain of self-subversion. So if we are to avoid such circularity of explanation, we are going to have to fill in the details here ourselves. Presumably, to say that a doubt subverts one's epistemic rationality is to say that it engenders a paralysis of one's attempts at tracking the truth. An instance of this, albeit an extreme case, might be where one attempts to simultaneously doubt all of one's beliefs. In this instance one would clearly thereby lose all means by which one could claim to be tracking the truth; such an objective would be 'on hold' until this difficulty had been resolved [cf. OC §§115 & 450]. Moreover, since, plausibly, a coherent doubt requires grounds which are not themselves doubted, such an all-inclusive doubt would, perforce, lack grounds and so be epistemically non-rational; indistinguishable from a mere arbitrary doubt. Miller's claim must thus be that we can extend this reasoning to less extreme cases in order to rule-out the legitimacy of the sceptic's doubt on methodological grounds. Consequently, we must (if we are interested in pursuing the epistemic goal of tracking the truth) never doubt in such a way that calls the contested propositions into question, even though it is acknowledged that our belief in these propositions lacks epistemic sanction and that this is, typically, a sufficient reason for doubt.<sup>25</sup>

At present this is all extremely vague and speculative since it merely assumes

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<sup>25</sup> This last clause is crucial if we are to avoid the situation whereby a hinge proposition thesis opens the door to epistemically rational belief in all sorts of propositions which belong to discourses that do not exhibit what Wright terms "cognitive command" (see footnote 18). Where a belief lacks grounds, it ought to be a default response to say that it is epistemically non-rational.

that hinge propositions play the role that Miller ascribes to them. Moreover, there may be a direct problem facing such an account regarding whether it meets the adversary constraint. After all, given that it is a non-epistemic response to scepticism that is being put forward here, it follows that this sort of argument will only apply to the *conclusions* that we can draw from a sceptical paradox, not to the premises or the reasoning that led to the formation of that paradox. (If this were not the case then it would be mysterious as to why a *non*-epistemic response to scepticism was being offered, as opposed to an account which straightforwardly rejected the sceptic's conclusion that we lacked warrant for our belief in the contested propositions). But unless the sceptic's initial paradox-inducing reasoning is impugned, then it seems unclear how a subversion claim is to cause them any harm. For the sceptic is not committed, once he has established his paradoxical conclusion, to live in the lights of this result. His job is done, and to think otherwise is to assume that the sceptic is a real live opponent with theoretical commitments of his own.<sup>26</sup>

It turns out, however, that this is a peripheral issue since the subversion charge does not go through in the first place. Take scepticism about the external world as the paradigm case, where a proposition such as "There is an external world" is, presumably, the relevant hinge. How would doubt of this proposition subvert one's epistemic rationality? One suggestion might be that such doubt would lead to such an extensive withdrawal of assent to one's beliefs as to be paralysing. But even granted the issue as to whether we ought to be paralysed in this way (perhaps it is better to strive to believe nothing than believe that which you have no warrant for?), it remains that

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<sup>26</sup> In *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* [1748], Hume distinguished between the sort of scepticism that requires a prior justification for our rationality and that which does not; what we might call, following Fogelin [1985, pp. 5-6], 'antecedent' and 'consequent' scepticism, respectively. In contrast to the stance taken here, many commentators have contended that we are entitled to dismiss antecedent scepticism out of hand. Wright, for instance, maintains that "there isn't a standing doubt about your reason", seemingly on the grounds that "if there were a standing sceptical doubt about your reason, [*then*] you would not be in the market for the reasoning which goes into the *construction* of sceptical paradoxes, let alone their resolution" [Wright 1991, p. 103]. But if this is so, then it leads to the implausible result that those who present a paradox are obliged to actually endorse the 'rational' principles which they employ in order to set-up their puzzle; even though the point of their reasoning is that such principles are inconsistent. (Indeed, Wright seems to be abusing his own 'adversarial' constraint on dealings with the sceptic here [Wright 1991, pp. 88-89]). Despite this, Wright is not alone in decrying antecedent scepticism. See, for example, Hookway [1990, especially, chapter V], and Weintraub [1997, chapter III].

epistemic rationality could continue. In theory at least, it seems perfectly possible for the sceptic to delimit the class of beliefs the warrant for which he objects to (those that assume the existence of the external world), whilst retaining those beliefs which involve no such assumption. In so doing he can continue to act in accordance with an epistemic rationality whilst maintaining his doubt. As a consequence he can claim that, at least by his own lights, he is behaving in an epistemically superior way to someone like Miller who allows these beliefs to be assented to even though he freely admits that they fail to fulfil the usual epistemic standards. Given the choice, should we not choose a conservative picture within which all our beliefs are warranted in an 'ideal' way, rather than one that involved assent to certain propositions that did not enjoy this ideal warrant?

It seems then that if a strategy such as this is to work then we shall require a more sophisticated version that is able to force this subversion charge through. The accounts that we have considered so far have all been adapted from Wright's [1985] early work on scepticism that takes a non-factuality line. There is, however, a later text due to Wright [1991] that may be of use in this respect where he offers an anti-sceptical thesis that does not rest on this non-factuality claim. Recall that the earlier strategy focused upon certain forms of scepticism - such as external world scepticism or scepticism about the past - where the propositions in question were all, or so the sceptic contended at any rate, immune to *any* form of empirical support. In contrast, in his later work Wright focuses upon those forms of scepticism - such as dreaming<sup>27</sup> and BIV scepticism - which revolve, he claims, around propositions which, since they explicitly refer to a particular subject (as in "I am not now a BIV") are not plausible candidates for non-factuality [cf. Wright 1991, p. 139n]. Nevertheless, although there is this difference between the two texts, the strategy that Wright pursues in this later work is interesting for our purposes because it does seem to offer a cogent account of how a subversion charge might run. Essentially, Wright's claim in this paper is that these forms of

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<sup>27</sup> Recall that *dreaming\**, as opposed to dreaming, is *necessarily* phenomenologically indistinguishable from being awake.

scepticism (he focuses on dreaming\* scepticism in particular) can be shown to be self-contradictory since they call into question the very sort of assumptions which they need to make in order to set-up the sceptical argument. Accordingly, this strategy has the potential (especially if it can be extended to 'non-factual' propositions) to resurrect Miller's approach of showing how our belief in these basic propositions, though lacking any direct epistemic sanction, is, nonetheless, epistemically rational.<sup>28</sup>

The sceptical argument that Wright considers is that which, in its crudest form, contends that there is no warrant available for my belief that I am not now dreaming\* and thus, since dreaming\* excludes perception, there is no warrant available for a wide class of my everyday perceptual beliefs. 'Warrant' here is not, however, to be construed simply as whatever it is that takes us from true belief to knowledge, since Wright has a specific epistemic notion in mind which, unlike knowledge, is non-factive, but which, nevertheless, demands that the belief in question has a pedigree - the "holder's grounds if any, her cognitive conditions as she forms it and the circumstances surrounding its formation" [Wright 1991, p. 95] - that is flawless. Unlike justification, then, a warranted perceptual belief has a pedigree such that its very possession entails that the subject is not dreaming\*. I shall say more about Wright's conception of warrant in a moment. First, let us see how the sceptical argument unfolds.

Wright believes that this form of scepticism pivots on the following principle, which he terms the 'Proper Execution Principle':

(PEP): If the acquisition of warrant to believe a proposition depends on the proper execution of some procedure, then executing the procedure cannot give you any stronger warrant to believe the proposition in question than you have independently for believing that you have executed the procedure properly. [Wright 1991, p. 99; cf. Stroud 1984, pp. 21-3]

As he explains, your attaining a warrant for believing that you have correctly measured the length of, say, a chair, is proportionate to your warrant for thinking that the measuring procedure was carried out properly; that, for instance, the ruler you used to conduct the measurement was accurate.

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<sup>28</sup> The arguments that follow are due to be published as Pritchard [2000d].

According to Wright, the sceptic uses this principle as a means of undermining the pedigree of our beliefs. Given the phenomenological indistinguishability of sceptical scenarios from everyday life, the problem is that whatever procedure you could carry out which would give you grounds for believing that you were not now dreaming\* could only give you a warrant on the presupposition that you are not dreaming\* in the first place. For instance, suppose you pinch yourself, or ask someone else whether or not you are dreaming\*, this is only a valid procedure which could afford you a warrant if you are not now dreaming\*, since you may be dreaming\* that you executed this procedure. (Similar considerations will apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to the modern variant of the dreaming\* argument, the BIV scenario). Consequently, there is no warrant available for believing that you are not now dreaming\* since you lack a warrant for thinking that whatever procedure you might carry out to ascertain that you are not now dreaming\* has been properly executed (i.e., the pedigree of the belief is impugned). As a result, you lack a warrant for any belief that is gained by perception. For, recall, dreaming\* excludes perception and so, via (PEP), a warrant for a perceptual belief would require a warrant for thinking that you are not now dreaming\*, a warrant which you do not have.

We can formally characterise this sceptical threat as follows, where “W [P]” stands for “*x* has a warrant available at time *t* for the belief P”; “D” stands for “*x* is now dreaming\*”, and “[P]” is taken as a schematic letter restricted to those propositions that might only be known by perception.<sup>29</sup>

(1)	$\neg W [\neg D]$	The Sceptical Claim (via (PEP)). (P1).
(2)	$W [P] \rightarrow \neg D$	Conceptual Truth.
(3)	$W [W [P] \rightarrow \neg D]$	Warrant for a Conceptual Truth, 2. <sup>30</sup> (P2).
(4)	$W [P]$	Assumed for <i>Reductio</i> .
(5)	$W W [P]$	Iterativity, 4. <sup>31</sup>
(6)	$W [\neg D]$	Transmission, 3, 5. <sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Following Tymoczko & Vogel [1992], I symbolise Wright’s “Rxt [P]” (“*x* has a warrant available at time *t* for the belief P”), as simply “W [P]”, since the indexicals of subject and time are never varied or quantified over and so may be taken as being fixed.

<sup>30</sup> Wright assumes that there is always a warrant available for conceptual truths [Wright 1991, p. 92n., p. 97 & p. 109].

<sup>31</sup> That W [P] implies W W [P] [Wright 1991, p. 98].

<sup>32</sup> That if there is a warrant available for a set of propositions  $\{p_1, \dots, p_n\}$ , and these propositions entail a further proposition *q*, then there is a warrant available for *q* [Wright 1991, p. 97]. In later works, Wright [1997; 1998; 2000a] offers a more developed construal of this principle which we shall consider in chapter four.

- |     |                                     |                                     |
|-----|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| (7) | $\neg W [\neg D] \ \& \ W [\neg D]$ | & Introduction, 1, 6.               |
| (8) | $\neg W [P]$                        | <i>Reductio Ad Absurdum</i> , 4, 7. |

As we have seen, the sceptic is able to contend (line (1)), that there is no warrant available for  $x$ 's belief that she not now dreaming\*. Moreover, it is a conceptual truth that, given the manner in which warrant is characterised,  $x$ 's possession of warrant for a perception-based belief would entail that she is not now dreaming\* (line (2)). And since this is a conceptual truth, it seems unproblematic to assume that there will be a warrant available for  $x$ 's belief in it (line (3)). On the assumption then that  $x$  does have a warrant for a perception-based belief (line (4)), coupled with the relatively uncontentious principles of (modalized) Iterativity (so that we get line (5)) and Transmission, we can then deduce that  $x$  is warranted in believing that she is not now dreaming\* (line (6)). And since (as made explicit in line (7)) this conflicts with the sceptical premise, this entitles the sceptic to deny the assumption and thereby claim that there is no warrant available for any of  $x$ 's perception-based beliefs.

An intuitive response to an argument of this sort (suggested by Wittgenstein [OC §§383 & 676]), is to contend that, if you were dreaming\*, then you would lack the intellectual function which would enable you to formulate the argument in the first place. Accordingly, insofar as one can run a sceptical argument, then one can be assured that one is not now dreaming\*. Wright rejects such a rebuttal though, since although it is true that dreaming\* necessarily excludes perception of an external world, it is not true that it also necessarily excludes intellectual function, this being, at best, merely a contingent fact which therefore lacks the generality required to rule-out the sceptical argument on the requisite *a priori* grounds [Wright 1991, pp. 101-5]. Wright does, however, take up the strategy on offer here of highlighting a presupposition of the sceptic's argument as a means of undermining his claims. To this end he adopts the ingenious tactic of defining the following state of *maundering*:

$x$  is *maundering* at  $t$  just in case  $x$  is then in a phenomenologically smooth state which, like dreaming, necessarily excludes the causal conditions for perception but, in addition, likewise precludes the causal conditions of competent intellection. [Wright 1991, p.

106]<sup>33</sup>

The interesting question now is whether the sceptic is able to distinguish maundering from dreaming\* in such a way as to have the intellectual function necessary to run his argument.

The original argument contended, on the basis of (PEP) and phenomenological indistinguishability, that warrants are not available for our belief that we are not now dreaming\* and thus, since dreaming\* precludes perception, we also lack warrants for any perception-based belief. The idea is that this very same reasoning should lead to the claim that warrants are likewise unavailable for thinking that we are not now maundering and hence, since maundering excludes both perception and intellection, we also lack warrants for all our perception *and* intellection-based beliefs.

We can express this formally as follows, where "M" stands for "x is now maundering"; and "[P]" is interpreted as before except that now it covers all propositions which can be known by perception *or* intellection:

- |     |                                 |  |
|-----|---------------------------------|--|
| (1) | $\neg W [\neg M]$               | The Sceptical Claim (via (PEP)). (P1**).   |
| (2) | $W [P] \rightarrow \neg M$      | Conceptual Truth.                          |
| (3) | $W [W [P] \rightarrow \neg M]$  | Warrant for a Conceptual Truth, 2. (P2**). |
| (4) | $W [P]$                         | Assumed for <i>Reductio</i> .              |
| (5) | $W W [P]$                       | Iterativity, 4.                            |
| (6) | $W [\neg M]$                    | Transmission, 3, 5.                        |
| (7) | $\neg W [\neg M] \& W [\neg M]$ | & Introduction, 1, 6.                      |
| (8) | $\neg W [P]$                    | <i>Reductio Ad Absurdum</i> , 4, 7.        |

We thus get a completely analogous argument to the dreaming\* argument, except that the scope of the sceptical conclusion has now been dramatically extended to cover both perception- and intellection-based beliefs. The problem is that the sceptic requires the availability of intellection-based beliefs in order to run their argument, and yet their argument shows that warrants are unavailable for such beliefs. As a result it self-destructs. In particular, any instance of (2) is itself a conceptual truth which can only be known by intellection, and thus comes within the scope of (8). We can therefore extend the argument to a contradiction:

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<sup>33</sup> As with the coherent dreams that Descartes specifies, it is not really important whether we do in fact ever maunder, only that such a possibility can be actualised.

- (9)  $\neg W [W [P] \rightarrow \neg M]$  By Preceding Discussion, 8.  
 (10) CONTRADICTION & Introduction, 3, 9.

So the very same reasoning which led to the dreaming\* argument likewise leads to a second argument, with analogous premises, that implodes. Wright argues that it therefore follows that there must be something wrong with the premises. The second premise, that we are warranted in thinking that, if we possess a warrant for a perception-based belief/perception or intellection-based belief then we are not now dreaming\*/maundering, is a conceptual truth, so there is little hope of locating the problem there. The blame thus falls to the first premise of the maundering argument; that we lack a warrant for thinking that we are not now maundering. Wright's manoeuvre is to contend that this premise is false and thus, since the first premise of the dreaming\* argument was derived via analogous reasoning, further claim that the first premise of the dreaming\* argument is false also: it is not the case that warrants are unavailable for believing that we are not now dreaming\*.

But this is no straightforward victory since Wright makes an important concession to the sceptic at this point. According to Wright the conclusion that we should draw from this implosion of scepticism is that "the impossibility of *earning* a warrant that one is not now dreaming\* does not imply that no such warrant is ever *possessed*." [Wright 1991, pp. 107-8] The "warrant" that we have rescued from the sceptic is thus not quite the warrant we originally claimed to enjoy.

Before considering what this esoteric conclusion is supposed to mean, I want to dwell first on whether Wright has succeeded in making a case for the sort of scepticism embodied in the first premise: that there is no warrant available for believing that I am not now dreaming\*. Wright explicitly defines the notion of warrant as follows:

Let us say that the holding by a subject,  $x$ , of a particular belief at a particular time is *warranted* just in case the following two conditions are met:

- (i)  $x$  has sufficient reason, all things considered which she is in a position to consider, to hold the belief; and
- (ii) one who knew of all the features of its pedigree in  $x$ 's thought would not be placed in a position where, independently of any reason bestowed thereby to regard the belief as false, it would be rational to view the probability of its truth as being unimproved by the fact of  $x$ 's holding it. [Wright 1991, p. 95]

The first condition is a purely *internalist* epistemic notion since it makes reference only to those factors which the subject is herself in a position to determine. In contrast, (ii) adds the *externalist* quality to this justification that Wright thinks we need in order to effectively characterise the sceptical argument since this condition makes a purely factual demand, the satisfaction of which may be completely beyond the subject's ken.<sup>34</sup> Implicit in the formulation of (ii) is the idea that the grounds for a belief can be defeated in one of two ways: either they are '*overridden*' in the sense that new information may come to light which, although not impugning the original credentials of the belief, nevertheless generates a total state of information which no longer supports that belief; or they may be '*rebutted*', in that the original credibility of the grounds for the belief are impeached (its "pedigree"), perhaps by an illustration of how the evidence gathered was prone to error for instance, or by showing that the subject made some cognitive mistake [Wright 1991, pp. 94-5; cf. Pollock 1986, pp. 38-9]. The second half of this specification of warrant allows for the possibility of the first sort of defeater but not the second; that is, it demands that, whether or not the belief will be overridden, it is, as a matter of fact, not rebutted. Accordingly, if one knows that the belief fulfils such a pedigree then, absent any independent grounds for regarding the belief as false, the likelihood of the belief being true must be increased by the fact that the person holds it. Warrant thus contrasts with knowledge in that it is not factive, but, like knowledge, it is responsive to the actual pedigree of the belief (unlike mere justification, where the pedigree can be just reasonably supposed) [cf. Wright 1991, p. 95].

The problem is that given this externalist element to the notion of warrant, coupled with the fact that Wright [1991, p. 94] avers that our justifications are entirely satisfactory in this respect (and thus that we can take it that we satisfy (i)), it is unclear whether the considerations about (PEP) and phenomenological indistinguishability are going to be sufficient to establish a sceptical argument. Wright argues for the first

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<sup>34</sup> I offer a more sustained discussion of the internalist/externalist epistemological distinction in the next chapter.

premise in the following way:

Suppose I set myself to acquire a warrant to believe that I am not now dreaming by some procedure, of whatever sort - [e.g.] pinching myself [...] By (PEP), the result cannot be better warranted than the belief that I have properly executed the procedure is independently warranted; and that belief cannot be independently warranted at all unless I have independent warrant for its component, that I really did execute the procedure and *did not merely dream its execution*. But then it appears that I must already have the warrant which I have set myself to acquire - only if so does the execution of the procedure have any probative force. There is no route from a state in which one has no warrant for the supposition one is not dreaming to the acquisition of a warrant for that belief; hence, it seems, the belief is unwarrantable, just as (P1) says. [Wright 1991, p. 100]

Wright here suggests that one cannot acquire a warrant for the belief that one is not now dreaming\*, because this would presuppose that one already has such a warrant. The trouble with this claim is that, even on Wright's own explicit definition of warrant, there seems no principled reason for thinking that I must lack this prior epistemic support for the belief in question. After all, all I need is a sufficient justification for this belief (which Wright claims is possible), thereby satisfying (i), and, as a matter of fact, satisfy (ii). And since (ii) makes an externalist requirement on my possession of warrant, it follows that I can fulfil (ii) *independently* of whatever cognitive efforts I undertake in order to acquire the warrant in question. As long as I am so related to the world as to be able to meet (ii), then this would suffice. Accordingly, the sort of purely internalist considerations mooted in (PEP) about the acquisition of warrant are irrelevant both to my possession of warrant and the import that warrant is deemed to have for the sceptical argument.

Indeed, if (PEP) has *any* sceptical consequences then it seems to speak against the possibility of acquiring a *justification* for the contested beliefs, so it is perhaps odd then that Wright thinks that our justifications are intact in this regard, thereby defusing one way in which the sceptical argument could be appropriately expressed.<sup>35</sup>

Despite these concerns over the establishment of the sceptical argument, one might nevertheless feel that at the very least Wright's argument might, with suitable modifications, supply an attractive schema within which certain sceptical attacks are defused. For it still remains that, in theory at least, Wright has gone one step further than Miller by actually supplying the dialectical tools which would enable us to subvert

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<sup>35</sup> Similar concerns are raised by Brueckner [1992].

the sceptic's reasoning. We could then use the success of such a strategy to motivate a reconfiguration of our epistemic concepts along less sceptic-friendly lines. Unfortunately, attractive though this approach is, it is fatally flawed.

Recall the final conclusion that Wright reached: that we have an "unearned" warrant for the contested dreaming\* proposition (and so, one might reasonably assume, for the maundering proposition also). It is important at this juncture to be clear why Wright does not make the more natural move at this point in the proceedings and go from denying the first premise to saying that we have a warrant for the contested proposition in the normal way. The reason is that Wright is not claiming that the sceptic's reasoning is faulty - indeed, he admits to finding it persuasive [Wright 1991, pp. 103-4] - since if it were there would be no argument to 'implode'. His point is rather to show that the sceptic has *misdescribed* the epistemic facts by failing to notice that his doubt involves a proposition which, although it appears straightforwardly empirical, is in fact of a more complex design. That is, Wright remains true to our sense that the sceptic is employing a legitimate epistemic policy in this respect and merely contends that this policy is *misapplied*; that there is a relevant epistemic distinction to be drawn between the propositions that are properly subject to the sceptic's reasoning and those which, like the dreaming\* proposition, are not.<sup>36</sup> Wright therefore has to tell a story about what is happening here, and it is to serve this end that he introduces the notion of a hinge proposition.

The thinking behind Wright's use of this notion seems (naturally) to be an extension of that applied in his earlier paper 'Facts and Certainty', albeit without the stress on 'non-factuality'. As before, the idea is that there are certain propositions which can never be warranted in the usual sense because they are *presuppositions* of a certain discourse, but that it is because of this presuppositional role that they can never be coherently supposed to lack warrant either. As he puts it, it is:

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<sup>36</sup> Indeed, Wright admits as much when he writes: "the argument from the (PEP) *would* establish its object were the further assumption correct that warrants for beliefs of the ilk we are concerned with - I am not now dreaming etc., - had to be earned." [Wright 1991, p. 114] That is, the argument from (PEP) would have worked if it had been focused on ordinary empirical propositions rather than hinge propositions.

the idea that among our beliefs there are some which we are warranted in accepting not as a result of some specific cognitive achievement but rather as a product of a special place they hold in our framework of thought and inquiry. [Wright 1991, p. 104]

On this basis the maundering claim clearly falls into the hinge camp since the presupposition that I am in a state which does not exclude intellectual function is needed in order to question intellectual function in the first place, since this very questioning requires intellectual function. Moreover, I cannot prove that I exhibit such intellectual function without presupposing that I possess it in the first place (since the very act of proving it assumes intellectual function), so the warrant that I do not maunder can never be “earned”.

For the sake of brevity let us suppose that the sceptic is quite willing to concede this fact (he has no interest in maundering-scepticism, say), and focus instead on the real topic of dispute: whether “I am not now dreaming\*” is a hinge proposition. So far all the sceptic has conceded is that if he wishes to raise a legitimate argument for his doubt then he must not argue in any way that presupposes that he is incapable of such argument. (The sceptic may be able to resist even this move since it seems to offend against the adversary constraint, but I shall not reiterate this point here).<sup>37,38</sup> Certain propositions have then what we might call a ‘default’ warrant, because belief in them is methodologically necessary for coherently entering into a certain discourse.

There are two important elements of Wright’s ‘implosion’ of scepticism that ought to be noted at this point. The first is that his use of the term ‘warrant’, even when qualified as being “unearned”, seems out of place to express the methodological status of these beliefs. For it is not that we have now acquired truth-tracking support for these beliefs, only that we *must*, as a matter of methodological necessity, believe them.

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<sup>37</sup> Indeed, as we noted in the last chapter, it was Wright who drew our attention to this constraint on our dealings with the sceptic [Wright 1991, pp. 88-9]. For why should the sceptic be forced to concede the presence of intellection-based warrants in order to argue unless we view him as embodied in some way? Is the sceptic really unable to present us with a paradox here such that ‘reason’ is used in order to impeach reason?

<sup>38</sup> Another way in which the sceptic could take issue with Wright’s argument would be to claim that it is the reasoning employed that is at fault, as opposed to the premises. In particular, he could query each of the four logical laws that the defective notion of warrant is held to obey. This issue is explored by Tymoczko & Vogel [1992].

(Indeed, to say that the warrant is “unearned” is precisely to say that it fails to fulfil the definition of warrant that Wright himself outlined above, and is thus a euphemistic way of saying that the beliefs in question here simply *lack* warrant).<sup>39</sup> No matter how one eventually defined the notion, one would intuitively think that if a belief enjoys a warrant then it should be regarded as being more likely to be true than an unwarranted counterpart, but this need not be the case here. It may thus be more accurate to say that, despite his anti-sceptical guise, Wright is nevertheless making a significant concession to the sceptic by allowing a fundamental sceptical claim: that there are certain pivotal propositions which we must believe even though such belief can have nothing to do with tracking the truth. As with other commentators (and his earlier self), Wright’s response to scepticism is of a non-epistemic variety. (In a related vein, what exactly has the sceptic conceded by dropping maundering-scepticism? Not that there are *warrants* available, as Wright defines the term, for believing this proposition after all, but only that we must believe that there are. The sceptic has given very little).

The second element of Wright’s schema that should be noted is that it is not immediately obvious that the dreaming\* proposition is going to be a hinge proposition in any case. After all, it was shown that the maundering argument imploded, not that the dreaming\* argument did. (In fact, as we saw, Wright rejects Wittgenstein’s attempt to directly implode the dreaming\* argument). If Wright were saying that we should conclude from the implosion of the maundering argument that the reasoning that established the premises of the dreaming\* argument is faulty (i.e., the considerations concerning (PEP) and phenomenological indistinguishability), then things would be different. But he is not going to say that because, as noted above, there would then be no sceptical argument to implode - defeating a straw man is no victory at all. So Wright must maintain that the reasoning is acceptable but that it is the application of that reasoning that is at fault, and at fault because it was applied to propositions which were

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<sup>39</sup> Given that the warrant we have is of a *methodological* rather than *truth-tracking* nature, it follows that it will fail to fulfil the first part of the specification of warrant straight away. Moreover, someone who availed themselves of the pedigree of the belief in your thought (and therefore acknowledged its methodological status) would have to regard the probability of the belief’s truth as being *unchanged* by your holding it, thus contravening the second part also.

hinges rather than just ordinary empirical propositions. As far as maundering goes this point is clear enough, but as regards dreaming\* the problem merely seemed to be that arguing as in the dreaming\* case leads to arguing in the maundering case, and this leads to implosion. That is, if the sceptic wants to propose dreaming\* scepticism then they must further propose maundering scepticism, and since the latter is self-defeating, so dreaming\* scepticism must be defective as well. But if the sceptic's reasoning is meant to be acceptable provided it is applied to non-hinge propositions, why cannot the sceptic simply doubt the dreaming\* proposition whilst conceding the maundering proposition its hinge status? After all, we do not need to assume that we are not dreaming\* in order to run an argument in the same way that we must assume that we are not maundering, and so it is not even clear that the proposition that I am not now dreaming\* performs the sort of framework role that Wright felt was constitutive of a hinge proposition. This objection to Wright's schema is, essentially, contiguous with the 'killer-blow' made against Miller's argument above - that even if we concede the validity of the approach, still, the sceptic is able, in principle, to 'contain' his doubt in such a way that his radical scepticism can remain unharmed.

If Wright is to fill this lacuna he would thus need to adduce some form of consistency constraint on epistemic rationality which would force the sceptic who doubted in the dreaming\* case to doubting in the maundering instance also. The notion of a hinge proposition would also have to be extended such that it covered not only propositions the doubt of which was self-subverting, but also propositions which *indirectly* engendered self-subversion: that is, those propositions which, when believed by an epistemically consistent agent, would lead to a belief in a further proposition which was self-subverting. Let us bracket the reservations we might have regarding whether the sceptic ought to be required to be consistent, or whether such epistemic universality constraints are even plausible. The important issue is whether this would assist the anti-sceptic in his endeavour. For the problem would then be to establish an inconsistency on the sceptic's part without begging the question against him. Recall that Wright is not impugning the reasoning that led the sceptic to propose the premises of

the dreaming\* argument, he is merely arguing that this very same reasoning leads to doubt of a hinge proposition (in the maundering case), and so, by implication, that the dreaming\* proposition is a hinge proposition also. But now the difficulty is manifest. What would be inconsistent about the sceptic treating the maundering proposition as a hinge and the dreaming\* proposition as an ordinary empirical proposition? After all, the distinction that the sceptic needs to draw between these two propositions (in order for it to be appropriate, epistemically speaking, to treat them differently), has been supplied by Wright's very anti-sceptical *modus operandi* which illustrated that doubt of the maundering proposition leads to implosion and is thus, by hypothesis, a different sort of epistemic entity to the dreaming\* proposition. Moreover, it would be rather odd that the anti-sceptic should now be so keen on consistency given that it is only in the face of adversity that this new epistemic device is introduced.<sup>40,41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Wright himself argues that the diagnosis of his sceptical implosion is that "[W]e illicitly convert the perceived impossibility of *earning* a warrant for beliefs of this kind with their unwarrantability *tout court*, failing to recognise that this distinction is imposed by the very apparatus of the sceptical argument itself." [Wright 1991, pp. 113-4].

<sup>41</sup> Wright does not directly consider this sceptical reply to his argument but he does make a further case for the joint unsatisfiability of the premises for the dreaming argument. He concedes that even though the premises of the maundering argument have been shown to be jointly unsatisfiable, still, it might be objected that the premises of the dreaming argument have not yet been shown to be likewise unsatisfiable. That is, even if his argument against the dreaming hypothesis above were thought to go through, it would merely show that its premises could not be established in this way, not that they could not be established at all (as in the maundering case). He writes:

How [...], if it has not been shown that the premises of the Dreaming Argument are jointly unsatisfiable, do we resist the claim that there is at least no warrant to reject them - that they may be true for all we are warranted in believing - and that the same goes, accordingly, for the conclusion too? [Wright 1991, p. 108]

If it could be shown that the premises of the dreaming argument were jointly unsatisfiable, then we would have an answer to the sceptic which does not trade on any anti-sceptical move which involves forcing the sceptic into endorsing an extreme form of doubt, and we would thus avoid the core difficulties raised above. Wright considers the possibility of the sceptic responding to his argument in terms of agnosticism, which he characterises as the claim that one lacks a warrant for thinking that the negation of the contested P does not hold. He argues [Wright 1991, p. 109] that this second-order response to his anti-scepticism could be defused if we were allowed to hold the following material conditional where the antecedent is agnosticism about the first premise of the dreaming argument, and the consequent is agnosticism about the first premise of the maundering argument:

I. Axt [(P1)] > Axt [(P1\*\*)].

He then claims that from this, and from the conclusions gained from the previous argument, he can derive:

VII.  $\neg$  Axt [(P1), (P2)].

And this is simply the denial of agnosticism concerning the compatibility of the two main premises of the dreaming argument. So if only (I) could be established, then the anti-sceptical proof would go through. His reasons for accepting (I) are, however, somewhat revealing given the preceding discussion:

So even if we could silence fears about how this argument may offend the adversary constraint (let alone how we are to live without truth-tracking warrants for these propositions), it would still remain that the argument would not achieve its desired end. Indeed, the irony is that it was the sceptical threat that led Wright to revise his conception of the epistemic landscape, but that he motivated this in such a way that gave the sceptic a means of evading his grasp.

### §5. Concluding Remarks.

The most distinctive feature of the non-epistemic response to scepticism is that it concedes to the sceptic not only his sceptical premise (that we do not know that we are not BIVs and so forth), but also the basic thrust of his argument - that our relationship to the world is not, at root, of an epistemic nature. It would appear that we can trace the failure of this anti-sceptical thesis to this concession. In the first instance, the problem that the non-epistemic approach faces is to account for how it does not immediately fall

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So, what can be said for (I)? Well, under what circumstances would it fail? Can it be coherently envisaged that Axt [(P1)] and Not: Axt [(P1\*\*)] might hold at the same time? The latter, [...] comes to [...] the claim that  $x$  has available a second-order warrant at  $t$ : a warrant to believe that the belief that she is not then maundering is warrantable. But now the evident difficulty is to understand how such a warrant could indeed be available to a subject without a corresponding second-order warrant being simultaneously available with respect to the supposition that she is not dreaming. What would explain the difference? Dreams - at least those on which scepticism seeks to capitalise - and maunderings are alike in being phenomenologically smooth states, distinguished from genuinely perceptual or intellectual modes of consciousness by aetiological considerations of which the reflective subject on whom the sceptical arguments are targeted can have no direct awareness. How then can the thought that I am not now maundering possibly fare better [...] than the thought that I am not now dreaming - what further disanalogy is there which a counterexample to (I) could exploit? [Wright 1991, p. 110]

The trouble is that this query is exactly the point at issue. Why *must* the sceptic adopt such a stance about (P1\*\*) on the basis of their scepticism about (P1) given that they are able to consistently concede that (P1\*\*) is undoubtable since it concerns a hinge proposition? And if they do not proceed in this fashion, of what fault do we convict them? The point is that the sceptic never claimed to be doubting as in the maundering case, and so it is incumbent upon us to show them that they must. But given that they can claim that, like us, they do not doubt hinge propositions - indeed, that one should treat hinge propositions with a kind of epistemic reverence that ordinary empirical propositions do not justify - it seems unclear how we are to *force* them to make this crucial move.

Wright makes one last move that is worthy of mention. He argues that at the very least we should be entitled to affirm

Axt [(I) & (II) & (III)],

where (II) and (III) are two further claims upon which the argument to (VII) depends [Wright 1991, pp. 111ff.]. However, given the preceding discussion it seems that this is precisely a move that the sceptic will want to disallow. Whatever the merits of (II) and (III), as far as the sceptic is concerned there *is* reason to think that (I) does not hold; to wit, that it concerns a relation between two propositions of different epistemic status, one which is not a hinge (and so doubtable) and another which is.

foul of the epistemic constraint. Insofar as it presents strategies to evade the demands of this constraint, however, then it faces the further problem of how to offer an intellectually satisfying response (as opposed to a capitulation) to a sceptical paradox with which it finds no substantive fault.

The moral to be drawn from this discussion is thus that if the sceptical paradox is to be blocked at all then this must be done by rejecting some element in the sceptical argument - either a premise or a principle of reasoning. Indeed, the inadequacy of Wright's 'implosion' of dreaming\* scepticism offers cause for optimism in this respect. For although it is true that this implosion failed, we also found that despite Wright's rigorous theoretical attempts to set-up a sceptical paradox there was, even by his own lights, no sceptical argument to implode. This was due to the externalist component of the epistemic operator that Wright used to characterise the sceptical thesis. The failure of the non-epistemic approach to scepticism thus enjoins us to look again at the machinery of the sceptical paradox and, in particular, at the (internalist?) presuppositions upon which it rests.

One final note. Although we have found a certain anti-sceptical interpretation of hinge propositions to be inadequate to the task, this need not decisively count against the utility of this notion in this regard. After all, what we have witnessed here is just one rendering of the Wittgensteinian thesis and, in any case, of all the various strategies that we have considered in this chapter, none of them bear much of a resemblance to the Wittgensteinian account. In particular, although we found traces of a non-epistemic view in *On Certainty*, it is notable that the sort of propositions that Wittgenstein had in mind as candidates for hinge proposition status (such as 'I have two hands') are far more quotidian than those proposed by his interpreters which reflect philosophical concerns about dreaming\* and the external world. There is thus still some room for an anti-sceptical account that respects some of Wittgenstein's intuitions. We will see the beginnings of such a theory in the next chapter.

In a related vein, it is also important to recognise that although we have rejected the non-epistemic approach as an anti-sceptical thesis, this is entirely consistent with

our accepting the truth of some of the arguments that comprise that view. After all, it is entirely plausible to suppose that not only is there a certain pragmatic and methodological utility in our belief in the denials of sceptical hypotheses, but also that we are, in any case, 'hard-wired' to retain such belief no matter what. The goal of the arguments here was not to undermine these claims, but rather to illustrate that, in themselves, they lacked the necessary anti-sceptical import. That this is so, however, does not mean that they cannot be incorporated into an anti-sceptical strategy which succeeded (where the non-epistemic strategy failed) in offering an epistemic response to the sceptical challenge. Accordingly, there may yet be some anti-sceptical mileage in these non-epistemic claims.

# INTERNALISM, EXTERNALISM, AND THE SCEPTICAL PREMISE\*

## Chapter Three

### §1. Preamble.

In the last chapter we saw the deficiencies of the non-epistemic solution to scepticism, an approach which tried to meet the sceptical paradox whilst conceding the basic thrust of the sceptical argument. In particular, the non-epistemic solution agreed with the sceptic's assessment of the epistemic status of our belief in the 'sceptical' propositions that figure in the sceptical premise - that, for instance, we do not know that we are not BIVs, or in a state of perpetual slumber, and so forth. What we also saw, however, was that one particular instantiation of the non-epistemic strategy - Wright's [1991] 'Maundering' argument - actually turned upon an epistemic notion which, being externalist, was unable to unproblematically support the sceptical premise in the first place (at least, not in the way that Wright supposed). This raises the interesting possibility that the legitimacy of the sceptical premise is entirely dependent upon the acceptability of the doctrine of epistemological internalism. If this is so, then we may be able to block the sceptical paradox by denying internalism and thereby rejecting the sceptic's premise.

Although the strategy sounds simple enough, the problem it faces is that undermining the sceptical argument in this way involves supporting several further claims. In the first place, it is not enough to simply show that the internalist theory supports the sceptical premise, since it may be the case that externalist theories also lack

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\* The main sections of this chapter are due to be presented at this year's annual international Wittgenstein symposium in Kirchberg, Austria. They will also be published in the proceedings of that conference under the title, 'Wittgenstein, "Hinge" Propositions, & On Certainty', [Pritchard 2000f]. The final section of this chapter was presented at the 1999 Joint Session of the Mind Association and the Aristotelian Society, held that year at the University of Nottingham. In order to give these remarks a focus, I directed them specifically at Edward Craig's account of epistemology - hence the title, 'Craig and the Sceptic: The Thumbnail Version'. My chair that day was Andrew Morton. A later version of that paper, now entitled 'Understanding Scepticism', is forthcoming in *Nordic Journal of Philosophy*, [Pritchard 2000e]. Material from this chapter also informs another paper entitled 'Is "God Exists" a "Hinge" Proposition of Religious Belief?', which is forthcoming in *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, [Pritchard 2000c]. (A shorter version of this piece shall be aired at this year's Gifford Bequest International Conference on the topic of 'Natural Theology: Problems and Prospects', to be held at the University of Aberdeen, May 2000).

the resources to resist this premise. One must therefore further show that the favoured externalist theory does not also sustain the sceptical premise. Moreover, even if it were true that scepticism arises purely out of internalism, this would do nothing to stymie the cause of scepticism if internalism were part of the intuitive understanding of our epistemic concepts. We would then be back in the position of confronting an intuitive sceptical interpretation of our epistemic concepts with an unintuitive anti-sceptical interpretation and so face the problem of meeting the *impasse* constraint outlined in chapter one. It is therefore incumbent upon us either to show that internalism is not an intuitive doctrine, or else to furnish our revisionist epistemology with second-order grounds which would warrant its acceptance over any competing sceptical construal of our epistemic concepts. Finally, even if we are able to establish that externalism is the intuitive theory and that it does not entail the sceptical premise, still, it may nevertheless be the case that externalism leaves us with a different form of scepticism, one which we did not recognise before because we were blinded by our commitment to the (erroneous) doctrine of internalism. We must therefore also establish that the resultant externalist theory is scepticism-free.

As a result of these complicating factors, we must tread with care. In this chapter we shall confine our attention to supporting the following three claims. First, that internalism lacks the resources to resist the sceptical premise. Second, that there are *prima facie* grounds for believing that externalism does not entail the sceptical premise. And, third, that internalism, unlike the favoured form of externalism, is not an intuitive doctrine. In chapter four we shall discuss the two remaining issues - whether externalism entails the sceptical premise, and whether the externalist theory which is ultimately decided upon succumbs to a different form of sceptical paradox.

## §2. Internalism and Externalism.

There is a considerable amount of philosophical debate devoted to the question of exactly where the internalism/externalism distinction is to be drawn.<sup>1</sup> In order to

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Goldman [1976; 1980; 1988]; Bonjour [1980; 1985, chapter 3; 1993]; Alston [1986; 1988]; Fumerton [1988]; and Plantinga [1993a]. For discussion of this distinction insofar as it relates to the

simplify matters, I shall not here be interested in the so-called ‘hybrid’ accounts on offer which attempt to conjoin elements of internalism with aspects of the externalist theory [e.g. Swain 1981; 1988; Pollock 1986; Alston 1988; 1989]. For our purposes, we can simply define internalism in a suitable fashion and then stipulate that any non-internalist epistemology shall be considered an *externalist* epistemology. In order to get a handle on the distinction, it is necessary to consider first what I shall refer to as the *classical* conception of internalism. This holds that there is nothing more to justification than the possession of appropriate “internal” access to the factors that make the belief justified; and that there is nothing more to knowledge than sufficiently (internalistically) justified true belief.

Of course, the pivotal issue here is how we are to understand “internal” in this context. Consider the following characterisations of this notion:

Traditional epistemology [...] has been predominantly *internalist*, or egocentric. [... *It argues that*] epistemology’s job is to construct a doxastic principle or procedure from the inside, from our own individual vantage point. [Goldman 1980, p. 32]

Internalism requires that a person have “cognitive grasp” of whatever makes the belief justified. [Bach 1985, p. 247]

Only what is within the subject’s “perspective” can determine the justification of a belief. [Alston 1986, p. 181].

The concept of epistemic justification [...] is *internal* [...] in that one can find out directly, by *reflection*, what one is justified in believing at any one time. [Chisholm 1989, p. 7]

[...] a theory of justification is *internalist* if and only if it requires that all of the factors needed for a belief to be epistemically justified for a given person be *cognitively accessible* to that person, *internal* to his cognitive perspective. [Bonjour 1993, p. 132; cf. Bonjour 1980]

[*Internalism about justification suggests ...*] that justification is grounded entirely in what is internal to the mind, in a sense implying that it is accessible to introspection or reflection by the subject. [Audi 1998, pp. 231-2]

These quotations make diverse recommendations as to how we should understand the concept in question, and often convey a disconcertingly cautious attitude to the view they advocate by setting the core term within scare quotes. Moreover, in the standard case we find that the concept to be explicated - “internal” - is often characterised either

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sceptical challenge, see Bonjour [1987]; M. Williams [1991]; Stroud [1994]; and Sosa [1994a; 1994b; 1999a; 1999c].

in terms of further notions which are just as vague as the original concept - such as "perspective" or "vantage point" - or in terms of other *epistemic* notions - such as "cognitive grasp" or "cognitive access" - so making the characterisation potentially circular. What does seem to be underlying these rough-and-ready characterisations of the notion, however, is a clear intuition that the relevant sense of "internal" is defined by what is *reflectively accessible* to the subject - that for an agent to possess internalist justification for his belief is for that agent to be in a position to access the factors which make his belief justified in a, broadly speaking, non-empirical manner. Conversely, then, if one is unable to determine this - if some factor relevant to one's justification is not, in fact, accessible in this way - then one's belief will not be justified.

Consider the following example. Suppose Patrick believes that his keys are in his office. On the classical internalist account, if this belief is justified then Patrick must be able to reflectively access the grounds which support his belief in this respect. This may involve, for instance, recalling that he saw them in his office only moments before; surmising that no-one had cause, or opportunity, to move them; and perhaps also realising that he is in a good position to judge that it was his keys that were there (he has not been drinking for instance). If Patrick is able to reflectively access these grounds for his belief in this way, then his belief will be justified. It is not necessary that he actually run through all of these grounds of course, since the point is only that he be in a position to do so, not that he actually does. Equally, however, it is not enough that Patrick could find out, via an empirical means, those factors which could justify his belief - by, for instance, looking in his office - since the classical internalist account stipulates that his justification be *reflectively* based. If Patrick's belief is sufficiently justified in this way (if he manages to meet some set standard of justification), and his belief is true, then he will have internalist knowledge of the proposition in question.

This is, of course, extremely vague. Setting aside the inherent indeterminacy involved in a phrase like 'sufficient' for the moment, the vagueness runs along two axes. On the one hand, there is some room for manoeuvre as regards how one construes the 'reflective accessibility' of the justifying factors. The natural way to read this is, I take it,

as defining accessibility in terms of what the agent can reflectively access under the conditions that actually obtain. Natural though this construal may be, however, it can be put under pressure. For instance, there are going to be situations in which one's faculties are affected in such a way as to prevent one from actually being able to reflectively access the relevant factors at that time. Provided that such impairment is temporary, however, it would seem somewhat zealous to deny one internalistic justification for one's beliefs. Imagine, for example, that an agent's concentration is temporarily addled by the sound of a car alarm nearby to such an extent that he is unable, at that time, to reflectively access anything. Given that all it would take is a second or two for that agent's concentration to return, would it not be unduly restrictive to deny him internalist justification? Indeed, if we are to restrict the conditions for knowledge in this way, then does this not mean that our knowledge possession ebbs and flows throughout the day in line with our concentration levels (and disappears completely when we are asleep)? Accordingly, it may be that one ought to admit some degree of idealisation into this characterisation of internalism, specifying 'reflectively accessible' in terms of, for instance, what the agent can access under standard conditions. The problem with idealising one's understanding of internalism in this way, as with all idealisations, is that it seems to make the notion inherently imprecise. Although we have a clear idea of what actual circumstances are, the appropriate interpretation of 'standard' circumstances will always be in danger of being moot.

A second area of indeterminacy concerns the proper interpretation of 'reflective' access. Perhaps the most natural rendering of this term in this setting is as simply meaning *a priori*. The trouble with this suggestion is that the relevant sense of 'reflective' seems to have a broader extension. For instance, Patrick's belief that his keys are in his office is justified by appeal to not only what he could access via reason, but also with respect to his memory. Although reason may always be thought of as an *a priori* faculty, there is good cause to doubt the role of memory in this respect. At the very least, accessing very distant memories, for example, can require intense concentration and the 'running-through' of various other memories in order to stimulate the memory required

(consider, for instance, the use of Freudian psychoanalysis as a means of discovering 'repressed' memories). On the one hand, this raises the problem we just noted about just how 'accessible' the reflectively accessible data should be. On the other, it raises the issue of whether some instances of memory retrieval are really to be thought of as gaining information in a purely *a priori* manner. If one has to make a strenuous effort in order to recall a memory, perhaps by employing carefully selected stimuli, then to what extent was the memory retrieved in a non-empirical *a priori* fashion? Clearly there is some room for manoeuvre as regards how one decides this matter. If, however, one does not characterise the notion of reflective access which is central to internalism in terms of the *a priori*, then how else is one to describe it?

Fortunately, although there are these problems concerning how one ought to formulate the internalist position, we need not concern ourselves with determining an exact specification of the doctrine. This is because the sort of cases that the sceptic uses to motivate his sceptical premise on internalist grounds do not fall into the problematic penumbral areas of the characterisation. If anything, the cases that the sceptic focuses upon constitute *paradigm* examples of a lack of internalist knowledge and justification since sceptical hypotheses are carefully chosen such that, from the agent's point of view, there will be *no* reflectively available difference between these scenarios and everyday circumstances. Take the BIV hypothesis for example, where a subject is being 'fed' everyday experiences by a benevolent scientist. *Ex hypothesi*, there will be no phenomenological difference between that subject's experience of being a BIV and his experience of, say, sitting at his computer typing. Absent *a priori* grounds for one's belief that one is not a BIV, there is thus not going to be anything which is reflectively available to the subject which would indicate to him that he is not the victim of such a scenario. It follows that on the classical internalist view one is never able to know that one is not a BIV. And what applies in the BIV case will also hold, *mutatis mutandis*, for other sceptical hypotheses. As a result, we do not need to worry about the subtleties of the internalist position in order to recognise that, however this doctrine is to be made precise, internalist knowledge is lacking in the crucial sceptical case.

However, although this vague characterisation of classical internalism will suffice in regard to our investigations into scepticism, it will not enable us to best understand what would constitute a non-internalist *externalist* epistemology. The reason for this is that the classical form of internalism just sketched, although at the heart of the doctrine, does not itself capture the internalist position. This is because whatever knowledge is, it is *not* true belief plus some merely internalist component. As Edmund Gettier [1963] highlighted, one can straightforwardly generate cases in which one has a sufficiently (internalistically) justified true belief whilst *lacking* knowledge. Accordingly, internalist justification cannot be thought sufficient, with true belief, for knowledge in the way that the classical account suggests, and hence externalism cannot simply be seen as the denial of classical internalism.

Consider the following 'Gettier' scenario. John has excellent reasons for thinking that his next door neighbour, Bill, has a Porsche. For instance, he has seen him driving it and it is always parked outside his house. Sure enough, Bill does own a Porsche. Crucially, however, the Porsche that Bill owns is not the one that John has seen in the driveway and so forth (this is owned by his brother), but rather a battered old model which is currently parked in a local field. Does John know that Bill has a Porsche? Well, on a purely internalist model of knowledge, it would certainly seem as if this were the case. He has a true belief that Bill has a Porsche and, by his own lights, he has excellent grounds to support this belief. Nevertheless, we would clearly be reluctant to say that John knows this proposition.

Indeed, we get analogous Gettier examples with certain carefully chosen sceptical hypotheses. Suppose that I have the belief that I am sitting here now in front of my computer, based on the excellent grounds that this is what I am currently experiencing and I have no good reason for thinking otherwise. Unfortunately, however, a few minutes ago, whilst sitting in front of my computer, I fell asleep at my desk and went into a vivid dream in which I was imagining that I was still awake in front of my computer. As before, I have a true belief (that I am currently sitting in front of my computer), and, by my own lights, excellent grounds for that belief. Seemingly,

however, I do not know what I believe.

What ties these counterexamples to the classical tripartite account together is the fact that they are both cases of true belief which are just too lucky - too *accidental* - to count as knowledge. Typically, having a sufficient justification will be enough to ensure that your true belief was not gained via serendipity, but Gettier cases illustrate that, although this may be the norm, it is not without exception. Our conception of knowledge as justified true belief should thus be replaced by a different notion, that of *non-accidental true belief*. The problem with this modification is that specifying what is involved in a belief being 'non-accidental' in the appropriate way has proved to be notoriously difficult. Significantly for our purposes, however, one cannot adequately characterise this notion in any way that is compatible with the classical internalist account.

The most natural way to specify 'non-accidental' in this regard is in terms of subjunctive conditionals.<sup>2</sup> For example, in both of the cases given above, although the agent managed to get a true belief, the problem with that belief was that it could have so easily have been false. If slightly different circumstances had obtained (where Bill *did* not secretly own a Porsche, or where I had fallen asleep on the floor instead of next to the computer), then the agent in question would have ended up with a false belief instead of a true one. We can express this notion of 'non-accidentality' in a rough-and-ready way in terms of the '*sensitivity*' of the agent's belief to actual and possible circumstances. Penumbral cases aside, for an agent's belief in a contingent proposition

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<sup>2</sup> That said, contemporary epistemology 'post-Gettier' went through a number of epicycles before it came to this conclusion. To begin with, the dominant suggestion was that one should simply rule out the presence of 'false lemmas' in the subject's reasoning to the true belief (e.g. John's assumption that the Porsche that his next-door neighbour was driving was his own). Proposals along this line were advocated by Lehrer & Paxson [1969]; Swain [1972]; and Armstrong [1973]. But, as Chisholm [1989] for one has pointed out, one can construct Gettier counterexamples to the tripartite account without assuming that the subject makes any inference at all. The next wave of proposals tended to focus upon Goldman's [1967] *causal* analysis of knowledge such that what makes a subject's belief knowledge depends upon what caused the subject to have the belief. A related proposal in this respect was the *reliabilist* claim - also associated with the work of Goldman (see Goldman [1976; 1979; 1986]) - which argued, crudely put, that knowledge should be cashed-out in terms of its propensity to 'mesh' with the truth. As Dretske [1970] made clear, however, if the causal and reliabilist accounts are not to be construed in terms of subjunctive conditionals then they are clearly prone to very straightforward counterexamples. It was thus with Dretske [1970] himself that we get the first clear-cut analysis of this property of 'non-accidentality' in terms of subjunctive conditionals.

to count as knowledge the agent's belief must not only be true, but also be *sensitive*, where this means that it is a belief as to whether P which matches the truth as to whether P across a wide range of nearby possible worlds, such that the agent believes P in worlds in which P is true, and does not believe P in worlds in which P is false.<sup>3</sup>

Consider Jack's knowledge that he has hands. What makes this true belief knowledge is not just that it is an instance of true belief, but also that Jack's belief is responsive to a broad range of possible scenarios. This will not only involve Jack's continuing to believe that he has hands in slightly different possible worlds in which he retains his hands, but also his not believing that he has hands in near-by possible worlds in which he lacks them (possible worlds in which, for instance, Jack has had the gruesome misfortune to lose his hands operating that garden shredder he is so careless with).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Of course, any such subjunctive account of knowledge will be hostage, to some extent at least, to the debate over the 'reality' of possible worlds. Although I shall be saying a lot more about how I understand this notion of sensitivity, I will not be engaging in this related discussion. For our purposes we only require an intuitive understanding of subjunctives, and it is therefore reasonable to anticipate that whatever theory of subjunctives turns out to be adequate can be plugged into these remarks without loss. In any case, the aim here is not to develop a fully-fledged epistemology, but rather to explore what sorts of general features an intuitive account of our epistemology would possess. Provided we can show that, on an intuitive construal, our epistemic concepts do not licence radical scepticism, then, given an adequate diagnosis of the phenomenology of scepticism, this will suffice to meet the four constraints on an anti-sceptical theory that were outlined in chapter one. For the main texts on subjunctives, see Lewis [1973] and Stalnaker [1991]. For discussion specific to the relationship between scepticism and subjunctives, see Barker [1987] and Nozick [1981, section 3; cf. Nozick 1987].

Moreover, given this characterisation of sensitivity, it is clearly important that it is restricted to potential knowledge of *contingent* propositions. Since necessary truths are true in all possible worlds, so merely having a stubborn belief in a necessary proposition would suffice for sensitivity and therefore make one's belief a candidate for knowledge. Further supplementation to the characterisation offered here is therefore required in order for it to apply to potential knowledge of these propositions (similar remarks will apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to potential knowledge of necessary falsehoods). I disregard this complication here since, in general, the only propositions that the sceptic uses are contingent propositions. The exceptions are those propositions that state the entailment from the everyday proposition to the denial of the sceptical hypothesis. Since sceptical hypotheses are *defined* such that they are logically incompatible with everyday propositions, it will be a necessary conceptual truth that this entailment should hold. (Recall that this is also the case even with sceptical hypotheses that are not directly logically incompatible with everyday propositions - such as the 'dreaming' hypothesis. This is because the logical incompatibility is not between the sceptical hypothesis and the everyday proposition, but rather between, for example, the sceptical hypothesis and the agent's *knowledge* of the everyday proposition). In any case, it ought to be harmless to assume knowledge of these propositions in this context because such an assumption can only benefit the sceptic's cause. Many of the issues raised here also affect Nozick's subjunctive account of knowledge in a similar fashion. For his discussion of some of these problems, see Nozick [1981, pp. 31-2, p. 105n23; cf. Nozick 1987, p. 32]. For discussion of Nozick's subjunctive account of our knowledge of necessary truths, see Barker [1987]; Fumerton [1987, esp. pp. 165-70]; and Luper-Foy [1987a, p. 12].

<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of a roughly equivalent notion of sensitivity, see DeRose [1995].

This notion of sensitivity clearly captures what was lacking in the Gettier counterexamples. The trouble with John's belief that Bill owns a Porsche, for instance, is not a lack of (internalist) justification, but rather a lack of sensitivity in his beliefs - he would have believed this proposition even in a near-by possible world in which it was false. Moreover, sensitivity can account for why it is that having a sufficiently justified true belief will usually be sufficient for knowledge. After all, the possession of reflectively accessible grounds for one's beliefs will enable one's beliefs to be responsive to just such a range of possible circumstances. So even though it is, as yet, vague how sensitive a belief must be if it is to count as knowledge (i.e., how broad the range of possible worlds in which the agent's belief as to whether P matches the truth as to whether P must be), it clearly is intuitive that sensitivity is a core element of our everyday conception of knowledge. And since a belief can be sufficiently internalistically justified and yet not be sensitive, it follows that classical internalism does not completely capture our intuitive understanding of our epistemic concepts.

Given the failure of the classical conception of internalism, the dividing line between externalist and internalist theories of knowledge tends to rest with the issue of what role sensitivity allows for sufficiently internalistically justified belief. Clearly, as we saw above, having such a justification will still be important to having a sensitive belief. The issue, however, is whether it is *necessary*. The internalist will argue that one cannot have knowledge without having a belief which possesses this property, and thus will maintain (with the sceptic), that one's beliefs in the denials of sceptical hypotheses can never be candidates for knowledge. The externalist will argue, in contrast, that there is nothing in the notion of sensitivity that makes this demand and therefore that although possessing a sufficiently internalistically justified belief may be central to knowledge possession, it is the possession of a sensitive belief which is both necessary and sufficient for knowledge.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> That externalism is consistent with according internalist justification a central role in our epistemic concepts is often overlooked. Indeed, the internalism/externalism debate, particularly as it relates to scepticism, has been severely hampered by the tendency of some commentators to identify externalism with the view that internalist justification plays *no part* in the determination of knowledge [e.g. DeRose

If we are to assess the truth of these claims whilst evading concerns over the potential vagueness in the boundary between internalist and externalist knowledge, it is going to be necessary to find an example of purely externalist knowledge which is wholly uncontentious. This, in turn, will require determining some element of internalist justification which, the internalist argues, is essential for knowledge, and then finding a clear-cut example in which an agent has knowledge even though this property is absent from his belief.

Now it may well be true that one cannot know a proposition without having a belief which is internalistically justified in *some* measure. At least, we shall set aside the question of whether a *completely* unjustified belief could count as knowledge. What we are concerned with here is whether it is possible to know a proposition whilst lacking *internalist* knowledge of that proposition, where internalist knowledge is defined in terms of the presence of a *sufficiently* internalistically justified true belief in the proposition in question.<sup>6</sup> It is not enough for the internalist to claim that if we know a proposition, then we must have some degree of internalist justification for our belief in that proposition. Rather, he must make the stronger claim that if we know a proposition then we must possess *sufficient* internalist justification for our belief in that proposition. Accordingly, since it is going to be essential to an agent's knowledge on this modified (non-classical) internalist account that the belief in question is reliable in such a way as to guarantee sensitivity, so it is surely going to be essential to the notion of sufficient internalist justification that an agent should have reflective access to the factors which indicate that the belief in question is reliable. A clear case of purely externalist knowledge would thus be where the subject knows a proposition and yet lacks reflective access to factors which would indicate that the belief in question is reliable.

Consider the following scenario (due to Robert Brandom [1998]). An expert on Central American pottery has, over many years, acquired the highly reliable ability to

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1999b; cf. Hill 1996], a view that is thought to be found in the early *reliabilist* work conducted by Goldman [1967; 1976; 1979; cf. Goldman 1980; 1986; 1988].

<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, the thesis of internalism would reduce to the claim that internalist knowledge, so defined, is all the knowledge that there is; whereas externalism is tantamount to the *denial* of this claim, and thus to the contention that there exists some knowledge which is not internalist knowledge.

tell Toltec and Aztec potsherds apart by sight alone. However, being the careful archaeologist that he is, he has always sent the groups of putative Toltec and Aztec mounds of pottery off to the laboratory for a second evaluation under the microscope. Moreover, he has never checked to see whether his separation of the two types of pottery has been confirmed by the laboratory verification in question. As a result, although he is a reliable indicator of Toltec and Aztec pottery, he lacks sufficient reflectively accessible grounds for believing that this is the case. Hence, as regards any particular belief he might have concerning the origin of a specific piece of pottery, that belief will not be a candidate for internalist knowledge since it lacks a feature which, on the internalist theory, is essential. Nevertheless, if his belief is not only true but also reliable enough to be sensitive to a wide range of counterfactual scenarios then, according to the externalist account at any rate, he ought to be regarded as possessing knowledge. And, indeed, this judgement is backed-up by intuition. We would clearly be willing to ascribe knowledge to an agent who possesses an ability to produce reliable beliefs which is grounded in this way.

A second example that is often offered in the literature is that of the 'chicken-sexers'. These are people who, simply by being raised around chickens, are able to reliably determine the sex of a chick. Typically, the sexers tend to assume that they must be seeing or touching something distinctive, but tests have shown that their actual means of distinguishing male from female chicks is olfactory. So even though these sexers have a highly reliable ability, they nevertheless tend to have false beliefs about how that ability functions. Now take the example of the 'naïve' chicken-sexer. This is a person who has this highly reliable ability but not only has false beliefs about how he does it but also fails to have sufficiently reflectively accessible grounds for believing that he is reliable in this respect. As with the expert in Central American pottery, let us say that he has just never ascertained what his success ratio is. Nevertheless, if he is reliable, then his belief that such-and-such chick is a male will be a sensitive belief and we would clearly be prepared to ascribe to him knowledge of this proposition. Significantly, however, and in common with the case of the Central American pottery expert, his

knowledge of this proposition clearly coexists with a lack of sufficient internalist justification for his belief.<sup>7</sup>

If either of these cases are instances of (non-internalist) knowledge we would thus get a clear refutation of the internalist position. Their plausibility as examples of non-internalist knowledge thus presents a challenge to the internalist motivation for the sceptical premise. For if internalism is false, then we can no longer take it for granted that the sceptical premise - that we lack knowledge of the denials of sceptical hypotheses - which was motivated primarily on internalist grounds, should still be thought to hold. Accordingly, the sceptic is therefore in danger of losing his *a priori* argument for the sceptical premise. It is important to appreciate the manner in which this would change the dialectical landscape. Since we know, *a priori*, that we lack internalist knowledge of the sceptical premise, it follows that if internalism is true then we will lack knowledge of the denials of sceptical hypotheses in *all* possible worlds, regardless of how our beliefs are related to the facts in those worlds. If externalism is true, however, and we are able to characterise an agent's knowledge of the denial of a sceptical hypothesis in purely externalist terms, then the issue of whether or not the sceptical premise is true will be decided by the empirical facts of the situation. In sceptical possible worlds - worlds in which sceptical hypotheses are either true or where there is a reasonable likelihood of their truth - the sceptical premise will hold. But in *non-sceptical* worlds - worlds in which sceptical hypotheses are not only false but where

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<sup>7</sup> This example is common currency in the contemporary literature, appearing in, for example, Millikan [1984]; Lewis [1996]; Sainsbury [1996]; and Brandom [1998]. There have been a number of internalist replies to examples such as this, many of which rest upon the claim that the 'knowledge' in question is only apparent. There are two main motivations for this claim. On the one hand, one might argue that such knowledge is more akin to *ability* knowledge rather than propositional knowledge. On the other, one might argue that the sort of 'knowledge' being ascribed here is similar to that which we ascribe to small children and animals, and which, therefore, is not 'real' knowledge at all. Neither contention really hits home. The former because the ability in question clearly is issuing in a belief (*that* the chick is male, for instance). The latter because we can simply stipulate that the agent in these examples is a fully rational individual who possesses, therefore, the very sort of reflective capacities that (one might suppose) small children and animals lack and which disqualifies them from being knowing subjects. A more sophisticated line of attack, due to Wright [1996], maintains that mastering a skill necessarily involves adducing independent corroboration for one's beliefs. To demand this, however, is simply to disallow the intuition that is at stake here - that even despite the lack of such independent corroboration, our protagonist does know the sex of the chick before him. For more on the internalism/externalism debate in this respect, contrast Brandom [1995; cf. Brandom 1994; 1998] with McDowell [1995; cf. McDowell 1982]; and Sosa [1994b; cf. Sosa 1994a; 1999a; 1999c] with Stroud [1994; cf. Stroud 1989; 1996].

there is also a low likelihood of their truth - the sceptical premise will not hold. If the sceptic wanted to continue maintaining the sceptical premise, then he would thus have to argue for the empirical claim that we are in fact in a sceptical world rather than a non-sceptical world, and this is something that the sceptic is not in a position to do. *Prima facie*, then, externalism would suffice to block the sceptical premise.

We shall consider the relationship between externalism and the sceptical premise in more detail in the next chapter, but one natural response that one might put to any anti-sceptical account which was run along these lines would be to argue that, whatever epistemic notion externalism captures, it is not this notion that is at issue in the sceptical debate. The point might be made that purely externalist knowledge is in some sense a very 'low-grade' epistemic property, and that what we need to dispel the sceptical paradox is the more fine-grained internalist knowledge.

There is certainly some initial plausibility in this claim. Were our naïve chicken-sexer and our expert in Central American pottery to avail themselves of their success ratios - and, in the case of the chicken-sexer, become aware of the causal mechanisms through which that success is gained - then the proper account of the status of their knowledge would be liable to change such that it now fulfils the internalist component and thus, in the process, becomes more refined. In general, internalist knowledge will be 'better' knowledge than its merely externalist cousin because it will be based on a belief as to whether P which matches the truth as to whether P across a broader range of possible worlds. For instance, if one has reflective access to the fact that chicken-sexing requires a good sense of smell, then one will withdraw judgement on days in which one believes that one has a cold, illustrating a sensitivity to the facts that will not be mirrored by the naïve chicken-sexer. Does this mean, however, that purely externalist knowledge is of no use against the sceptic?

There are two ways in which the externalist might respond to a charge of this sort. On the one hand, the externalist can argue that, knowing what we know about these cases, we would clearly be willing to ascribe knowledge to these agents because of their sensitive beliefs. Accordingly, it seems mere prejudice to regard this knowledge so

described as being 'deficient' knowledge, rather than merely knowledge which lacks certain non-essential attributes. In this respect, the externalist clearly has intuition on his side - ordinary language-users are quite happy to ascribe knowledge to agents who have sensitive beliefs even whilst recognising that the agents in question are not in a position to coherently ascribe that knowledge to themselves. As a result, the internalist faces a up-hill struggle to explain why we should adopt his revisionist stance of only ascribing knowledge where the subjects have a specific sort of knowledge. For sure, one's epistemic position can always (in principle) be improved, but if the threshold standard has been met then, whatever relevance this potential improvement has, it cannot have any significant impact on the sceptical debate.

In any case, a second response that the externalist can make will focus on the supposed *sceptical* use of this observation. Suppose it were true that the sceptic is unable to motivate his sceptical premise because he is incapable of ruling-out the possibility of externalist knowledge of the denials of sceptical hypotheses. Would it be a useful sceptical response to argue that having externalist knowledge of the denials of sceptical hypotheses is not enough because 'high-grade' internalist knowledge is needed? To begin with, note that the radical sceptical paradox is meant to show that we do not have *any* knowledge, approximate or otherwise. Accordingly, to rescue even approximate knowledge from the sceptic's grasp is to emasculate the radical sceptical argument. Could we not live with the verdict on our knowledge that it is ultimately based on 'low-grade' approximate knowledge, but *knowledge* nonetheless? Moreover, as before, if it can be shown that agents are quite happy to regard purely externalist knowledge as worthy of the term, then the onus would thus be on the sceptic to legitimate this revisionist demand, so shifting the burden of explanation away from one's anti-sceptical account.

The substantive issue regarding the relationship between externalism and scepticism thus hangs, first and foremost, not on the nature of externalist knowledge as such, but rather on the question of whether a case can be made for regarding externalism as an intuitive rendering of our epistemic concepts that has application to the sceptical debate. It is to this question that I will now turn.

### §3. "Hinge" Propositions and the Conversational Implicature of Epistemic Language-Games.

As we have seen, if externalism is to offer the means of undermining the sceptic's claim to have discovered a paradox, then it ought to be the case that our concept of knowledge is, intuitively understood, externalist in the manner outlined above. We have already noted one feature of our use of epistemic terms that straightforwardly favours the externalist thesis over the internalist thesis in this respect. This is the fact that we are quite prepared to ascribe knowledge to agents who have sensitive true beliefs but who lack sufficient internalist justification for their belief. In this section I want to expand on this insight in order to offer the beginnings of an account of how a commitment to externalism - in a manner that has application to the sceptical debate - might be implicit in our everyday use of epistemic terms.

One of the interesting aspects of the purely externalist knowledge that features in the scenarios discussed above is that although we would be happy to regard the agent in question as knowing the propositions at issue, one would not consider that agent as being in a position to either self-ascribe that knowledge or legitimately claim that knowledge. For although we may be able to determine that the naïve chicken-sexer knows the sex of the chick, he is not himself in a position to ascertain this fact. As a result, if he were to claim that he knew the sex of the chick then he would clearly be misleading his audience even though the assertion in question would be true. That externalism should highlight a class of cases in which an agent knows a certain proposition but where he is unable to unproblematically claim knowledge of that proposition is not itself an epistemically significant result because the assertibility conditions for the use of a term and its truth conditions can come apart for a variety of reasons. In particular, an important sub-class of cases in which truth conditions and assertibility conditions come apart concern purely *social* factors which have no direct bearing upon the epistemic status of one's beliefs. In order to identify the particular epistemological import of the unassertibility of purely externalist knowledge, it is therefore necessary first to distinguish these examples from other superficially similar

cases which lack this import.

The best way to get a handle on the different ways in which an assertion can be both true and yet illegitimate is in contrast to an analysis of the *conversational implicature* of our linguistic practice [Austin 1961; 1962a; Grice 1989; cf. Stevenson 1999a; 1999b]. A conversational implicature is an inference which one is entitled to make upon hearing an assertion (but which is not entailed by what is asserted itself) given that one is allowed to make certain assumptions about the agent making that assertion - that he is, for instance, honest, co-operative and (at least otherwise) rational. *Ceteris paribus*, if an agent's assertion carries a false conversational implicature then it will be deemed illegitimate even if the assertion itself is true, *and* even if the agent's grounds for belief in that assertion are sufficient to justify that belief.

For example, if I asked you where the umbrella had been moved to and you answered (truly) "I saw it earlier in the broom cupboard", then so long as I can legitimately make these assumptions about you (that you are honest and co-operative and so forth), then I am entitled to infer that you do not believe that the umbrella is in your office. Although you have not actually said that you do not believe that the umbrella is in your office, your assertion does carry the implicature that you do not believe this because if you did then, given that you were being honest and co-operative, you would have simply said so. For this reason, if you do believe that the umbrella is in your office, then your assertion is illegitimate because it generates a false conversational implicature. Note, however, that this is not to say that there is anything false about the assertion itself (which is, by stipulation, true), nor does it in any way impugn the subject's grounds for belief in that assertion (he has, let us say, excellent grounds for believing that he saw the umbrella earlier in the broom cupboard).

Now one might naturally think that we can model the impropriety of a subject's claim to know where the knowledge possessed is mere externalist knowledge along the same lines. The thought would be that what makes this assertion improper is simply the fact that, although it is true, it generates false conversational implicatures. As we saw Wittgenstein arguing in chapter two, a claim to know carries with it certain

conversational implicatures to the effect that, for instance, we are able to adduce sufficient grounds to back-up our assertion. Accordingly, since it is precisely such grounds that are lacking in the case of externalist knowledge, one might imagine that a claim to know in this case would be illegitimate for this reason. That is, a claim to know in the case of, say, the naïve chicken-sexer, would be improper because, for example, it carries the false conversational implicature that he is able to offer sufficient grounds to justify his belief.

Unfortunately, the matter is not quite so simple. This is because it is not just a self-ascription of externalist knowledge in a social setting which is improper. It would, for instance, be just as improper for the naïve chicken-sexer to simply *think* to himself that he knows the sex of the chick because, as far as he is aware, he lacks sufficient grounds to indicate that this is so (even though it is in fact true). The impropriety of a claim to know in the case of externalist knowledge is thus not entirely dependent upon the fact that it generates a false conversational implicature. Instead, a stronger point needs to be made. One ought not to claim knowledge in these cases because, regardless of the prevailing social conventions and the false conversational implicatures that this assertion will generate, one just is not in a position to properly make such a claim (even though it is in fact true) because one lacks sufficient reflectively accessible grounds to license that claim. Henceforth, we shall refer to the false implicatures that such improper (though true) assertions of knowledge generate as ‘false *epistemic* conversational implicatures’. That way we shall be able to mark them apart from true assertions which are improper for *purely* social reasons.<sup>8</sup>

Crucially, as we saw above, on the internalist account of knowledge one could not be in a situation in which one both knew a proposition and yet was unable to adduce sufficient grounds to support that knowledge. Accordingly, social factors aside, on the internalist account (and unlike the externalist account), to possess knowledge of P is thereby to be in a position to properly claim to know P. There will thus not be any

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<sup>8</sup> This inclusive use of the term ‘conversational implicature’ is, I grant, rather idiosyncratic - I use it only so that a certain contrast is made explicit. In what follows, any reader familiar with a less inclusive notion of conversational implicature should thus keep in mind my characterisation.

cases in which a true assertion of knowledge generates a false epistemic conversational implicature.

The contrast with conversational implicature thus marks out a crucial difference between an internalist and an externalist account of knowledge. Whereas an internalist can only allow that a claim to know can be both true and illegitimate because of *social* factors, the externalist is able to go further and argue that sometimes such assertions are improper because of *epistemic* factors.

What is significant about this divergence between the externalist and internalist theories is that it puts the Wittgensteinian description of hinge propositions which we considered in the last chapter into a new light. This is because Wittgenstein's remarks are not primarily directed at the truth conditions for knowledge at all, but rather at the assertibility conditions for knowledge *claims*. Accordingly, it is only an epistemological account which is guided by internalist insights that is going to straightforwardly transplant Wittgenstein's assertion that one cannot properly claim knowledge of hinge propositions into the non-epistemic theorist's contention that one cannot know these propositions. On the externalist interpretation this will be a further issue to be resolved. It is the manner in which such an externalist interpretation of hinge propositions might fit with our everyday use of epistemic terms that I wish to examine here.

Although the dominant exegetical camp as regards Wittgenstein's On Certainty endorses the non-epistemic interpretation, there does exist an opposing school of thought which maintains that Wittgenstein should merely be regarded as largely confining his remarks to epistemic concerns at the level, broadly speaking, of pragmatics. As Michael Kober [1996] has argued, the aim of On Certainty is not to provide a "dissolution of scepticism", but rather

[...] a philosophically illuminating picture of the epistemic structure of language-games and their epistemically relevant settings. [Kober 1996, p. 412, italics in the original]<sup>9</sup>

In particular, according to Kober Wittgenstein was aiming to show how Moore's *claims* to know in the context of the sceptical debate were improper. Accordingly, such an

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<sup>9</sup> See also Morawetz [1978] for an interpretation of On Certainty which runs along similar lines.

interpretation does not automatically privilege the internalist non-epistemic reading.

As noted above, one of the constraints that Wittgenstein offered regarding legitimate claims to know was that the one who made the claim should be able to adduce sufficient grounds to support his assertion. Clearly this is the very sort of ability which is going to be lacking in the case of purely externalist knowledge and thus, by implication, in the case of any knowledge that we might putatively have of the denial of a sceptical hypothesis. As we have just seen, however, on an externalist account of knowledge it does not follow from the mere fact that a certain proposition cannot properly be claimed to be known because it generates a false epistemic conversational implicature that it therefore *cannot* be known. Indeed, since Wittgenstein is trying to be true to our actual usage of epistemic terms, we might reasonably suppose that for him, too, there will be elements of our epistemic practices which conform to the externalist picture. Moreover, the hypothesis that Wittgenstein shares some of these externalist intuitions would also explain why, for Wittgenstein, the Moorean error is often held to consist not in disagreeing with the *truth* of the sceptical thesis, but rather with trying to explicitly *argue* with the sceptic. As Wittgenstein puts the matter at one point:

Moore's mistake lies in this - countering the assertion that *one cannot know* that, by saying "I do know it". [OC §521, *my italics*]

If Wittgenstein really is concerned to support the non-epistemic thesis in On Certainty, then why, in remarks such as these, is he so coy? If, primarily, it is Moore's *belief* that he knows that is at fault, then why focus upon the impropriety of Moore's *claim* to know?<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, as we noted at the end of the last chapter, the non-epistemic interpretation of Wittgenstein is only able to give an account of *one* of the two types of examples of hinge propositions that Wittgenstein offers. Recall that the sort of hinge propositions that the non-epistemic account focused upon were those 'global' propositions which might directly function in the sceptical premise (i.e., which were the

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<sup>10</sup> This is not to deny that there are remarks in On Certainty that only awkwardly fit the interpretation offered here. After all, since it is merely an unedited notebook, it would be overly optimistic to expect to find a definitive thesis being expounded therein. My concern is only to undermine the supposed hegemony of the non-epistemic construal and indicate how the intuitive notion of a hinge proposition can be used for externalist ends.

denials of radical sceptical hypotheses); propositions such as “I am not now dreaming\*”, or “The universe did not come into existence five minutes ago”. Significantly, however, the bulk of the examples of hinge propositions that Wittgenstein offers are not of this global form, but instead concern propositions which could *not* figure as the premise in a radical sceptical argument (at least in the form that we set out in chapter one). Examples of these ‘local’ hinges include, “I have (two) hands”, “Cats do not grow on trees”, and “All human beings have parents”. Combining an externalist epistemology with an account of the conversational implicature of our epistemic language-games allows us to pay attention to the important differences between these two types of hinge propositions.

I shall consider the global hinge propositions first. By the lights of any plausible interpretation of On Certainty, the primary Wittgensteinian thesis will be that our belief in these sorts of propositions will lack, perforce, the kind of internalist grounds that are necessary to support a legitimate claim to know (i.e., a claim to know that does not generate a false epistemic conversational implicature). Accordingly, independently of the issue of whether or not we do know these propositions, we ought not, *à la* Moore, claim or otherwise self-ascribe such knowledge. Where the two interpretations will diverge is in their account of the truth - as opposed to the implicature - of what is asserted. Whereas on the non-epistemic account the global hinges are thought of as necessary presuppositions of our beliefs which are themselves unknown (indeed, *unknowable*), on the externalist account they will retain their presuppositional nature whilst gaining (potentially) an epistemic status. That we lack sufficient internalist grounds for these propositions will only impair the legitimacy of our claims to know (and non-social self-ascriptions of knowledge) in this respect - it will not decide the issue of whether we do in fact know them.

One of the consequences of this view is that it will not directly generate the same sort of problems over Closure that we found with the non-epistemic theory. Recall that on the non-epistemic account one had to explain how one could both know an everyday proposition, such as that one’s car was in the garage, and know that this entailed a

global hinge proposition, such as that there existed an external world, whilst simultaneously *not* knowing that there existed an external world. In short, how could it be that the truth of one set of propositions could be presupposed in our knowledge of another set of propositions (and we know that this relationship exists), without our knowing the propositions presupposed? No such conflict need exist on the externalist account because by the lights of this theory if we do know the everyday propositions then, *prima facie* at least, we will know the global hinge propositions as well. Seemingly, I could not have sensitive beliefs about so fine-grained a concern as whether or not my car was in the garage unless I also had beliefs which were sensitive to the issue of whether or not there existed an external world. Moreover, that there are different sorts of knowledge at issue here should not present any immediate concern. There is no *direct* contradiction between maintaining that one is unable to legitimately claim knowledge of a certain proposition whilst contending that there are other propositions which one knows entails these propositions and which one *can* legitimately claim to know.<sup>11</sup>

So whereas the non-epistemic interpretation regards the presuppositional role of global hinge propositions as legitimating our belief in them even *despite* a lack of adequate internalist grounds (and thus knowledge), the externalist interpretation is able to view these presuppositions as legitimate only *so long as* they are known. On both accounts we are held to be compelled to assume the truth of these propositions even without the necessary internalist grounds, but whereas this involves an *epistemic* 'leap-of-faith' on the non-epistemic account, this merely reflects inevitable empirical constraints on our epistemic position on the externalist account; the fact that we cannot acquire adequate internalist grounds for all that we believe. If our beliefs in the global hinge propositions are sensitive, then the superstructure of our epistemic practices may well be generally in order. If they are not, then we know very little. But, as we have seen before, this thought is not the same as the sceptical contention that, *a priori*, we lack

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<sup>11</sup> I shall be saying more about what other reasons one might have, *independently* of internalism, for denying the Closure principle in the next chapter. I shall also be examining whether or not there is any *indirect* tension between maintaining that an agent can legitimately claim knowledge of one set of propositions and know that they entail another set of propositions, whilst nevertheless maintaining that the agent is unable to legitimately claim knowledge of the second set of propositions.

knowledge of most of what we believe. Rather, it merely reflects the fact that whether or not we know most of what we believe depends upon certain empirical conditions obtaining. As Wittgenstein puts the matter, in the final analysis, "It is always by favour of Nature that one knows something" [OC §505].

One worry that one might have about allowing our beliefs in global hinge propositions to be instances of externalist knowledge might be that they lack certain properties that one finds in other cases of externalist knowledge. In the instances of externalist knowledge that we considered above, for instance, central to the description of those examples was that we had a third-person viewpoint upon the facts of the situation and could therefore tell - in a way that the agent himself could not - that our protagonist did know the proposition in question. Significantly, however, there does not seem to be any analogue of this in the sceptical case. The primary point of a sceptical hypotheses is that *no-one* is in a position to determine that these conditions are present on our behalf since everyone is in the same epistemic predicament.

That this concern does not present a substantive objection to the view can be seen by considering how one's knowledge of global hinges can be adequately characterised *hypothetically*. For example, take the following hypothetical situation. Jack believes, on the basis of the evidence of his senses, that he is not a BIV. This belief is, let us say, not only true, but it is also embedded within a large number of other true beliefs. Jack is right, not only is he not a BIV, but the possibility that he might have been is very remote (in the language of possible worlds we might say that there are no nearby worlds in which he is a BIV). Would we be willing to ascribe knowledge to Jack in this situation? I take it that the intuition here is entirely positive. If these conditions, so described, do obtain, then Jack does know that he is not a BIV. For sure, he lacks reflective access to the grounds that make it such that he knows that he is not a BIV, and thus he cannot legitimately claim knowledge of this proposition, but this does not mean that he does not know. Moreover, we ourselves lack reflective grounds for believing that Jack knows the proposition in question. Nevertheless, it remains that we can determine, *on a priori* grounds, that were these conditions to obtain, then Jack would know this global hinge

proposition. Accordingly, on the externalist account we have *prima facie* grounds for believing that if certain empirical conditions obtain then the sceptical premise - that we lack knowledge of the denials of sceptical hypotheses - will be false.<sup>12</sup>

The 'local' hinges - which do not concern 'sceptical' propositions as such, but rather more mundane propositions such as "I have two hands" - require a separate treatment. What these propositions have in common with the global hinges is the fact that saying that you know them carries the false conversational implicature that you can adduce grounds which would sufficiently support your belief in the proposition which you claim to know. The reason why this implicature is false, however, is entirely different in the two cases. Whereas one cannot offer sufficient internalist grounds for one's belief in global hinge propositions because there are none (if one knows them at all it is due to externalist factors), in the case of local hinges there *are* grounds to be offered - it is just that they are not socially regarded as being able to epistemically support the belief in question.

As Wittgenstein expounds at length in On Certainty, certainty is an attitude which is in part psychologically and in part socially defined; that is, a psychological attitude which one adopts "in conformity with mankind" [OC §156]. And since the attitude of certainty which is taken towards hinge propositions is such that nothing is regarded as being more certain than them, so it cannot be the case that any grounds will be accepted in support of one's belief in a hinge proposition. In the case of a local hinge proposition, however, this does not mean that there are no grounds supporting one's belief in this proposition. Rather the point is that the local hinge propositions represent elements of our everyday conception of the world that are so taken for granted that the grounds which support belief in these propositions would not be socially accepted as performing this supporting role.

This is not to say that on the externalist account one does not have reflective access to the grounds that support one's knowledge of local hinges, since if one does know these propositions then, typically, one will have reflective access to the grounds

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<sup>12</sup> I shall be expanding on this point in the next chapter.

that make one's belief sufficiently justified. Nevertheless, as noted above in our discussion on conversational implicature, the propriety of a claim to know does not stand or fall with epistemic factors alone - rather one must also meet the social standards appropriate to the assertion in question. In this case, this means being able to offer grounds which, whether or not they do in fact sufficiently support the belief in question, can be socially regarded as sufficiently supporting that belief. And since no grounds are regarded in this way when it comes to one's belief in a hinge proposition, it follows that one cannot claim knowledge of a hinge proposition even if, as can be the case with local hinges, one does in fact possess sufficient internalist justification for one's belief in that proposition.

Consider the example of a (true) claim to know that one has hands. Given the certainty attached to this proposition (in normal circumstances) no socially acceptable grounds could be offered in support of this knowledge and thus the claim to know would generate the false conversational implicature that such grounds could be offered. The assertion would therefore be improper. Nevertheless, if the grounds which support one's belief in this proposition (such as one's experience of one's hands and so forth) *do* appropriately perform this supporting function and one does in fact have reflective access to these grounds, then one will have internalist knowledge of this proposition. One way of expressing this matter is via the distinction made earlier between false conversational implicatures and false *epistemic* conversational implicatures. Unlike a claim to know a global hinge proposition, a claim to know a local hinge proposition would only generate a purely *social* false conversational implicature which need constitute no reflection whatsoever on the epistemic nature of the agent's belief in that regard.<sup>13</sup>

According to the externalist interpretation of Wittgenstein being sketched here,

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<sup>13</sup> This thus explains why the role that 'local' hinge propositions play can be relative to certain socially defined parameters, such as normal circumstances, a certain system of beliefs, or a cultural-cum-geographical location. It also explains why, unlike global hinge propositions, local hinges can *lose* their special epistemic role (consider, for instance, the erstwhile 'social' hinge that the earth is flat [cf. OC §§291-99]). Rather than exhibiting the universal epistemic property of being immune to internalist knowledge, local hinges instead merely 'mimic' this property as a result of the certainty that is accorded to them in certain scenarios.

we thus get a two-fold distinction between the different ways in which a known hinge proposition cannot be legitimately claimed to be known. On the one hand, as with the global hinges, we have the cases in which (if one knows anything substantive at all) one does know these propositions, but where one cannot claim such knowledge because one lacks the necessary reflectively accessible grounds. This would be an instance of a claim to know which generated a false epistemic conversational implicature. On the other, as with the local hinges, we have the cases in which one knows the propositions but where one cannot claim such knowledge because one lacks grounds which are socially apt for the purpose of sufficiently supporting belief in those propositions. This would thus be a case of a claim to know which generated a purely social false conversational implicature.

This is not the end of the story, however, since there is a great deal more to be said about how this account can be developed to accommodate other factors necessary to make our anti-scepticism intuitive. In particular, as I shall explain in chapter five, there are other social factors which are relevant to the assessment of knowledge claims that have a particular impact on any hinge proposition thesis. What is important at present, however, is merely that there is a way of construing the hinge proposition thesis which both accommodates certain features of our intuitive use of our epistemic concepts and which also conforms to the externalist thesis. We thus have the *prima facie* grounds we were seeking to underpin an externalist response to the sceptic which runs along wholly intuitive lines.

#### **§4. Internalism, Realism, and Infallibilism.**

Before going on to develop this externalist line against scepticism, it is worthwhile considering an influential style of argument that has been offered in defence of scepticism which may appear to have been ignored thus far. It has been argued that the motivation for scepticism does not arise out of internalism at all, but rather results from uncontentious reflections on the nature of realism and objectivity. If this were true, then we would be failing to capture certain pivotal elements of the sceptical debate by

confining our attention to the internalism/externalism distinction. In this section I want to argue that the supposed 'realist' considerations that drive scepticism are actually simply elements of an internalist epistemology. Accordingly, we lose nothing by focusing on the acceptability, or otherwise, of internalism with regard to scepticism rather than digressing into a wider debate about the role of realism in this dispute. Moreover, by evaluating how these internalist presuppositions are bound into the 'realist' story in this respect we shall get a better handle on some of the features of the internalism/externalism distinction that have arisen in the discussion so far.

Perhaps the most influential account of how our realist aspirations for objectivity lead us to scepticism can be found in Thomas Nagel's [1986] book The View From Nowhere. For Nagel, objectivity involves attaining a completely impartial view of reality, one that is not tainted by any particular perspective. We must, he argues, "get outside of ourselves", and thereby achieve the impossible task of being able to "view the world from nowhere from within it" [Nagel 1986, p. 76]. We realise that the initial appearances present to a viewpoint can be unreliable guides to reality and therefore seek to modify our 'subjective' view with a more 'objective' perspective that is tempered by reason and reflection. As Nagel points out, however, the trouble with this approach is that

[...] if initial appearances are not in themselves reliable guides to reality, [*then*] why should the products of detached reflection be any different? Why aren't they [...] equally doubtful [...]? [...] The same ideas that make the pursuit of objectivity seem necessary for knowledge make both objectivity and knowledge seem, on reflection, unattainable. [Nagel 1986, p. 76]

We can reconstruct the argument here as follows. We recognise that our initial unmodified 'subjective' experience of the world is unreliable and therefore should be adapted along 'objective' lines by eliminating the 'subjective' element. For instance, initial appearances tell us, falsely, that straight sticks suddenly become 'bent' when placed in water. Accordingly, we modify our initial 'subjective' view with the testimony of 'objective' scientific investigation which tells us that the stick in fact stays straight, it is just the light that is bending. However, and here is the crux of the matter as far as Nagel is concerned, why do we regard this modified view as being any more reliable

than the completely 'subjective' perspective that it replaces? After all, we cannot eliminate every trace of 'subjectivity' and thus the problematic component of our conception of reality that engendered the pursuit of objectivity in the first place remains. Consequently, we are both aware of the need for objectivity whilst also recognising that such objectivity is impossible. As a result, according to Nagel, we are condemned to the following pessimistic evaluation of our epistemic capacities:

The search for objective knowledge, because of its commitment to a realist picture, is inescapably subject to skepticism and cannot refute it but must proceed under its shadow. [...] Skepticism [...] is a problem only because of the realist claims of objectivity. [Nagel 1986, p. 71]

That is, the problem of scepticism

[...] has no solution, but to recognise that is to come as near as we can to living in the light of truth. [Nagel 1986, p. 231]

Moreover, since these 'realist' truths concerning objectivity are meant to be inherent in our epistemic concepts, so it is held that this pessimism falls naturally out of any reflective analysis of our epistemic concepts.<sup>14</sup>

The first thing we need to do if we are to get a purchase on the mechanics of this argument is to cash-out the metaphors being employed. In particular, the role of 'subjective' in this context is particularly laden with epistemological significance. According to Nagel, subjectivity taints our conception of reality to such an extent that any element of subjectivity in our view of reality is enough to make that view

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<sup>14</sup> One finds such pessimism in recent work by a number of influential figures. Stroud, for example, argues that scepticism falls out of "platitudes" which "we would all accept" [Stroud 1984, p. 82; cf. Stroud 1989; 1994; 1996], whereas C. McGinn [1979, p. 115] goes so far as to claim that "a *prima facie* vulnerability to [...] a [sceptical] challenge should be regarded as an adequacy condition which any form of realism should be required to meet." More recently, Heil [1998] has argued that, strictly speaking, scepticism is unanswerable because of the inherent, though necessary, realist assumptions that we must make. In a related fashion, we find even those who are usually completely unsympathetic to the sceptical question claiming, in an off-hand way, that "The Humean predicament is the human predicament" [Quine 1969, p. 72]. That is, that there is no real escape from Hume's arguments which purport to show a lack of epistemic support for our most basic and cherished beliefs. Quine's particular 'spin' on this Humean pessimism is derived from his underdetermination of theory with respect to data thesis, which leads him to comment on the "hypothesis" of physical objects [Quine 1969; cf. Quine 1960, p. 22]. For a discussion of Quine's contribution to this debate see Stroud [1981; 1984, chapter VI]; Quine [1981]; Hookway [1990]; and M. Williams [1991, pp. 254-65]. For an illuminating discussion of the relationship between realism and scepticism - which includes a critique of Dummett's [1978] influential drawing of the realism/anti-realism distinction - see M. Williams [1991, chapters 1 and 6; 1993b].

illegitimate or doubtful. But why, exactly, should this be so? Just as our discovery that light refracts in water eliminates one source of error in experience, why can it not simply be that as we eliminate sources of subjective error so we get a progressively more 'objective' view of reality? Nagel's point seems to be that since 'subjectivity' is endemic, in some measure, to our conception of reality, so we can never attain even an *approximately* reliable conception of the world.

There are two ways in which one can construe the epistemological significance of this term. On the one hand, Nagel's point in this respect may be that our account of reality is subjective in the sense that it is *fallible*. The problem with a viewpoint which is not fully objective would thus be that it fails to eliminate all sources of possible error and so, as a result, fails to rule-out the possibility that our conception of the world may lead us wholly awry as to the true nature of reality. On the other, a second possible reading of 'subjectivity' that may be plausible here concerns the supposed epistemological dependence that our knowledge of an external world bears to our 'inner' knowledge of our own psychological states, a dependence which is thought to call our knowledge of the external world into question. I shall consider each of these interpretations in turn.

Central to the *infallibilist* thesis is the claim that 'knowledge' is an "absolute" concept [Unger 1975; 1984; cf. Cohen 1991; Lewis 1996; Rieber 1998]. In this respect, 'knowledge' is meant to be like other 'absolute' concepts such as 'flat', 'empty' or 'vacuum' in that, strictly speaking, nothing ever really fulfils these concepts since nothing is ever *really* known, flat, empty or a vacuum. Although we use these terms in everyday life, in so doing we are implicitly ignoring the fact that, for instance, an 'empty' refrigerator, though empty of food, is not empty of refrigerator parts; and a 'flat' table, though flat to the eye, is, under a microscope, covered in all sorts of bumps and ridges. Equally, according to the 'absolutist', knowledge is an absolute concept since although in everyday life we use the term 'knowledge', this does not refer to the absolute use but merely reflects the same sort of practical constraints that we find in our use of other absolute concepts like 'flat'. The reason for this is that, just as being *really*

flat is impossible since it requires absolutely no imperfections to the flatness of the surface; so being *really* known is impossible because this would require *infallibility*: the ruling-out of all possibilities that would defeat one's knowledge. We get a neat expression of this position in the following passage from David Lewis:

The sceptical argument is nothing new or fancy. It's just this: it seems as if knowledge must be by definition infallible. If you claim that *S* knows that *P*, and yet you grant that *S* cannot eliminate a certain possibility in which not-*P*, it certainly seems as if you have granted that *S* does not after all know that *P*. To speak of fallible knowledge, of knowledge despite uneliminated possibilities of error, just *sounds* contradictory. [Lewis 1996, p. 549]

Accordingly, or so the absolutist claims at any rate, the sceptic is simply responding to a very real component of our concept of knowledge when he argues from the presence of possible error to the claim that we do not know most of what we take ourselves to know. Although this demand for infallibility is obscured in everyday life by layers of practical limitations, the sceptic exposes the true infallible nature of knowledge by requesting knowledge which is not confined by any pragmatic constraints - by requesting knowledge *pure and simple*. And given that this notion of knowledge is held to be built into our everyday epistemic concepts, it follows that the sceptical problem both supervenes upon everyday epistemic usage without being impugned by the fact that it is not directly reflected in that usage (since how could it be?).

The first thing that we need to be clear about is what this infallibilist claim amounts to. A weak, though implausible, way of interpreting the infallibilist position would be as saying that if an agent knows a certain proposition, then any proposition which is logically inconsistent with that proposition is false. So if, for instance, I know an everyday proposition, *O*, such as "I am sitting here now", then a sceptical error possibility like "I am currently a BIV", which is logically inconsistent with *O* (i.e., it entails the falsity of *O*), must be false. There are two reasons why this thesis cannot capture the infallibilist claim.

The first is that it follows from the factivity of knowledge - the fact that knowledge that *P* entails *P* - that an agent's knowledge of *P* will entail the negation of any proposition which is logically inconsistent with *P*. And since factivity is a feature of

the concept of knowledge on *any* account, so equating infallibilism with the demand for the falsity of all propositions which are logically inconsistent with the target proposition would trivialise the infallibilist claim. The second, and more important, reason why infallibilism cannot be reduced to this characterisation, is that the class of all error possibilities - the possibilities that might defeat one's knowledge that P - extends beyond the class of propositions which are logically inconsistent with P. For instance, take the error possibility that I might now be dreaming, a possibility which, if true, would defeat my putative knowledge that O. It does not follow from factivity alone that if I do know that I am sitting here now then it must be false that I am dreaming. Clearly, I could be dreaming *and* O be true. As a result, if infallibilism merely comes down to the claim that knowledge of P requires that all propositions which are logically inconsistent with P be false, then it will fail to accommodate a feature which seems essential to 'infallible' knowledge - that it cannot coexist with the failure to eliminate an error-possibility.

Infallibilism - indeed any theory of knowledge for that matter - must thus amount to more than simply the demand that all propositions which are logically inconsistent with the target proposition be false. The natural thought would thus be that infallibilism is the thesis which demands that in order to know a proposition the class of all *error*-possibilities must be false. This modification would clearly accommodate the dreaming case and thereby make a demand on knowledge which went beyond the requirements of the weak form of 'infallibilism' just sketched. Again, though, it would still be difficult to ascertain exactly what is meant to be problematic about knowledge were this demand to be imposed. After all, surely we are all in agreement that (even by everyday, and thereby supposedly 'fallibilist', lights), if one does know a proposition like O, then it ought to be the case that one is neither a BIV or in a state of slumber?

We thus have to look deeper if we are to get to the heart of the infallibilist position. The key to infallibilism, if it is to make this putatively extravagant demand, is not that all error-possibilities which are incompatible with the proposition known must be false, but rather that one must have a belief that these error-possibilities are excluded

which is itself sufficiently *epistemically* sanctioned. And since we are talking here about beliefs which must be both true *and* sufficiently epistemically sanctioned, we can harmlessly translate this demand for epistemic sanction into a demand for knowledge (this can, after all, only help the sceptic's case). On the infallibilist account, if I am to know a proposition, then I must know, or at least be in a position to know (without acquiring any further information for instance), that any error-possibility incompatible with my knowing that proposition has been excluded.

The idea would thus be that whereas in everyday life we only require that an agent should know that a finite range of error-possibilities has been excluded, the sceptic, responding to the infallibilist core of our epistemic concepts, demands that the agent should know that *every* incompatible error-possibility is excluded. Hence, if we are to know an everyday proposition such as O, then this will involve not only knowing that a range of mundane error-possibilities have been excluded (such as that one is not currently standing), but also that a list of 'super' error-possibilities, like the sceptical error-possibility that one is a BIV, have likewise been excluded. The relationship between this thesis and Nagel's epistemic pessimism (if this is what he has in mind) would thus cash-out as follows. Realism demands that we attain infallibility in our knowledge (the elimination of 'subjective' error). Not only is this an impossible demand (we cannot always know that all incompatible error-possibilities have been excluded), but it is also a goal which we cannot coherently regard ourselves as approximating to (since we would always have grounds to doubt that our fallible 'knowledge' was approximate to this absolute standard). Accordingly, since knowledge is ineliminably subjective (i.e., fallible), it is therefore prone to doubt just as the sceptic contends.

Crucially, however, this argument will only achieve its pessimistic conclusion if one factors-in a commitment to epistemological internalism from the outset. For one thing, note that we do not need to endorse a view so extreme as absolutism in order to get the sceptical import that Nagel has in mind. So long as knowing an everyday proposition requires that one know that one is not the victim of a sceptical hypothesis,

then we will get a view which is just as sceptic-friendly.<sup>15</sup> Now suppose that the core infallibilist thought is true and that in order to know an everyday proposition such as O one must first know that, for instance, one is not a BIV. This is a very plausible thesis, but it is insufficient, in itself, to support the radical sceptical conclusion that Nagel has in mind. After all, we only get scepticism from this observation if one assumes that one *cannot* know the denial of a sceptical hypothesis, such as that one is not a BIV. If one endorses internalism, of course, then one gets this conclusion straight away, but, taken independently of the internalist thesis, there is no *a priori* reason for thinking that the infallibilist standard could not be reached by our knowing (externalistically) that such 'sceptical' error-possibilities have been excluded. We could put the matter this way, infallibilism sets a *high* standard for knowledge, but it does not set an (*a priori*) *unreachable* standard unless one combines the view with epistemological internalism.<sup>16</sup>

The competing conception of what is held to be scepticism-inducing about 'subjectivity' - concerning the relationship between our knowledge of our inner-states and our knowledge of an extra-mental reality - fares little better when set outside the ambit of internalism. Bernard Williams has been a prominent defender of this type of stance, bemoaning the fact that, as he sees it:

[...] knowledge does have a problematic character, [...] something in it which offers a standing invitation to scepticism. [B. Williams 1978, p. 64]

This "something" that makes this invitation is simply this inherent subjective element in our knowledge. As Williams goes on to argue, the sceptical threat arises from:

[...] the very basic thought that if knowledge is what it claims to be, then it is knowledge of a reality that exists independently of that knowledge, and indeed (except for the special case where the reality known happens to be some psychological item) independently of thought or experience. Knowledge of what is there *anyway*. [B. Williams 1978, p. 64]

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<sup>15</sup> As echoed by Craig [1990b, chapter X]. Craig argues against absolutism on the grounds that such an absolute use of this concept could not serve any practical purpose. (Indeed, in this respect it is worthwhile to reconsider the quotation from Lewis above and see just how *unintuitive* infallibilism sounds when stated baldly). Accordingly, he maintains that one should reject 'absolutism' in favour of this more modest sceptic-friendly doctrine that he terms 'objectivism'.

<sup>16</sup> That this is so is especially surprising given that most of the proponents of the claim that infallibilism (or something like it) leads to scepticism are externalists [e.g. Craig 1990b, chapter X; Lewis 1996]. We shall explore the relationship between externalism and the demand that knowledge of everyday propositions requires knowledge of the denial of error-possibilities in more detail in the next chapter.

That is, our knowledge, if it is to be worth anything, must be responsive to what is only indirectly (and so *dubiously*) known - an extra-mental reality. We can get a better grip on what is going on here if we return to Wright's [1985] use of the 'I-II-III' argument to establish what he takes to be the core sceptical claim in this respect:

- |   |                |   |
|---|----------------|---|
| I.  | E <sub>0</sub> | [A suitable description of the agent's experience.] |
| II.                                       | P <sub>1</sub> | I have a hand.                                      |
| <hr style="width: 50%; margin-left: 0;"/> |                |   |
| III.                                      | C              | There is an external world.                         |

Wright's point was that since there is only a defeasible connection between E<sub>0</sub> and P<sub>1</sub> which could be defeated by the falsity of C, so one cannot allow the transfer of warrant from one's belief in P<sub>1</sub> to one's belief in C unless one already has an *independent* warrant for one's belief in C. Without such an independent warrant the inference would be question-begging since the move from E<sub>0</sub> to P<sub>1</sub>, upon which the subsequent move from P<sub>1</sub> to C depends, presupposes a warrant for one's belief in C.

One's warrant for P<sub>1</sub>-type beliefs, then, beliefs which entail the existence of an external world, are always hostage to one already having a warrant for belief in C. And since, as Wright argues, we cannot acquire an independent warrant for our belief in C, we are therefore unable to acquire a warrant for our P<sub>1</sub>-type beliefs that will be of any use to us in countering scepticism. Under any robust *epistemic* understanding of warrant this is tantamount to the claim that we lack knowledge of all P<sub>1</sub>-type propositions. Recall that we are assuming, for the time being, that the Closure principle for knowledge holds, and this will mean that were one to know P<sub>1</sub>, then given that any particular agent will, we are entitled to suppose, know that P<sub>1</sub> entails C, so knowledge of P<sub>1</sub> will always be accompanied by knowledge of C. Thus, if the warrant at issue as regards belief in P<sub>1</sub> were of the robust kind, this would mean that if P<sub>1</sub> were true, then the agent would be in a position to know both P<sub>1</sub> and C. But since, as Wright argues, the agent cannot know C (and, *a fortiori*, cannot know C on the basis of his warranted belief in P<sub>1</sub>), so whatever the warrant that is at issue here as regards the agent's belief in P<sub>1</sub>, it

cannot be of the robust variety.

Of course, Wright was not arguing for scepticism as such, but merely using the sceptical argument as a spring-board for his own anti-sceptical thesis. As we saw in the last chapter, however, there are serious flaws in this thesis, and so we are left with the sceptical argument with no anti-sceptical argument to counter it. It is worthwhile, then, to consider exactly what is driving this picture of scepticism.

Wright's argument appears to expose an epistemic asymmetry between our unproblematic knowledge of "psychological items", broadly speaking (these will figure in  $E_0$ ), and our *inferential* knowledge of "what is there anyway", objects in an external world. This inferential knowledge becomes problematic because one can only make the inferences on the supposition that one has a warrant for believing that such inferences are valid in the first place, and this cannot be acquired in a non-question-begging way. Or, at least, this is Wright's claim. If this is so, then it follows that we may have determined what is scepticism-inducing about realism; that it is the fact that external objects are both potentially knowledge-transcendent *and* only inferentially known that makes knowledge of them problematic. Unless we are to assume from the outset that a positive epistemic relationship exists between our 'subjective' beliefs and our beliefs about an 'objective' reality, how are we to be assured that our subjective beliefs provide any guide to objective reality?

Even if one accepts this internal/external picture, however, it remains that it is far from obvious that it is going to support the variety of radical scepticism in question. What is significant here is that the sceptical argument says that we lack knowledge (and therefore a robust warrant) for the contested propositions, whereas Wright only says that one cannot *reason* one's way to a robust warrant for the contested propositions because this would involve adducing a warrant for the 'anti-sceptical' proposition, in this case, C, "There is an external world". This may be thought to be a distinction without a difference, since if one *cannot* determine, via reason, that one has such a warrant, then on what grounds is one to hold that such a warrant is nevertheless possessed? The point is, however, that this is to make an internalist supposition - that if

it can be shown that one is unable to determine, by reflection, that one possesses such a warrant, then one cannot be truly thought to possess such a warrant. In contrast, on an externalist account of knowledge where one can know a proposition without being in a position to reflectively determine the epistemic factors that make it such that one knows, it might be possible for one to know a proposition (because, as a matter of fact, one's beliefs stand in a certain relation to the facts), without being in a position to reason one's way to knowledge of that proposition because the epistemic factors that make it such that one knows are not reflectively available. On an externalist account, for instance, it is possible that one may, as a matter of empirical fact, be warranted in believing C (if there is, in fact, an external world, and if, in fact, the agent's belief in this respect is suitably sensitive to circumstances in a range of near-by possible worlds), and thus the inference from  $E_0$  to  $P_1$  will go through without a hitch. Accordingly, Wright's I-II-III reconstruction of scepticism only achieves its sceptical end on the supposition of epistemological internalism.<sup>17</sup>

In general, then, we can be assured that characterising the sceptical debate primarily in terms of the internalism/externalism distinction will not result in disregarding any pivotal element of the sceptical position because, whatever the connection between objectivity and scepticism is supposed to be, it cannot be expressed independently of the internalist thesis. Accordingly, if it can be shown that externalism not only offers us an intuitive construal of our epistemic concepts, but also that it enables us to block the sceptical paradox, then we shall have a response to the sceptic which thereby meets the kinds of arguments from 'objectivity' that we have sketched here.

### §5. Concluding Remarks.

In this chapter I have argued for three claims. First, that internalism entails the sceptical premise that we lack knowledge of the denials of sceptical hypotheses. As we have just seen, sometimes the relationship between internalism and scepticism is not obvious

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<sup>17</sup> I shall be saying more about Wright's use of I-II-III arguments - specifically with regard to how they relate to the Closure principle and internalism - in the next chapter.

because a commitment to the doctrine is implicit within other arguments that are used to motivate scepticism, such as arguments involving infallibilism and realism. Second, that there are *prima facie* grounds for believing that externalism does not support the sceptical premise. We shall examine this claim in more detail in the next chapter. And, third, that internalism, unlike the favoured form of externalism, is not an intuitive doctrine. In this respect I argued that it is possible to reconfigure the hinge proposition doctrine along externalist lines.

# MEETING THE SCEPTICAL PARADOX\*

## Chapter Four

### §1. Preamble.

In the last chapter support was motivated for the following three claims. First, that internalism entails the sceptical premise. Second, that there are *prima facie* grounds for believing that externalism does not entail the sceptical premise. And, third, that internalism, unlike the favoured form of externalism, is not an intuitive doctrine. In this chapter I shall expand upon these claims by arguing for the following propositions. First, that an externalist account of knowledge can be used to meet the sceptical paradox. And, second, that, contrary to an influential body of thought, externalism does not entail either the sceptical premise or, relatedly, the denial of the Closure principle (at least not in any way that might be useful for meeting the sceptical challenge).

### §2. Meeting the Sceptical Paradox.

As we saw in chapter one, the radical sceptical paradox has (at least in general) the following basic structure:

(1)	$\neg Ka [\neg SH]$	Sceptical Premise.
(2)	$Ka [O \rightarrow \neg SH]$	Knowledge of a Conceptual Truth.
(3)	$Ka [O]$	Assumed for <i>Reductio</i> .
(4)	$Ka [\neg SH]$	Closure, 2, 3.
(5)	$\neg Ka [\neg SH] \ \& \ Ka [\neg SH]$	& Introduction, 1, 4.
(6)	$\neg Ka [O]$	<i>Reductio Ad Absurdum</i> , 3, 5.

The sceptic begins by arguing that we fail to know a certain pivotal proposition which expresses the denial of a sceptical hypothesis (line (1)). Next, he maintains (line (2)) that it is a mundane conceptual truth - and therefore, one might assume, widely known - that most everyday propositions are inconsistent with the sceptical hypothesis denied in line (1). With these two claims in play, the sceptic need only assume knowledge of one

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\* Material from this chapter forms part of a paper which is forthcoming in the *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* entitled 'Closure and Context' [Pritchard 2000a], the abstract of which will appear in the *Review of Metaphysics*, [Pritchard 2000b]. Elements of this chapter also inform my paper 'Is "God Exists" a "Hinge" Proposition of Religious Belief?', which is forthcoming in *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, [Pritchard 2000c].

of the everyday propositions (line (3)) in order to generate a *reductio ad absurdum*. For if the Closure principle holds, then knowledge of an everyday proposition, coupled with knowledge of the fact that this everyday proposition entails the denial of the sceptical hypothesis, will itself entail knowledge of the denial of the sceptical hypothesis (line (4)). And since (line (5)) the possession of knowledge of the denial of the sceptical hypothesis conflicts with the major sceptical premise, so we must deny the assumption of everyday knowledge (line (6)). Furthermore, because this argument can be repeated at any time, with any epistemic agent, and with almost any everyday proposition, it therefore has the potential to establish that we know hardly any of the everyday propositions which we believe.

In its crudest form, the externalist response to the sceptic will simply involve *qualifying* our understanding of the sceptical premise. Whereas the sceptic claims to have shown that we lack knowledge, *simpliciter*, of the denials of sceptical hypotheses, the externalist will argue that all that has been shown is that we lack *internalist* knowledge of these propositions. He will therefore demand that we qualify the sceptical premise accordingly so that we get the following *minimal* construal:

S<sub>M</sub>:  $\neg \{K_I a [\neg SH]\}$

We therefore have to distinguish between three different types of knowledge operators. To begin with, we have the unrestricted knowledge operator that appears in the paradox above which makes no specification of the type of knowledge in question. Call this knowledge, 'knowledge *simpliciter*' ('K'). On the externalist account, knowledge *simpliciter* can be sub-divided into two further distinct categories. First, knowledge which is understood in terms of the modified (i.e., non-classical) internalism that we witnessed in the last chapter and which appears in the minimal sceptical premise above. Call this, '*internalist* knowledge' ('K<sub>I</sub>'). This will be knowledge which involves a true belief that is not only sensitive but which is also sufficiently internalistically justified. Second, there will be knowledge where the agent, whilst having a sensitive belief in the proposition known, lacks a sufficiently internalistically justified belief. Call this

knowledge, 'externalist knowledge' ('K<sub>E</sub>'). This will be the sort of knowledge that the agents in the naïve chicken-sexer and the Central American pottery expert examples possessed. And, as we saw in the last chapter, if we know global hinge propositions at all - such as propositions which express the denials of sceptical hypotheses (e.g. "I am not a BIV") - then our knowledge of them will also be of this sort.

However, although this distinction will block the sceptical paradox as it stands above (by denying the sceptical premise in its unrestricted form), it will do nothing to stop a modified version of the sceptical argument which qualifies its use of the knowledge operator throughout to internalist standards:

- |     |   |   |
|-----|---|---|
| (1) | $\neg K_{Ia} [\neg SH]$                         | Minimal Sceptical Claim, ('S <sub>M</sub> '). |
| (2) | $K_{Ia} [O \rightarrow \neg SH]$                | Internalist Knowledge of a Conceptual ....    |
| (3) | $K_{Ia} [O]$                                    | Assumed for <i>Reductio</i> .                 |
| (4) | $K_{Ia} [\neg SH]$                              | Closure, ('K <sub>C</sub> '), 2, 3.           |
| (5) | $\neg K_{Ia} [\neg SH] \ \& \ K_{Ia} [\neg SH]$ | & Introduction, 1, 4.                         |
| (6) | $\neg K_{Ia} [O]$                               | <i>Reductio Ad Absurdum</i> , 3, 5.           |

This sceptical argument is clearly weaker than that proposed above because it is consistent with the widespread possession of externalist knowledge. Nevertheless, it still represents a radically sceptical argument that must be responded to. Although we may be able to live with the conclusion that some of our knowledge is not internalist knowledge but knowledge which merely meets the externalist standard, we could not live with the conclusion that most (if not all) of our knowledge was only known in this way. In order to comprehend the radical nature of this conclusion, it is worthwhile reflecting upon the result canvassed in the last chapter that, *ceteris paribus*, a claim to have merely externalist knowledge generates a false *epistemic* conversational implicature, and therefore is improper for epistemic (i.e., not just social) reasons. Accordingly, if this sceptical argument were to go through then our everyday practices of claiming knowledge would all be consigned to absurdity, and this conclusion is no better, in practice, than the conclusion of the basic form of the sceptical paradox itself.

Fortunately, however, the externalist response to the sceptic is not confined to this crude manoeuvre. This is because externalism does not just lead to a modification of the sceptical premise, but also to the key inference principle used by the sceptic - the

Closure principle. As we shall see below, there is an influential body of externalist thinkers who advocate denying the highly intuitive Closure principle. We need not be so bold in the face of scepticism, however, since accepting Closure is not the same thing as accepting that the knowledge that transfers across a known entailment will be of the same *type* no matter what sort of propositions are under consideration. That is, accepting Closure means accepting 'K<sub>C</sub>':

$$K_C: \quad \{K_a [\emptyset] \ \& \ K_a [\emptyset \rightarrow \Pi]\} \rightarrow K_a [\Pi]$$

But since knowledge *simpliciter* does not automatically reduce to internalist knowledge, accepting this is not the same as accepting a sister principle to K<sub>C</sub> which indexes the knowledge operators to internalistic standards, namely, 'K<sub>CI</sub>':

$$K_{CI}: \quad \{K_{Ia} [\emptyset] \ \& \ K_{Ia} [\emptyset \rightarrow \Pi]\} \rightarrow K_{Ia} [\Pi]$$

And it is this principle that the sceptic is using in his modified sceptical argument above in order to generate the sceptical conclusion that we lack internalist knowledge of most everyday propositions. Accordingly, if we can retain Closure whilst rejecting 'internalist' Closure, then we can block even the modified internalist sceptical paradox without having to forfeit Closure.

We do not need to offer a defence of Closure *per se* if we are to support this manoeuvre. All that we need to do is show that the instances of the Closure principle that the sceptic contraposes on - where everyday knowledge transfers across a known entailment to knowledge of the denial of a sceptical hypothesis - are acceptable, and further illustrate that internalist Closure is unacceptable.

Recall that in the last chapter it was argued that, penumbral cases aside, the possession of a sensitive belief was both a necessary and a sufficient condition for knowledge, where a *sensitive* belief was defined as a belief as to whether P that matched the facts as to whether P across a wide range of near-by possible worlds (call this range, the 'domain of sensitivity'). The issue of whether knowledge transfers across known entailments thus reduces to the question of whether sensitivity transfers across known

entailments.<sup>1</sup> Consider what a possible counterexample to the transference of sensitivity across a known entailment in a sceptical context would consist in. We would require an agent both to have a sensitive belief in an everyday proposition, which he knew entailed the denial of a sceptical hypothesis, and for that agent to have an *insensitive* belief in the denial of the sceptical hypothesis.

For example, suppose the agent has clear-cut knowledge of the everyday proposition, 'O', "I am wearing my black shoes". In the actual world this proposition is true, and the agent's belief tracks the truth across a wide range of near-by possible worlds. This means that in close-by worlds in which he is wearing his black shoes, he believes that he is, whereas in other close-by worlds in which he is not wearing his black shoes (but, say, his brown ones), he does not believe that he is wearing them (because, for example, he just looked).

Clearly, since sensitivity is necessary for knowledge, the range of possible worlds included in the determination of the agent's knowledge of the everyday proposition cannot include *sceptical* worlds - worlds in which the agent is the victim of a widespread deception - because in such worlds the agent's beliefs will not be appropriately sensitive to the facts. If there were possible worlds in the domain of sensitivity in which, for instance, the radical sceptical BIV hypothesis is true, then there would be worlds in the domain of sensitivity in which the agent believes O even though it is false, or does not believe O even though it is true. The agent would thus clearly lack knowledge of O.

Indeed, given that the agent's knowledge of O is meant to be clear-cut, hence even borderline cases of sceptical worlds will be ruled-out. That is, even if there are no sceptical possible worlds in the domain of sensitivity, as long as there are such worlds *near* the borderline of the domain of sensitivity then this will be sufficient to destroy the *clear-cut* knowledge of O required for the counterexample. The agent's possession of knowledge of O thus entails that there are no sceptical possible worlds either in, or near-by, the domain of sensitivity.

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<sup>1</sup> In what follows I assume that the agent has the belief in the consequent proposition, so ruling-out possible (though philosophically uninteresting) counterexamples which rest upon the agent's doxastic indifference to this proposition.

Now consider the following 'anti-sceptical' proposition, ' $\neg$  SH', which is entailed by O and which the agent also believes: "I am not a BIV". Given that, as we have just seen, the sensitivity of the agent's belief in O requires that there be *no* sceptical possible worlds either in or near to the domain of sensitivity, how would it be possible for the agent to *not* have a (true) belief in  $\neg$  SH which was sensitive? Since such a sceptical scenario is, *ex hypothesi*, far-fetched, it follows that all the agent needs to do in order to have a sensitive belief in  $\neg$  SH (and thereby have externalist knowledge of  $\neg$  SH) is to simply retain his belief in  $\neg$  SH in all of the resolutely non-sceptical worlds contained within the domain of sensitivity.

Of course, one might object that the flaw in this reasoning is that it is perfectly conceivable that there may be some possible worlds in the domain of sensitivity in which the agent does not believe  $\neg$  SH. If this were so then he would lack a sensitive belief in  $\neg$  SH and thus externalist knowledge of  $\neg$  SH. Now one might question this claim on the basis that, as we saw in the last chapter, it is in fact questionable to suppose that anyone could fail to believe the denials of sceptical hypotheses, but we need not rest our response on this contentious manoeuvre. This reason for this is because whatever grounds we might offer to support the claim that the agent lacks the belief in  $\neg$  SH - perhaps, for example, he would be convinced by a sceptical argument if he heard one - will be such that it would interfere with the subject's sensitive belief in O in the first place. If there are near-by possible worlds in which the agent is convinced by scepticism, for instance, and so does not believe  $\neg$  SH, then, accordingly, there will be near-by worlds in which he does not believe O either, even though O is true in those worlds. It thus won't be possible to find a case in which one has a sensitive belief in an everyday proposition and one knows that this entails the denial of a sceptical hypothesis, and yet one lacks a sensitive belief in the denial of the sceptical hypothesis.

This result - that Closure holds in this scenario - should not surprise us. If one were to ask the question of whether or not a subject knows  $\neg$  SH independently of stipulating what else the subject knows, then the orderings of the possible worlds could be different in such a way as to allow for the subject to not have a sensitive belief in  $\neg$

SH and therefore not know  $\neg$  SH. But that is not the question. Rather, we need to ask whether the subject has a sensitive belief in  $\neg$  SH (and therefore knows  $\neg$  SH), *given* that the subject has a sensitive belief in O (and therefore knows O), and knows that O entails  $\neg$  SH. In such a case, the orderings of the possible worlds are set such that the relevant sceptical possible worlds must, perforce, be well beyond the domain of sensitivity. As a result, it should come as no surprise to find that Closure holds in these 'sceptical' examples. Moreover, this result also confirms a deeply held intuition that if we know anything much at all, then we must know the denials of sceptical hypotheses, despite the fact that we cannot properly self-ascribe that knowledge.

That this is so, however, does not itself ensure that Closure holds in other 'non-sceptical' contexts. This is because although it is part of the nature of a sceptical hypothesis that it must be barred from figuring either in or near-to the domain of sensitivity if the agent is to have knowledge of the everyday antecedent proposition, this need not be the case in other examples. Consider, for instance, a parallel case where the consequent proposition is not the anti-sceptical proposition  $\neg$  SH, but rather another everyday proposition which is entailed by O; namely, 'Q', "I am not wearing my red shoes". As before, insofar as our protagonist really does know O, then he will have a belief as to whether O is true which matches the fact as to whether O is true across the range of possible worlds included in the domain of sensitivity. The orderings of possible worlds will thus be set as before with sceptical worlds well beyond this domain. Significantly, however, and in contrast to the example involving  $\neg$  SH as the consequent proposition, it is perfectly consistent with this ordering that there be not-Q worlds within the domain of sensitivity. As a result, we cannot ensure that Closure holds purely on the basis that the agent has a belief in Q which cannot help but match the truth as to whether Q in all the possible Q worlds in the domain of sensitivity. Nevertheless, this is not to say that Closure will fail in such cases. It is, after all, difficult to imagine how one could have a sensitive belief in O without a corresponding sensitive belief in Q. What, for instance, could get in the way of an agent's sensitivity as regards Q which does not likewise affect his sensitivity to O? We do not need to get into such

issues here, however, since it suffices for our purposes that Closure works perfectly well in the cases which the sceptic uses. Given this characterisation of sensitivity, the sceptic is perfectly within his rights to use Closure for sceptical ends.<sup>2</sup>

We shall consider below the arguments offered by externalists to motivate support for the denial of the Closure principle. First, I want to compare the acceptance of this principle with the rejection of the sister principle,  $K_{CI}$ . The formulation of the Closure principle that we have just defended only guarantees that knowledge *simpliciter* will transfer across known entailments in the cases specified, it does not guarantee that the *type* of knowledge at issue will transfer. Since the transference is dependent upon sensitivity, and sensitivity is only sufficient for externalist knowledge, so the considerations just garnered offer no guarantee that internalist knowledge will transfer across the (known) entailment, as opposed to only externalist knowledge. It is thus a further question as to whether  $K_{CI}$  holds.

One might wonder why  $K_{CI}$  needs to be specified such that the agent's knowledge of the entailment is internalist knowledge, rather than merely knowledge *simpliciter* (and therefore possibly externalist knowledge). There are two reasons for this. To begin with, it may well be that allowing for the possibility that the entailment could be only externalistically known could give rise to some rather straightforward, though not particularly interesting, counterexamples to the principle. If the agent's knowledge of the consequent proposition depended upon him having reflective access to the factors that made his belief in the entailment sensitive, then we would get a clear case where an agent has internalist knowledge of the antecedent proposition, knowledge of the entailment, and yet a lack of internalist knowledge of the consequent proposition. Such a counterexample would not be particularly significant in this setting, however, because what we are interested in here is not whether internalist Closure might fail under this 'hybrid' construal, but whether Closure would fail *given that one is an internalist and so did not draw this distinction between externalist and internalist knowledge*. In any case, by

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<sup>2</sup> Heller [1999a] is one philosopher who has argued that although Closure does fail in certain situations, it nevertheless holds in the very cases that the sceptic uses to enforce his sceptical conclusions. For a discussion of this proposal, see Pritchard [2000a].

allowing internalist Closure under this stronger  $K_{CI}$  construal we thereby give the principle the best run for its money. As a result, we therefore sharpen the framework of the debate.

There clearly are a class of counterexamples to  $K_{CI}$ . We considered one such class in chapters two and three under the guise of Wright's [1985] I-II-III arguments. Recall that Wright attempted to reconstruct the radical sceptical argument in terms of the contention that the anti-sceptical argument was necessarily *question-begging*. The way that Wright expressed the point was that the (experiential) grounds that one had which could potentially warrant one's belief in the type-II everyday proposition ("I have a hand"), only transfer to grounds for warranted belief in the type-III sceptical proposition ("There is an external world") provided the subject already had a warrant for his belief in the type-III proposition. The reason for this was that the grounds which supported the warrant for the type-II proposition were only grounds fit for the purpose on the assumption that one was already warranted in believing the type-III proposition. Accordingly, were the agent to lack independent grounds for the type-III proposition, then he would likewise lack grounds for the type-II proposition. And since there were no independent grounds to be had for the type-III proposition, so there was no non-question-begging way of acquiring grounds for belief in the type-II proposition either.

As we saw in the last chapter, this argument failed to support its sceptical conclusion because it presupposed an internalist epistemology. Wright was assuming that the only sort of knowledge that was at issue in this case was internalist knowledge, the sort of knowledge the grounds for which one can reflectively determine. On the assumption of externalist knowledge for the type-III proposition (which, as we have seen, is possible), the subject's internalist knowledge of the type-II proposition on the basis of the reflectively accessible grounds highlighted in the type-I proposition would be perfectly in order.

It is worthwhile outlining how this externalist rejection of the sceptical import of the I-II-III argument goes, since it brings to the fore the contrast between a Closure principle which is acceptable in these 'sceptical' cases, and an internalist variant on the

Closure principle which is not. For the sake of simplicity and continuity I shall rephrase Wright's argument in terms of knowledge, and, rather than using the example of an external world, use the example of BIV scepticism instead. Accordingly, one gets the following argument where an anti-sceptic, *à la* Moore, attempts to argue against the BIV-sceptic (where O retains the same meaning it had previously):

- (1)  $K_{Ia} [O]$
- (2)  $K_{Ia} [O \rightarrow \neg BIV]$
- (3)  $K_{Ia} [\neg BIV]$

That is, one might contend, on the basis of one's reflectively accessible grounds, that one has internalist knowledge of an everyday proposition, O, and of the fact that this everyday proposition entails the falsity of the sceptical BIV sceptical hypothesis. Accordingly, one might well infer that one has internalist knowledge of the denial of the sceptical hypothesis. As Wright points out, however, one's grounds for line (1) are only grounds which support such a claim provided one already presupposes that one has an epistemic entitlement to believe the negation of the BIV hypothesis as stated in line (3) in the first place. That is, as far as the evidence that the agent can reflectively access suggests, he only has internalist knowledge of the following disjunction:

- (1')  $K_{Ia} [O] \vee SH^3$

Either his present reflectively accessible evidence supports the everyday proposition, O, or one of a range of radical sceptical hypotheses (including the BIV hypothesis) are true which would explain this evidence equally well. One might imagine that if one is to get from internalist knowledge of this disjunction to the internalist knowledge claimed in line (1), then all one needs to assume is that these sceptical hypotheses are indeed all false. Appearances notwithstanding, however, this will not suffice because the falsity of these hypotheses is nevertheless consistent with their truth in near-by possible worlds (and thus in the domain of sensitivity), and hence with one's lack of knowledge (internalist or otherwise) of O. Accordingly, the agent needs to suppose that the

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<sup>3</sup> Note that 'SH' doesn't refer here to a particular radical sceptical hypothesis, but rather to the whole class of relevant sceptical hypotheses.

sceptical possible worlds are as far-fetched as he takes them to be, and this assumption will be tantamount, in an externalist epistemology, to the assumption that one has externalist knowledge of the denials of sceptical hypotheses. With this assumption - line (2') - in play we thus get the original line (1):

- (2')  $K_{Ea} [\neg SH]$   
 (3')  $K_{Ia} [O]$

The rest of the argument now follows as before, except that the conclusion alters in a significant manner:

- (4')  $K_{Ia} [O \rightarrow \neg BIV]$   
 (5')  $K_{Ea} [\neg BIV]$

If one does have internalist knowledge of the everyday proposition and of the entailment to the denial of the sceptical hypothesis, then one *will* have knowledge of the denial of the sceptical hypothesis, just as this argument states. But since it has been argued that one is unable to acquire internalist knowledge of global hinge propositions which express the denials of radical sceptical hypotheses, so the knowledge that will transfer across the entailment will not meet the internalist standard. This is just as we should expect since it conforms to the intuition that we cannot get anything more out of an argument than we put in. If we must assume externalist knowledge of the denials of radical sceptical hypotheses in order to get the argument going in the first place, then it is not going to be possible to draw from an argument based on that assumption the stronger claim that we have internalist knowledge of the denial of one of the radical sceptical hypotheses. In the case of a question-begging argument such as this, the most we can derive is what was already implicit in the assumption.

We thus capture both what is inadequate and also *enticing* about the Moorean response to the sceptic. On the one hand, we cannot derive internalist knowledge of the denials of sceptical hypotheses from our internalist knowledge of everyday propositions because knowledge of the former already presupposes that we have such knowledge of the latter, albeit in a limited externalist form. On the other, if we do in fact have internalist knowledge of the everyday proposition, then we must indeed stand in some

epistemic relation to the anti-sceptical proposition which denies the radical sceptical hypothesis - in effect, Closure, in some form at least, must hold. If the assumption made in line (2') is indeed true, then we will in fact have both externalist knowledge of the denial of the BIV hypothesis and the internalist knowledge of the everyday proposition that we were after. In this regard it is worth re-emphasizing that this line of argument - which maintains that our internalist everyday knowledge rests upon the assumption of externalist knowledge of the global hinge propositions - in no way diminishes the legitimacy of our everyday internalist knowledge. As argued in the last chapter in the discussion on infallibilism, if the assumption of externalist knowledge of the denial of radical scepticism is true, then the reflective grounds that we have for our everyday knowledge *will* be sufficient to turn that knowledge into internalist knowledge. Only an internalist (or, more specifically, a sceptic) would demand more.

It is interesting to note that in later work Wright [1997; 1998; 2000a; cf. Davies 1998] seems to hint towards this very distinction between two sorts of closure principles. He notes that although the Closure principle seems to be valid, a related principle which, building on earlier work - see Wright [1991] - he terms the 'Transmission' principle, does not seem to hold. This latter principle is simply Closure with the added requirement that the knowledge that transfers across the known entailment should also preserve what Wright refers to as the "cogency" of the argument, which is its aptitude to produce *rational conviction*. Here is Wright:

A *cogent* argument is one whereby someone could be moved to rational conviction of the truth of its conclusion. [Wright 2000a, pp. 000-0]

Now it is certainly true that one of the features of the sceptical cases in which internalist Closure breaks down is that the reasons that one has for believing the premises do not transfer into adequate reasons for believing that the conclusion is true. Within an externalist framework, however, we can account for this fact by noting that what does not transfer are reflectively accessible grounds sufficient to support internalist knowledge in the consequent proposition, and therefore diagnose this intuition that some extra epistemic 'something' is not transferring across the known entailment by

identifying it with these reflectively accessible grounds. In terms of this framework, the distinction between Transmission and Closure simply collapses into the distinction between  $K_{CI}$  and Closure. Nevertheless, one might think that there is some philosophical mileage to be gained in trying to rescue this distinction in terms of an internalist framework. The problem with such a proposal, however, is that it is then going to be unclear what one has in mind when one talks of the 'mere' knowledge that transfers across a known entailment in sceptical cases where Transmission is not met. On an internalist picture, what kind of knowledge is it that one can have of the conclusion of such an anti-sceptical argument even whilst lacking any grounds for rational conviction in its truth? It seems that Wright is dangerously close to saying that the knowledge at issue is non-internalist knowledge, and thus we will be back with the distinction we started with. In any case, it would certainly appear that either Wright's distinction between Transmission and Closure is just another way of spelling out the distinction between Closure and  $K_{CI}$ , or else it is an unstable position.<sup>4</sup>

With this distinction between a valid Closure principle and an invalid  $K_{CI}$  principle in play, the sceptic is forced to modify his argument as follows:

- |     |                                  |  |
|-----|----------------------------------|--|
| (1) | $\neg K_{Ia} [\neg SH]$          | Minimal Sceptical Claim, (' $S_M$ ').      |
| (2) | $K_{Ia} [O \rightarrow \neg SH]$ | Internalist Knowledge of a Conceptual .... |
| (3) | $K_{Ia} [O]$                     | Assumed for <i>Reductio</i> .              |
| (4) | $K_a [\neg SH]$                  | Closure, (' $K_C$ '), 2, 3.                |

And since it has been argued that one can consistently know a proposition without internalistically knowing it, so there will no contradiction generated by this argument. (Indeed, we have already offered a diagnosis of why it is that internalist knowledge is unavailable when it comes to global hinge propositions such as the denial of radical sceptical hypotheses). Without this contradiction, however, the sceptic cannot motivate his case for the denial of the assumption, and thus for his radical scepticism in general.

It is worthwhile noting that a similar train of argument will also block the

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<sup>4</sup> It is important to emphasise that I am only evaluating Transmission insofar as it forms part of an anti-sceptical thesis. My remarks are thus intended to be consistent with the thought that, sceptical cases aside, one can distinguish between Transmission and  $K_{CI}$ . For discussion of Wright's latest work on this topic - Wright [2000a] - see Hale [2000]; Sainsbury [2000]; Suárez [2000]; and Wright's [2000b] own response to his commentators.

'deviant' sceptical paradoxes that we saw in chapter one. In particular, it will stymie the progress of the infamous 'dreaming\*' argument, where the sceptical premise is the claim that I do not know that I am not now dreaming\*. Recall that the crucial difference between the dreaming\* argument and other sceptical arguments was that the dreaming\* hypothesis was not inconsistent with the truth of most of one's everyday beliefs in the way that other sceptical hypotheses were, such as the BIV hypothesis. Accordingly, since it did not follow from the assumption of everyday knowledge that one knew that one was not now dreaming\*, we needed to modify the basic form of the sceptical paradox above in order to generate the sceptical conclusion. Although the truth of a typical everyday belief is not inconsistent with the truth of the dreaming\* hypothesis, one's *knowledge* of an everyday proposition is. As a result, the way we modified the sceptical paradox was by changing line (2) to the claim that one knows that, if one *knows* an everyday proposition, then one is not now dreaming\*. Accordingly, we then changed the assumption at line (3) so that what was assumed was not knowledge of an everyday proposition, but rather second-order knowledge of an everyday proposition.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, just to give the sceptic his due, we can index the modified version of lines (2) and (3) to internalist knowledge. As a result, we get the following first three lines of the sceptical paradox:

- |     |  |   |
|-----|--|---|
| (1) | $\neg K_{1a} [\neg D]$                     | Minimal Sceptical Claim, ('S <sub>M</sub> '). |
| (2) | $K_{1a} \{K_{1a} [O] \rightarrow \neg D\}$ | Internalist Knowledge of a Conceptual ....    |
| (3) | $K_{1a} \{K_{1a} [O]\}$                    | Assumed for <i>Reductio</i> .                 |

If the sceptic could run his *reductio* on this basis, then his conclusion would be the denial of the assumption at line (3). This would have the sceptical result that we lack second-order internalist knowledge of most of the everyday propositions which we believe. Moreover, since, as we shall see below, it ought to be uncontentious to maintain that the Iterativity principle holds for internalist knowledge, so this result would straightforwardly translate into a lack of first-order internalist knowledge of much of

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<sup>5</sup> Alternatively, one could assume internalist first-order knowledge of an everyday proposition and then epistemically ascend, by the internalist version of the Iterativity principle, to second-order internalist knowledge of this proposition. The role that the Iterativity principle plays in sceptical arguments such as this will be discussed further below.

the everyday propositions which we believe, a radical sceptical result which is just as subversive as that canvassed above in the modified sceptical paradox.

Fortunately, however, this result will not follow for the same reason that it is blocked in the standard case. This is because "I am not now dreaming\*" is a global hinge proposition and thus, since we have restricted Closure in the manner stated above, the only conclusion that can be derived from lines (2) and (3) above is the uncontentious (4):

(4)  $K_a [\neg D]$  Closure ('K<sub>C</sub>'), 2, 3.

And since this is not in direct conflict with the sceptical premise, the sceptic will not be able to motivate his *reductio* and, with it, the radically sceptical conclusion of his argument.

One might think that the sceptic can simply re-invent his radical scepticism at second-order. It is worthwhile being clear about why this cannot be done. Recall the previous argument, this time with the fact that the knowledge at issue as regards the anti-sceptical proposition is externalist knowledge made explicit:

(1)	$\neg K_{Ia} [\neg SH]$	Minimal Sceptical Claim, ('S <sub>M</sub> ').
(2)	$K_{Ia} [O \rightarrow \neg SH]$	Internalist Knowledge of a Conceptual ...
(3)	$K_{Ia} [O]$	Assumed for <i>Reductio</i> .
(4)	$K_a [\neg SH]$	Closure, ('K <sub>C</sub> '), 2, 3.
(5)	$K_{Ea} [\neg SH]$	By Preceding Discussion, 1, 4.

Now suppose that the sceptic continues his argument in the following way:

(6)	$K_{Ia} [O] \rightarrow K_{Ea} [\neg SH]$	Conditional Introduction, 3, 5.
(7)	$K_{Ia} \{K_{Ia} [O] \rightarrow K_{Ea} [\neg SH]\}$	Internalist Knowledge of a Conceptual ..., 6.
(8)	$K_{Ia} \{K_{Ia} [O]\}$	Internalist Iterativity, ('I <sub>KI</sub> ') 3.
(9)	$K_{Ia} \{K_{Ea} [\neg SH]\}$	Internalist Closure, ('K <sub>CI</sub> '), 8, 7.
(10)	$\neg \{K_{Ia} [K_{Ia} [\neg SH]]\}$	Factivity, 1.

Line (6) ought to be uncontentious, and we can allow, for the sake of argument, that line (7) is acceptable. Provided that the sceptic can use the Iterativity principle for internalist knowledge, it follows that he can iterate on the internalistic knowledge assumed in line (3) in order to get line (8). Via lines (7), (8), and the internalist version of Closure, the sceptic therefore derives line (9). One might wonder why we have allowed the sceptic to

use this principle. The reason is that we have only offered grounds for thinking that internalist closure fails where the consequent proposition is a global hinge proposition, and since a proposition expressing externalist *knowledge* of a global hinge proposition is not itself a global hinge proposition, so we cannot, at least not without further argumentation, disallow the use of this principle here. Nevertheless, we can concede this much without harm, because, *prima facie*, there is no reason to think that line (9) should be in direct contradiction with the second-order version of the minimal sceptical premise - gained via the uncontentious principle of factivity which states that knowledge entails the truth of what is known - that features at line (10).

Indeed, as matters stand, these two lines simply represent claims which have been explicitly made before. First, that if we know anything (such as the internalist knowledge of O assumed at line (3)), then we must have externalist knowledge of global hinge propositions. Since we can illustrate that this is so then it should come as no surprise to find that we can also show, on the assumption of internalist knowledge of an everyday proposition, that we have internalist knowledge of the fact that we have externalist knowledge of a global hinge proposition. Second, as emphasised throughout this thesis, we cannot have internalist knowledge of global hinge propositions, and this will apply no matter what internalist knowledge we might have at second-order, or, for that matter, at *n*th order.

It is significant that we can block this paradox without having to deny the internalist version of the Iterativity principle for knowledge. Because the Iterativity principle is contentious on an externalist account it might be thought to be essential to any externalist response to the sceptic that it should thereby deny the internalist version of this principle. As we have seen, however, this is not so. So long as we keep the internalist and the externalist knowledge operators apart, then we need not worry that the acceptance of internalist Iterativity will cause sceptical problems. Indeed, this is just as we should expect. Whereas meeting the conditions for first-order internalist knowledge thereby involves one in (plausibly) meeting the conditions for second-order knowledge of the same proposition (save, perhaps, the belief condition), the same

cannot be said for externalist knowledge. That one meets a certain set of conditions such that one's belief in a particular proposition is sensitive (so that what is believed is known), does not seem to entail that one should thereby meet a potentially *different* set of conditions such that one's belief that one knows that proposition is sensitive (and thus that one possess second-order knowledge of that proposition). Crucially, however, by keeping the contentious externalist (or 'mixed') version of the Iterativity principle apart from the internalist version, we can have an externalist response to the sceptic that does not trade upon the out-right denial of this principle. This is all to the good. The more that we can concede to the sceptic whilst still meeting his challenge the better, because this reduces any leverage that he might have to stage a defence of his doubt.<sup>6</sup>

### §3. Scepticism, Externalism, and Closure.

In order fully to expound the workings of this response to scepticism, it is useful to compare it to an influential competitor anti-sceptical account - what I shall call, following Fred Dretske [1970; 1971], the 'Dretskean' approach - which also runs along externalist lines. Where the Dretskean theory differs from that sketched here is, primarily, in its endorsement of the sceptical premise that we lack knowledge of the denials of sceptical hypotheses. Rather than rejecting the sceptical premise and modifying the Closure principle as I advocate above, the Dretskean theory keeps the sceptical premise and denies Closure altogether, so blocking the sceptical paradox at a different juncture. Juxtaposing this account with the anti-sceptical proposal sketched here thus highlights two salient features of the externalist theory that I have argued for. First, that it does not support the sceptical premise. Second, that it does not deny the Closure principle (at least not in sceptical contexts).

Although Closure is a highly intuitive epistemic principle, work can be done to undercut one's acceptance of it. Dretske [1970; 1971] was the first to offer a sustained attack on this principle, and his critique remains the most persuasive.<sup>7</sup> In 'Epistemic

<sup>6</sup> For some useful discussions on externalism, Iterativity, and the relationship they bear to each other, see Hintikka [1962]; Dretske [1971, pp. 17-9]; Craig [1990b, section VIII]; and M. Williams [1991, chapter 8].

<sup>7</sup> That said, one can detect a train of argument against the Closure principle - or, at least,  $K_{CI}$  - in earlier work by Austin [1961] and Wittgenstein [1969].

Operators' [1970], he pointed out that it need not be surprising that epistemic operators should fail to exhibit this 'penetration' across entailments when there are many other operators which also fail in this way.<sup>8</sup> Examples that Dretske offers include operators such as "It is extraordinary that ...", or "It is a mistake that ...". That I bumped into my next door neighbour on the summit of mount Vesuvius is certainly an extraordinary occurrence, but it is not extraordinary at all (given the extent of tourism in that region) that I bumped into *someone* at this summit, and this latter claim is entailed by the former. In any case, Dretske argues, it is not as if the knowledge operator *completely* fails to penetrate across (known) entailments since there are only a certain class of cases in which Closure fails. As a consequence, he can stay true to our intuition that we often gain new knowledge in this way.<sup>9</sup> In essence, the class of entailments over which knowledge will not penetrate are those where in order to know the entailed proposition one must know that the reliability conditions for the original knowledge claim have obtained. The intuition is that one cannot lift oneself up by one's own bootstraps - one cannot gain knowledge of the reliability conditions of a knowledge claim simply by knowing that proposition.

This style of reasoning mirrors that offered above as regards hinge propositions, of course, except that the 'hinge proposition' reasoning was meant to show that it was  $K_{CI}$ , and not Closure, that failed. It is thus important to consider Dretske's argument in detail and identify why an externalist like Dretske should feel compelled to deny this principle rather than the more contentious  $K_{CI}$ .

Consider Dretske's famous (putative) counterexample to Closure where the relevant propositions are as follows:

- (P): The animals in the pen are zebras.  
 (Q): The animals in the pen are not mules cleverly disguised to look like zebras.

Now consider the scenario of someone at the zoo looking into the zebra cage who has

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<sup>8</sup> Dretske's point is actually directed at epistemic operators *in general*, but we shall focus on his remarks as they relate to knowledge in particular. For a list of the epistemic operators that he has in mind, see Dretske [1970, p. 1009].

<sup>9</sup> Dretske [1970, p. 1009] refers to epistemic operators as being "semi-penetrating".

no special knowledge about zebras or mules. If he is in a good position to judge that the animal is a zebra, and it is in fact a zebra, then, by any usual standard of knowledge, we would be willing to ascribe knowledge to him of P. However, despite the fact that P entails Q, it is (according to Dretske) clearly the case that the fellow in our example does not have adequate evidence to support knowledge of Q. He is not, for instance, an expert at picking out this sort of deception (a cleverly disguised mule and a zebra look exactly the same to him). Dretske thus concludes that one's belief can be appropriately reliable with respect to a certain proposition, and so known, even though this proposition entails a second proposition which the subject is not in a reliable relation towards and so does not know.<sup>10</sup> And this will be so regardless of whether the agent in question knows that the entailment holds.<sup>11</sup>

For Dretske, then, knowledge of everyday propositions will always involve assuming the truth of propositions which state the reliability conditions of one's knowledge and which are not themselves known (at least not typically). And what applies to zebras in zoos will apply with equal force to BIVs and *malin génies*. Knowing an everyday proposition will require the denials of sceptical hypotheses to be true, but whatever grounds I have for my knowledge of the everyday proposition, they cannot sufficiently transfer through to the presuppositions of my knowledge and thereby give me knowledge of what is presupposed in my knowing (i.e., the denials of sceptical hypotheses). Thus, according to the Dretskean line, we can both know everyday propositions whilst failing to know the denials of sceptical hypotheses.

The sceptic argues in a similar way, of course, except that his acceptance of Closure means that these two putative examples of knowledge are in conflict.

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<sup>10</sup> The point is often expressed in terms of 'relevant alternatives' [e.g. Dretske 1970], where an 'alternative' to P is a proposition which is inconsistent with the truth of P (and thus a proposition which will be false if P is true). If Q is a 'relevant' alternative to P then one must be able to eliminate the possibility of Q in order to know P. Accordingly, for Dretske, not all alternatives to P are relevant alternatives - one can know that the animals in the pen are zebras without having to rule-out the irrelevant alternative that they are cleverly disguised mules. For discussion, see Stine [1976]; Yourgrau [1983]; Heller [1989]; Cohen [1991; cf. Dretske 1991]; and DeRose [1995; 1996].

<sup>11</sup> Dretske is actually noticeably coy about the epistemic status of the subject's belief in the entailment. If Dretske is to be seen as making a substantive point, however, then it ought to be possible to run his argument, as I have done here, with knowledge of the entailment taken for granted.

Accordingly, since it is held to be a cast-iron intuition that we lack knowledge of the denials of sceptical hypotheses, he maintains that we lack knowledge of many of the everyday propositions which we believe. As it stands, then, Dretske's argument - if applied directly to the problem of the sceptical paradox at any rate - is in danger of falling foul of the *impasse* constraint on our dealings with the sceptic that we noted in chapter one. If the only reason that Dretske can offer for denying a highly intuitive epistemic principle like Closure is that doing so makes seemingly contradictory (and therefore scepticism-friendly) ascriptions of knowledge consistent, then it is going to be open to the sceptic to simply retort that we should instead face up to our epistemic responsibilities by keeping Closure and recognising that these damaging conflicts in our epistemic assessments exist. And faced with such a choice, what warrant do we have for preferring the anti-sceptical option over the sceptical option? The sceptic has gained a draw and thus, as we saw in chapter one, a win by default.

This is, perhaps, a little unfair to Dretske since his primary interest in denying the Closure principle was not to meet the radical sceptical paradox (in which he has shown little interest), but rather to develop an intuitive epistemological view. Nevertheless, it does highlight the fact that the application that this argument for non-Closure has for the sceptical debate is at best limited. Perhaps the only way in which it could be sufficiently buttressed so that it is able to do some substantive anti-sceptical work would be if Dretske did indeed show that the Closure principle was not part of the intuitive epistemological picture. It is significant, therefore, that despite his claim to be expounding an epistemology on the basis of certain basic epistemological truths (e.g. that epistemic operators do not "penetrate" through logical consequences), Dretske is instead merely developing an epistemological view which conforms to the standard - and as we saw in chapter three, contentious - paradigm. The reason for this is that Dretske, despite (as we shall see below), his externalist credentials, is actually moulding his stance in response to conventional - and *outré* - epistemologically internalist intuitions.

In the first instance, Dretske's commitment to the core assumptions of the

internalist thesis is illustrated by his acceptance of the sceptical premise. It is this acceptance that places Dretske in an unadvantageous *impasse* with the sceptic since without this concession he would not be placed in a position whereby he had to deny Closure, and thus in a situation in which he and the sceptic were simply offering inverted stances. In order to see how this implicit commitment to the internalist picture underlies his project it is necessary to consider his putative counterexample to Closure in some detail. Despite adopting an externalist theory of knowledge, Dretske does not make a distinction between the Closure principle and the  $K_{CI}$  principle. Accordingly, if our diagnosis of the sceptical predicament is right, then it ought to be the case that once we factor this distinction into Dretske's discussion of Closure we shall find that his putative counterexample to Closure is actually just a counterexample to  $K_{CI}$ .

Let us take it for granted that the agent in Dretske's zebra example does indeed know the antecedent proposition, P. Moreover, given that this is meant to be everyday knowledge, we should be able to unproblematically concede that the knowledge possessed is of an internalist variety. Since we are here retaining Closure it follows that the agent's internalist knowledge of P (conjoined with his internalist knowledge of the entailment) *will* result in him also knowing the consequent proposition. Does Dretske offer grounds for thinking that the subject does not know the consequent proposition? Not exactly. If one looks closely at how Dretske motivates his counterexample to Closure, it is clear that what he is actually arguing is that the subject lacks *internalist* knowledge of the consequent proposition, which is a different claim entirely. As Dretske explicitly puts the matter:

If you are tempted to say [*that the agent does know Q ...*], think for a moment about the reasons that you have, what evidence you can produce in favour of this claim. The evidence you *had* for thinking them zebras has been effectively neutralised, since it does not count toward their *not* being mules cleverly disguised. Have you checked with the zoo authorities? Did you examine the animals closely enough to detect such a fraud? [Dretske 1970, p. 1016]

That is, in whatever sense we may regard the agent as knowing this proposition, it cannot be in terms of the evidence that the agent *is in a position to adduce*. And to characterise knowledge in these terms can only mean that Dretske has an internalist

notion of evidence in mind here (and thus an internalist notion of knowledge), which requires reflective access on the part of the agent. As he intimates, were the subject to undertake more strenuous tests of his knowledge so that there was more evidence that he could reflectively access, then he may be in a position to know this proposition.

The first thing to note, however, is that it is rather odd to suppose that the agent does not know, even internalistically, the consequent proposition Q, given that he has internalist knowledge of P. After all, given that he does indeed know P, then it follows that the kind of sceptical worry highlighted in Q must be far-fetched for otherwise it would undermine the knowledge the agent has of P in the first place. It is irrelevant, then, to demand that the subject should check with the zoo authorities before he could be said to know Q, since if this is required in order to have internalist knowledge of Q, then it ought to be likewise demanded in the case of internalist knowledge of P. Accordingly, what could be wrong with the subject's reflectively accessible grounds for belief in P such that they are not also reflectively accessible grounds for belief in Q? Seemingly, if the agent does have internalist knowledge of P, then he has internalist knowledge of Q also.<sup>12</sup>

It would appear then that Dretske has something stronger in mind as regards Q since, so defined, Q is unable to do the job that he asks of it. The problem with Q is that it is only a *local*, rather than a *radical*, sceptical hypothesis. Given that the subject does indeed have sufficient reflectively accessible grounds for his belief in P, then it follows, (given his internalist knowledge of the entailment), that he will have sufficient

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<sup>12</sup> Part of the problem here is that Dretske tends to run discussions on Closure together with his conception of "contrast-consequences". This latter phenomenon concerns how the same assertion in different conversational contexts can carry different contrast-consequences. For instance, in a conversational context in which the participants take for granted that there is no deception going on, then it may be legitimate to claim knowledge of P, but not of Q, because a claim to know P will not carry the conversational implicature that one can rule-out the contrast-consequent embedded in Q. As far as Closure goes, however, this is entirely besides the point. For the issue here ought not to be dependent upon pragmatic features of the situation but on the hard-and-fast epistemic standards in operation. Indeed, as both Yourgrau [1983] and Sanford [1991] have pointed out (with Dretske's agreement [Dretske 1991]), such examples do not seem to be cases where one knows P but not Q, but rather cases in which the agent does not know P, but may legitimately claim to know P because of the restricted parameters of that conversational context (in effect, the assertion has the form, "Given that certain conditions obtain, I know that P"). For more discussion on this point, see Dretske [1968; 1970]; Yourgrau [1983]; Sanford [1991; cf. Dretske 1991]; and Rieber [1998].

reflectively accessible grounds for Q also. What Dretske requires, in contrast, is a radical sceptical hypothesis - a hypothesis the belief in the denial of which *no* reflectively accessible grounds could be found to support. Indeed, since Dretske's point is that one cannot use one's everyday knowledge as a means of 'penetrating' through to knowledge of the reliability conditions of that everyday knowledge, it would appear that the actual form of the consequent proposition that Dretske has in mind is more akin to a global hinge proposition. Whereas the local sceptical hypothesis is unable, given one's internalist knowledge of P, to call one's reflectively accessible grounds into question, a radical sceptical hypothesis challenges the very idea that one has reflectively accessible grounds in the first place. Of course, in the hands of the sceptic, this kind of claim is meant to be enough to destroy internalist knowledge of the antecedent proposition, P. Dretske, however, wants to use the same reasoning in order to try to motivate instead the denial of the Closure principle that supports this move. In effect, he wants to play on the appeal of scepticism as a means of arguing to a *reductio* on Closure.

In order to see this, consider the following analogous scenario. Patrice meets Jesper coming out of Sven's office and asks if Sven is in there. Jesper says (truly) that he is, his grounds being, primarily, that he has just seen him in there. Imagine now that Patrice challenges Jesper by asking how it is that he can be sure, given that Sven might have just jumped out of his (third-storey) window. Radical scepticism aside, to such an objection Jesper is quite within his rights to be dismissive since, after all, he knows Sven well and thus has good reflectively accessible grounds for believing that this error-possibility can be discounted. Indeed, insofar as Jesper does internalistically know that Sven is in his office, then it seems that he also internalistically knows that he has not just jumped out of the window. Now suppose that Patrice asks how Jesper can be sure that Sven is in his office given that he might be a BIV. Of course, Jesper cannot claim to have sufficient reflectively accessible grounds to dismiss this error-possibility, since no such grounds exist. Accordingly, he must concede defeat on this point.

This is the juncture at which the sceptic usually argues for an extension of the defeat by querying the agent's (in this case Jesper's) knowledge of the antecedent

proposition (in this case that Sven is in his office). For what has happened now is that we have moved from a situation in which one grants that reflectively accessible grounds are available and simply challenges the conclusions drawn from those grounds, to one where one attacks the very sufficiency of the reflectively accessible grounds themselves. As a result, within an internalist framework at least, insofar as the agent really does lack internalist knowledge that he is not a BIV, then, argues the sceptic, neither can he know that Sven is in his office.

Dretske, however, wants it both ways. He both wants the reflectively accessible grounds which support knowledge of the antecedent proposition to stand, *and* also to challenge the very possibility of such grounds existing. The manner in which he tries to effect this feat is by using an example which is sufficiently like a radical sceptical scenario that it can play upon radical sceptical intuitions, whilst being different enough to enable Dretske to marshal conclusions outwith scepticism. As I have just argued, however, this manoeuvre does not work. Either Dretske keeps with the locally sceptical scenario, in which case knowledge that P will transfer to knowledge that Q and thus he does not have a counterexample to Closure (or  $K_{CI}$  for that matter), or he goes with the radical sceptical example, and so does battle with the sceptic.

One possible formulation which might capture the consequent proposition that Dretske has in mind could be Q':

(Q'): There is not some wholesale, yet undetectable, conspiracy to deceive going on.

And clearly the agent in Dretske's example (indeed, *any* agent) lacks sufficient reflectively accessible grounds to support internalist knowledge of this proposition. Of course, this might be considered to be good grounds for endorsing scepticism about the agent's knowledge of P, especially if one endorses an internalist epistemology and the Closure principle. The Dretskean line, on the other hand, takes the opposite tack of maintaining that an agent's (internalist) knowledge of P can coexist with that very same agent's lack of (internalist) knowledge of Q', even if the agent knows that P entails Q'. The Dretskean thus uses this example to motivate support for the denial of what he takes to be the Closure principle.

Crucially, however, these considerations have no capacity to militate against externalist knowledge of  $Q'$ , and thus against the Closure principle, provided we keep Closure and  $K_{CI}$  well apart. Indeed, since the agent does know the antecedent proposition, it is going to be impossible to find a possible world in which the agent has a sensitive belief about the antecedent proposition, and so has externalist knowledge of this proposition, but in which the agent does not have a sensitive belief about (and thus externalist knowledge of) the consequent proposition. As we saw above, simply in virtue of having a sensitive belief about  $P$ , the agent must, perforce, have a sensitive belief about a global hinge proposition such as  $Q'$  and therefore have externalist knowledge of  $Q'$ . Despite being an externalist, then, it is an internalist theory that drives Dretske's initial acceptance of the fact that we do not know  $Q'$ .

Nevertheless, one might protest that it is at the very least odd to say that the agent in this example should be ascribed knowledge of this proposition. Significantly, however, as we saw in chapter three, we can account for this reluctance to ascribe knowledge in these cases without thereby acceding to the denial of the Closure principle. To begin with, it certainly will be the case that the agent in this example will be unable to legitimately claim knowledge of a global hinge proposition such as  $Q'$  because this will generate a false epistemic conversational implicature, and this fact will, in part, explain our reluctance to ascribe knowledge here.

Moreover, as with our previous discussion on the difference between Closure and  $K_{CI}$ , it is important to remember that a 'sceptical' counterexample to Closure requires the orderings of possible worlds to be resolutely anti-sceptical. If the agent is to have uncontentious knowledge of the antecedent proposition, then the sceptical import of the consequent proposition should be unable to interfere with the agent's capacity to track the truth within the domain of sensitivity. Dretske himself undertakes a subtle sleight of hand in this respect since, as the above quotation indicates, he asks us to consider whether or not the agent knows the consequent proposition *independently* of whether or not he knows the antecedent proposition. So described, we may indeed be inclined to argue that the agent does not know the consequent proposition. That is not,

however, the question in hand. What we need to ask is whether, given that the agent does know the antecedent proposition, and thus that the range of possible worlds in the domain of sensitivity is devoid of sceptical worlds, does the agent know the consequent proposition. And, as we saw above, the answer we give under *this* supposition is entirely different.

We can thus account for the phenomenon that Dretske and the sceptic claim to discover without either rejecting Closure or denying that we know many of the everyday propositions which we believe.<sup>13</sup> It is this last point that is crucial to Dretske's overall account of knowledge, because it is by implicitly privileging an internalist notion of knowledge and then taking one's epistemic position as regards 'sceptical' propositions (such as Q') in isolation that he is left with an epistemology which straightforwardly accepts the sceptical premise that we do not know the denials of sceptical hypotheses. As we have just seen, if he had endorsed a thorough-going

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<sup>13</sup> There are three main camps of criticism of the denial of Closure in the contemporary literature, most of which are just as effective against Nozick's [1981; cf. Nozick 1987] related arguments for non-Closure as they are Dretske's. The currently dominant school of criticism in this regard argues that the denial of Closure rests upon an *ambiguity*. Since, as Dretske [1970] himself makes clear, cases of *semantic* ambiguity will only explain a certain sub-set of cases, so the charge here must involve a more substantive *epistemological* claim. Often, this involves setting the critique within the sort of *Contextualist* account of knowledge that we shall consider in the next chapter which holds that knowledge ascriptions should always be construed as relative to an epistemic context. Accordingly, the claim is that Dretske (like the sceptic) exploits an ambiguity between the epistemic context in which the agent's knowledge of P is evaluated and the epistemic context in which his knowledge of Q is evaluated. M. Williams [1991, chapter 8] offers the most sustained critique in this respect, focusing in particular on Dretske's own arguments. For the other main texts in this regard, see Stine [1976]; Cohen [1988; 1991; cf. Dretske 1991]; DeRose [1995]; and Lewis [1996]. A related account in this respect is offered by Rieber [1998] who argues that we can account for the 'contextualism' in our knowledge ascriptions which motivate the denial of Closure in terms of the context-sensitivity of *explanation*. (Indeed, Dretske [1970, pp. 1022-3] himself seems to intimate support for such an approach).

A second group of commentators - such as Wright [1983]; Bonjour [1987]; and Craig [1989] - criticise the idea that one could meet the sceptic by denying Closure. Moreover, just to complicate matters further, there are those who maintain that Closure should be denied, but that such a denial will not help the debate with the sceptic because Closure holds in sceptical contexts. The *locus classicus* for this approach is Heller [1999a], who argues for a 'hybrid' view that both denies Closure *and* 'contextualizes' the knowledge operator in sceptical contexts. I offer a critique of this suggestion in Pritchard [2000a]. Furthermore, as noted (and rejected) in chapter one, there is the proposal, put forward most clearly by Brueckner [1994b], that even if Closure does fail, still, if one accepts the sceptical premise then one can reformulate the sceptical paradox in terms of a weaker epistemic principle which does hold and which would be unaffected by the considerations raised over Closure.

Finally, another direction of criticism argues that Dretske and Nozick have failed to realise that knowledge is indexed to an *evidence-base*, where this is construed in internalist terms. The foremost exponent of this view is Klein [1981; 1987; 1995].

For discussion specific to Nozick's project, see the articles collected in Luper-Foy [1987b; cf. Luper-Foy 1987a; 1987c].

externalist epistemology then Dretske could have respected the distinction between internalist and externalist knowledge in such a way as to deny this premise in an unqualified form and thereby retain Closure whilst evading scepticism. Once Dretske has argued on this basis for the denial of Closure, however, he is thereafter committed to endorsing an odd epistemology which is able to incorporate these epistemological 'facts' (i.e., the denial of Closure and the acceptance of the sceptical premise). His synthesis of these disparate epistemic elements is, to say the least, ingenious.

Recall that in the last chapter we said that the heart of any account of knowledge was the notion of 'non-accidental' true belief, and that, penumbral cases apart, this could be characterised in terms of the 'sensitivity' of one's true beliefs. A sensitive belief was a belief as to whether P which matched the fact as to whether P not just in the actual world but also across a wide range of nearby possible worlds. If one has a sensitive belief in P then, at least in the standard case, one knows P. Of course, sensitivity will only guarantee, at best, externalist knowledge, since internalist knowledge would require something else - reflective access to the factors that make it such that one knows the proposition in question; the factors that make it such that one's belief in that proposition is sensitive. As we noted above, one would typically expect a sensitive belief to be a belief that responded to reflectively accessible grounds, but this is not necessarily the case. Accordingly, we get a characterisation of the heart of knowledge (in terms of sensitivity), with a sub-characterisation of *internalist* knowledge (in terms of the possession of a sensitive belief and reflective access to the factors that make that belief sensitive). Clearly, this sort of account of knowledge is not available to Dretske because it is unable to account for the 'results' which he has gleaned from his analysis of epistemic operators. If knowledge is, at root, simply sensitive belief, then it would be impossible to know the antecedent proposition, P, without knowing the consequent proposition, Q'. Moreover, as we saw in the last chapter, the motivation for denying that we could know Q'-type propositions becomes, at best, strained when viewed from the perspective of this sort of account of knowledge.

Dretske must thus advocate a different notion of knowledge, and to serve this

end in the paper subsequent to 'Epistemic Operators' [1970] - 'Conclusive Reasons' [1971] - he argues for the following characterisation of knowledge in terms of what I shall call, '*Dretskean sensitivity*'. We can formally express this notion as follows, where ' $B_{Ra} [\emptyset]$ ' means that the subject,  $a$ , believes  $\emptyset$  solely on the basis of his evidence,  $R$ , and ' $\Rightarrow$ ' indicates the counterfactual conditional:

$$D_K: \quad \{B_{Ra} [\emptyset]\} \& \{\neg \emptyset \Rightarrow \neg [B_{Ra} [\emptyset]]\}$$

In words, a subject,  $a$ , knows a proposition,  $\emptyset$ , if and only if he believes  $\emptyset$  solely on the basis of a certain class of evidence, and if, in the nearest possible world in which  $\emptyset$  is not true, he does not believe it on that basis.

Setting aside this reference to an "evidence-base" for a moment, consider how this model of knowledge will meet the demands that Dretske has set for it. Knowledge of an everyday proposition will only require the agent to have a true Dretskean sensitive belief in that proposition, where this requires that in the nearest possible world in which this proposition is false, the agent does not believe it. Take  $P$  as an example. In order for the agent to know  $P$ , all that is required is that he have a true belief that  $P$  and, in the nearest possible world in which  $P$  is false, such as the possible world in which the animal he is looking at in the zebra enclosure is an ape, he does not believe that the animal before him is a zebra (as presumably he does not). In contrast, consider whether the agent knows the anti-sceptical proposition,  $Q'$ . Although his belief in this proposition may well be true in the actual world, in the nearest possible world in which this proposition is false (i.e., the sceptical  $\neg Q'$ -world), he still continues to believe that it is true because he is the victim of the wholesale, and undetectable, conspiracy to deceive noted in  $Q'$ . As a result, Closure will fail on this view because the range of possible worlds at issue in determining knowledge of the antecedent proposition need not be the same as that which is at issue in determining knowledge of the consequent proposition. Using Dretskean sensitivity, then, Dretske can thus explain why it is that we both know everyday propositions whilst failing to know the denials of sceptical hypotheses, and thus why, accordingly, Closure fails.

One of the main ways in which Dretske's account differs from that offered here is in its insistence that a subject's knowledge be construed relative to the "reason" or "evidence-base" for the subject's belief. Unusually, however, despite Dretske's use of the term "reason" in this respect, it is not essential that the subject's formation of the belief in question should actually explicitly involve any reasoning (or even any *reasons* as such). Rather, the subject's evidence-base is simply to be thought of in terms of the "epistemic credential" [Dretske 1971, p. 1] that the subject has for holding the belief; the "state of affairs" [Dretske 1971, p. 13] to which the agent's conviction in that belief can be traced. Dretske offers little in the way of substantive argumentation to support this move, but we can get an idea of the motivation behind it by considering the reasons that Robert Nozick [1981; cf. Nozick 1987] offers for indexing his subjunctive account of knowledge - which involves, essentially, an analogous condition for knowledge as  $D_K^{14}$  - to the *method* by which the subject forms the belief.

Nozick [1981, pp. 170ff.; cf. Nozick 1987, pp. 25ff.; DeRose 1985, pp. 20-2] gives the following example to support his amendment to the subjunctive account. Suppose that a grandmother forms the belief that her son is well because he happens to visit her and she sees that he looks well, but that, had he not visited and been ill, she would have still believed that he was well because her relatives would have hidden his illness from her. The question at hand is whether or not she knows that he is well. At first glance, it seems that she does know this proposition because she saw that he was well. A subjunctive account (such as that offered here) which is not relativised to method would, however, seem to hold that she does not know this proposition since there clearly are near-by possible worlds (such as where her son is sick but she believes that he is well) where the grandmother's belief as to whether P fails to match the facts as to whether P. The solution that Nozick offers is to relativise the knowledge in question to the method of belief-formation involved - in this case the grandmother's use of her sight - such that we ignore near-by possible worlds in which the grandmother forms her belief about her son's health on a different basis (perhaps on the basis of the testimony

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<sup>14</sup> As we shall see below, however, Nozick supplements his account with a further condition.

of her relatives).

Examples such as this provide, however, only inconclusive support for the necessity of indexing the evaluation of the subject's knowledge to the method of belief-formation in question. The reason for this is that one can consistently allow that the method used to form the belief at issue is *central* to determining which range of possible worlds to consider without thereby arguing (with Nozick and Dretske) that it is *essential* to determining those worlds. That is, Nozick and Dretske are claiming, in effect, that for a possible world to be relevant to the determination of an agent's knowledge, it is necessary that the agent use the same method of belief formation. In contrast, one who argues for a conception of knowledge which is not indexed to methods in this way can allow that the range of possible worlds relevant to the determination of knowledge will normally only include possible worlds where the same method of belief formation is used as found in the actual world without insisting on the necessity that this be so.

In order to see this, it is useful to note that it is in fact very rare to find only *one* method of belief formation at issue. Typically, one would expect a whole host of methods to be functioning in any particular case. Nozick [1981, pp. 189-95; cf. Nozick 1987, pp. 25-31] is perfectly aware of this and therefore characterises his subjunctive account of knowledge in terms of the *dominant* method. In the grandmother example just given, for instance, we need not assume that the grandmother is basing her (actual) belief in her son's well-being purely upon her sight of him, only that this is the dominant method of belief formation, other methods (such as trusting the testimony of her relatives and so forth) being secondary. This point is important because it weakens the supposed intuitiveness of the claim that the grandmother knows. If other methods are implicated in her belief-formation and these methods are prone to lead her astray, then is it really so clear that the grandmother does know? After all, if this is so then there are going to be near-by possible worlds in which the method of looking at her son provides only weak support for her belief (perhaps where the lighting is bad), and thus where, accordingly, the disruptive effects of potentially deceitful testimony from her family are greater. If one of these worlds is such that the grandmother believes that her

son is well even though he is not, then this would suffice to destroy her knowledge.

Of course, one way that Nozick could try to evade these sorts of difficulties is by simply stipulating that the grandmother *only* uses the reliable method in the actual world. It is far from clear that we can make sense of a belief based on only one method in this way, but, in any case, a more pressing difficulty that faces this suggestion is that the issue then would be whether a possible world which is so different to the actual world as to include a scenario in which the agent forms her belief according to a *completely* different method is a 'near-by' possible world. After all, we would now have a scenario in which the method of belief-formation, and thus the surrounding circumstances, are so different from the actual case that it is far from clear that the grandmother would have to track the facts in this world in order to be said to know. Either way, then, it is far from clear-cut that we have an example here which motivates support for the 'method-based' approach advocated by Nozick and Dretske as opposed to simply offering an account of knowledge which gives the actual method used to form the beliefs the weight it deserves.<sup>15</sup>

Another respect in which Dretske's account differs from that offered here is in its disregard for the agent's ability to track the *truth* in near-by possible worlds. Recall that the account advocated in this thesis requires that one's beliefs be sensitive to the truth of the proposition in question across a *range* of possible worlds. This means that knowing a proposition will require more than merely not believing that proposition in a near-by not-P world; rather, it will also involve continuing to believe the proposition in a near-by possible world in which P is still true. That such a condition is necessary is illustrated by an example offered by Gilbert Harman [1973, pp. 142-54]. The first edition of a newspaper reports, truly, that the dictator of a country has been killed. Later editions of the paper, along with the rest of an otherwise reliable media, subsequently claim (falsely) that the original report was untrue. Everyone believes this retraction of the

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<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, given the more central role played by an agent's reasons for belief in the specific case of *internalist* knowledge, when it comes to the issue of the possession of such knowledge it may well be that more emphasis will be put on the sameness of the method employed than is the case when evaluating merely externalist knowledge.

original story except for our hero who, it turns out, never encounters the new reports (perhaps he falls ill immediately after reading the original report, and so is bed-ridden throughout the period in which the retractions are published). As a result, he continues to have a true belief gained from a source which is usually reliable, but his belief is clearly too lucky to count as knowledge. Had he not been ill, for instance - or had he fallen ill just a few hours later than he did - then he would have seen the retractions and no longer believed that the dictator was dead. Dretske's account cannot handle these cases because, by the lights of  $D_K$ , the agent should be taken as knowing the proposition in question. In the nearest possible world in which it is not true that the dictator was killed, our hero does not believe that he was because in this world it is not reported that this event has occurred. The account offered here, on the other hand, can accommodate such examples since they merely highlight the fact that knowledge requires more than merely not believing the proposition in question were it to be false in a near-by world. Rather, what is also required is that one should continue to believe it in changed circumstances in which the belief remains true.

Indeed, this is thus one respect in which Dretske's account of knowledge imposes a far weaker standard than that required by the account offered here. It is important to note, however, that the other main subjunctive account of knowledge - that offered by Nozick [1981; 1987] - does add an extra condition to the account in order to deal with these cases. What Nozick requires is not just that one should not believe the proposition in question in the nearest not-P world, but also that one should continue to believe that proposition in the nearest P world [Nozick 1981, pp. 182-8; 1987, pp. 19-25]. That said, however, Nozick's 'bipolar' account has in common with Dretske's theory an element which means that both of their characterisations of knowledge are both weaker *and* stronger than that offered here, even with Nozick's extra condition in play.

The Dretskean notion of sensitivity - (and also, *mutatis mutandis*, the Nozickean 'bipolar' account of sensitivity) - differs from that offered in chapter three in that it requires that the assessment of knowledge should essentially depend upon the sensitivity of the agent's belief in the *nearest* possible world in which what is believed is

false. In contrast, by the lights of the notion of sensitivity sketched here, having a sensitive belief simply means having a belief as to whether P which matches the truth as to whether P across a *range* of nearby possible worlds, even if that proposition is not false in any of these nearby possible worlds. As a result, the Dretske-Nozick line offers a *weaker* notion of knowledge as regards everyday propositions whilst offering a *stronger* account of knowledge as regards anti-sceptical propositions. In the former case, an agent will know a proposition provided he does not believe it in the nearest not-P world (and, according to Nozick, still believes it in the nearest P world), even if there are other possible worlds within the domain of sensitivity where the subject's beliefs do not match the truth. In the latter case, the subject will lack knowledge of anti-sceptical propositions even if he has a belief in those propositions which matches the truth across the range of possible worlds included in the domain of sensitivity.

Consider the former case first. Recall Patrick's true belief that his keys are in his office (P), based upon, let us say, the evidence of his memory. On Dretske's account, this will qualify as knowledge provided that in the nearest possible world in which his keys are not in his office - where, for instance, his memory has failed him and his keys are in his pocket - he does not form this belief on this basis. (And where, in line with the Nozickean account, in the nearest possible world in which it is still true that his keys are in his office - where the cleaner went in but decided not to remove them - he continues to have this belief).

In contrast, on the account of sensitivity that I offer this would not be sufficient for knowledge. Rather, what would be required would be that Patrick's belief that P should match the truth as to whether P across a *range* of near-by possible worlds in which Patrick forms a belief as to whether P, not just the closest not-P world. This account therefore requires that Patrick's belief as to whether P be responsive to a range of possible circumstances in which it is both true and (potentially) false that Patrick's keys are in his office. So if, for instance, there is a non-nearest possible world within the domain of sensitivity in which P is false and Patrick still believes it (or true, and Patrick ceases to believe it), then Patrick will not know P. For instance, suppose Patrick's belief

is both true and matches the truth in the nearest P and not-P possible worlds, but that there is a non-nearest near-by world in which Patrick still believes P even though the cleaner has decided to put Patrick's keys in a safe place outside the office. In such a case Patrick will not know P. This is entirely in accordance with intuition. If there is a near-by possible circumstance that one's belief is not sensitive to, then this ought to be sufficient to undermine one's knowledge.

It is, however, the manner in which the Dretske-Nozick account of knowledge is much *stronger* than that offered here which is of most significance - the manner in which it entails that we do not know (either internalistically or externalistically) the denials of sceptical hypotheses. (In what follows I shall focus on Dretske's account since it is this account that we have accorded the most thorough discussion here. Similar remarks will apply, however, to the Nozickean theory). What Dretske noted about the putative counterexamples to Closure that he offered was that the negations of the propositions in question each concern wildly different possible worlds. Whereas one need only go to a near-by possible world in which Patrick's memory has failed him to find a relevant not-P scenario, if one wants to find a world in which the denial of a sceptical hypothesis is false (as in the case of a sophisticated, and undetectable, conspiracy to deceive), one must go to the nearest *sceptical* world. Accordingly, in principle at least, the assessment of knowledge of an everyday proposition and the assessment of knowledge of a sceptical proposition can involve vastly different demands. The former need only require a belief which tracks the truth in the nearest not-P world (which is, one would hope at any rate, very near-by), whereas the latter requires the agent to track the truth in the nearest sceptical world even if that world is, (as, again, we would hope), very far-off, modally speaking. Hence, since we are unable to track the truth in sceptical worlds (that is what makes them *sceptical* worlds), so we cannot know the denials of sceptical hypotheses. And if one takes it as a datum that one can both know everyday propositions whilst being unable to know anti-sceptical propositions, then Closure must fail.

It is important to note, however, that the motivation for this analysis of

knowledge is primarily due to the considerations we saw Dretske adducing earlier on and which we found to employ contentious internalist presuppositions. Moreover, it is also crucial to recognise that Dretske has ended up with an account of knowledge that is, by the standards outlined in chapter three, externalist. This is because Dretske's account demands that a certain factual relationship should obtain between the subject's beliefs and the facts without thereby also demanding that the subject should have reflective access to the fact that this relationship obtains. As we saw above, however, if one is willing to endorse an externalist epistemology, then the motivation for the Dretskean argument for non-Closure just canvassed diminishes. If one couples this with the fact that we have a competing externalist account of knowledge which can both meet the sceptical threat *and* (in the relevant sense) retains Closure - since, as far as scepticism is concerned at any rate, it does not require the variability of possible worlds relevant to the assessment of knowledge of propositions which are related by an entailment - then the question must thus be asked as to why we should prefer the Dretskean manoeuvre at all. Why not simply adopt the intuitive epistemology which has neither the counterintuitive consequence of conceding the sceptical premise nor that of denying Closure?

Significantly, however, the defenders of this thesis argue that there are *independent* reasons for believing that knowledge ought to be characterised in terms of Dretskean sensitivity. In particular, it might be thought that the advantage that an account of knowledge cashed-out in terms of Dretskean sensitivity might have over a competing account expressed in terms of mere sensitivity is that the former can accommodate the so-called 'Lottery Puzzles' [e.g. Harman 1968; DeRose 1995; cf. Dretske 1971].<sup>16</sup> Imagine that Peter buys a single ticket for a lottery which has odds of a million-to-one. Peter, being a clear-headed fellow, fully recognises that, realistically speaking, he has very little chance of winning and therefore believes that he will not

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<sup>16</sup> These are not to be confused with the lottery *paradox*, originally due to Kyburg [1961; cf. Hempel 1962]. Although the two are related, we need only concern ourselves with the lottery puzzle because the paradox can only be run in terms of the notion of *reasonable belief*, and therefore cannot be reformulated such that it issues against knowledge (or even, for that matter, warrant, as understood here).

win. Suppose, moreover, that the draw has been announced in the national newspaper and that, as expected, Peter has not won.<sup>17</sup> Given that Peter has not read the newspaper announcement, however, would it be correct to say that he *knows* that has not won? After all, he has a true belief that he has not won and, moreover, he has a belief which is supported by an incredibly high probability and which, we might suppose, will thus be sensitive across a wide-range of near-by possible worlds (since he will, most likely, fail to win in any of them). Nevertheless, there does seem to be a reluctance to ascribe knowledge in these cases.

The diagnosis that Dretske offers of these cases is that they reveal that knowledge requires Dretskean sensitivity. On the Dretskean account, Peter fails to know because in the nearest possible world in which he did win and failed to find out that he had, he would still have believed that he had not won and so would have had a false belief. Dretskean sensitivity is thus seemingly supported by cases outwith the usual sceptical concerns.

This argument against a non-Dretskean account of sensitivity is, however, based on a confusion. Recall that we are assuming a fair lottery. It therefore follows that the possible world in which the winning numbers come up is no further away than the possible world in which they do not. This fact is, on reflection, not nearly so surprising as it may at first seem. After all, the possible world in which one wins the lottery is very similar to the actual world in which one doesn't. All that has changed is that some of the lottery balls have fallen into different slots. Accordingly, the possible world in which Peter does win the lottery and yet believes that he has lost *is* within the domain of sensitivity and this fact will suffice to defeat his putative knowledge that, in the actual

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<sup>17</sup> Sometimes the puzzle is set-up such that the draw has not yet been announced, but will be announced against the subject's favour. I ignore this flourish to the example for two reasons. First, because, strictly speaking, this modification ought to be irrelevant to the mechanics of the puzzle. Since one can only know true propositions, so we can assume that such a puzzle about knowledge will involve a true belief. Second, given the epistemological ramifications that I have drawn from the distinction between the propriety of a claim to know and the truth-conditions for knowledge, such a detail can be epistemically significant. If a claim to know is out-of-place in the usual lottery scenario, then it will be even more emphatically improper in this modified scenario where the draw has not even been announced. This is because, aside from anything else, a claim to know in these circumstances will clearly tend to carry the false conversational implicature that the draw has been announced.

world, he has lost.<sup>18</sup>

Dretske is thus unable to present independent support for his account of knowledge in terms of Dretskean sensitivity, and therefore must rely on the motivations derived from his argument for non-Closure which have been exposed as contentious. He is therefore incapable of offering sufficient support for his acceptance of the sceptical premise - and thus his denial of Closure - once his account is set against the externalist theory that has been proposed here and the epistemological considerations concerning the conversational implicature of knowledge claims into which it has been embedded. And what applies to Dretske's account will apply, in equal measure, to Nozick's later theory of knowledge which, since it incorporates the central Dretskean thesis, results in the same core claims. Accordingly, we have now motivated support for the contention that one can endorse an externalist account which can meet the sceptical paradox without having to concede either the sceptical premise or the denial of the Closure principle.

#### §4. Concluding Remarks.

In this chapter we have seen how the externalist theory of knowledge sketched in chapter three can meet the sceptical paradox with the Closure principle intact provided we are careful to distinguish Closure itself from a related internalist variant on this principle. Moreover, we have contrasted, with favourable results, the account of knowledge advocated here with the competitor 'Dretskean' theory which does deny Closure. As the dialectic currently stands, then, we have good reason for thinking that we have an intuitive anti-sceptical stance which meets the sceptical paradox whilst simultaneously possessing advantages over alternative anti-sceptical theories in the current literature.

A potential lacuna of explanation does, however, remain. In the next, and final, chapter, we will examine a competitor theory - the *Contextualist* account - which offers what we might call a 'sceptical' solution to the sceptical paradox. There are two

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<sup>18</sup> I am grateful to Peter Sullivan for making this point clear to me.

elements of this approach that are particularly significant for our purposes. The first is that the Contextualist theory both endorses the sceptical premise (within a certain context of inquiry) *and* the Closure principle, thus potentially posing a challenge to the claim made here that the Closure principle ought to be regarded as supporting our rejection of that premise. The second is that the contextualist claims to be offering an epistemological thesis which is true to the actual usage of our epistemic terms, and which, accordingly, is true to the conversational implicature of our language-games with epistemic terms. As a result, the Contextualist theory also poses a prospective challenge to the contention that the account I have suggested captures the intuitive intension of our epistemic concepts in this respect. In evaluating both of these claims we shall thus determine, in greater detail, how the solution to the sceptical paradox proposed here is to function.

# CONTEXTUALIST SOLUTIONS TO SCEPTICISM\*

## Chapter Five

*"He that increaseth knowledge, increaseth sorrow."* Ecclesiastes, 1:18.

### §1. Preamble.

The solution to scepticism outlined in this thesis has been motivated within an externalist epistemology in such a way that (it is claimed) it can meet the sceptical paradox whilst staying true to our everyday epistemological intuitions. Unlike the non-epistemic approach, it does not hold that our beliefs are, at root, devoid of epistemic buttress. And unlike the Dretskean theorist, neither does it take the unintuitive route of denying the Closure principle. Moreover, it recognises that maintaining an epistemic response to the sceptic does not licence one in simply *claiming, à la Moore*, that one knows the denials of sceptical hypotheses.

One challenge remains, however, in the form of the Contextualist response to scepticism, a proposal which is itself largely motivated from within an externalist framework and which also claims to conform to a common-sense understanding of our epistemic concepts. Furthermore, this account also appears to meet the sceptic head-on (and so cannot be accused of offering a non-epistemic solution), and, unlike the Dretskean model, it retains the Closure principle. It follows that the threat that this competitor approach to scepticism presents must be dissolved if the proposal argued for here is to have the necessary theoretical ascendancy.

In this chapter I will primarily be arguing against this view on the grounds that it is either so concessive that it is clearly counter-intuitive or, if it is not concessive, that it misidentifies what it refers to as the 'phenomenology' of scepticism and so fails to offer a completely intuitive response to the sceptic. The argument of this chapter will not be entirely negative, however, since it will also be claimed that the Contextualist strategy actually highlights certain pragmatic features of our epistemic language-games that

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\* Material from this chapter was presented at the 'Mind, World and Knowledge' conference held at the University of Reading in November 1997 as part of a paper entitled 'Williams' Contextualism and the Problem of Context-Change'. My thanks go to the audience that day and, in particular, Jonathan Dancy and John Preston. Elements of this chapter also inform Pritchard [2000a].

support the non-Contextualist solution to scepticism argued for here.

## §2. Scepticism, Closure and Context.

The type of Contextualism that is most interesting for our purposes is that which motivates its position with respect to scepticism,<sup>1</sup> and which endorses the claim that the truth-conditions of a knowledge claim are, in some sense to be specified, *indexed* to a context.<sup>2</sup> We shall consider in a little more detail what this means in a moment. For the time being it suffices to say that the primary motivation for the view is to show how our everyday ascriptions of knowledge are, despite appearances, entirely consistent with the sceptic's denial that such knowledge should be ascribed.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This point is important because not all forms of Contextualism are motivated with respect to scepticism. Indeed, one of the first explicitly Contextualist views - put forward by Annis [1978] - pays scant regard to sceptical issues. (For discussion of this view, see Airaksinen [1982; cf. Annis 1982]; Henderson [1994b; cf. Henderson 1994a]; and Brady [1998]). Another prominent exponent of the Contextualist position - Cohen [1986; 1987] - has also motivated his view, in the first instance, independently of scepticism. It was only in later works - such as Cohen [1988a; 1988b; 1990; 1991] - that he directly applies his work to the sceptical problem. (For discussion, see Dretske [1991], and also Sosa [1988; cf. Sosa 1991; 1986] who considers both Cohen *and* Annis). The writings of these two thinkers have prompted a great deal of discussion outside of the sceptical debate, especially as regards work on *feminist* and what is known as *social* epistemology. As regards the former, see the work of Code [1991], that draws on Cohen's version of Contextualism, and Duran [1991], that works with Annis' model. (For a general discussion of the relationship between Contextualist and feminist epistemology, see Longino [1990; 1999]). As regards the latter, see Schmitt [1994; 1999], and also some of the recent work on 'virtue' epistemology, as expounded by Plantinga [1986; 1988; 1993a; 1993b]; Sosa [1988; 1991; 1993]; Goldman [1993]; Greco [1993]; and Zagzebski [1996; 1999].

<sup>2</sup> The standard Contextualist line [e.g. DeRose 1992; 1995; 1999; cf. Brueckner 1994; Schiffer 1996; Brower 1998] is that this thesis is meant to be a variation on that proposed by Kaplan [1989] for the understanding of indexical terms in general. Essentially, Kaplan's account distinguishes between the constant element of the meaning of an indexical (its 'character'), and its variable content. Take the indexical 'I' for example. Roughly speaking, the invariant character of 'I' is a function from context to speaker, whereas the variable content of 'I' is the speaker on a given occasion of use. Accordingly, the Contextualist claim is that, like other indexical terms such as 'I' and 'that', it is constitutive of the term 'knows' that its content, but not its character, will change depending upon the standards employed by those who attribute knowledge.

<sup>3</sup> So put, this is, roughly, the sort of Contextualism endorsed, to varying extents, by Stine [1976]; Unger [1984; 1986]; Sosa [1986; 1988; 1991]; Hambourger [1987]; Cohen [1988a; 1988b; 1990; 1991; 1998; 1999]; M. McGinn [1989]; M. Williams [1991; cf. M. Williams 1988a; 1999b]; DeRose [1992; 1995; 1996; 1999]; Lewis [1996; cf. Lewis 1979]; and Heller [1999a; 1999b]; and attacked or qualified by, for instance, Craig [1990b, appendix, *contra* Unger 1984; Craig 1993, *contra* M. Williams 1991]; Dretske [1991, *contra* Cohen 1991]; M. McGinn [1993, *pace* M. Williams 1991]; Brueckner [1994a, *contra* DeRose 1995]; Skorupski [1994, *contra* M. Williams 1991]; Schiffer [1996, *contra* DeRose 1995]; Stroud [1996, *contra* M. Williams 1991, cf. Williams 1996]; Rorty [1997; cf. Rorty 1999, *contra* M. Williams 1991; cf. M. Williams 1997]; Vogel [1997, *contra* M. Williams 1991; cf. Vogel 1999]; Rieber [1998, *pace* DeRose 1995; Lewis 1996]; Shelley [1998, *contra* M. Williams 1991]; Feldman [1999]; Fogelin [1999; cf. Fogelin 1994, *contra* M. Williams 1991; cf. M. Williams 1999a]; Putnam [1999; *contra* Williams 1991]; Sosa [1999b]; and Pritchard [2000a, *contra* Heller 1999a]. For a related view which argues that knowledge - but not, *contra*, say, Blanshard [1941, pp. 305-13; cf. Kirkham 1992, §3.5], truth - admits of degrees, see Hetherington [1998]. For an overview of the literature in this respect, see Brower [1998] and DeRose [1999].

In its crudest form, the Contextualist response to scepticism can be expressed in the following fashion. In the first instance, the contextualist concedes that, provided we work with the high epistemic standard that the sceptic demands, we will not know everyday propositions. Accordingly, we get the following variation on the standard sceptical paradox, where the presence of the subscript 'H' indicates that the knowledge in question has been indexed to the ('high') sceptical standard:

- |     |   |   |
|-----|---|---|
| (1) | $\neg K_{Ha_t} [\neg SH]$                           | 'Indexed' Sceptical Premise.            |
| (2) | $K_{Ha_t} [O \rightarrow \neg SH]$                  | 'High' Knowledge of a Conceptual Truth. |
| (3) | $K_{Ha_t} [O]$                                      | Assumed for <i>Reductio</i> .           |
| (4) | $K_{Ha_t} [\neg SH]$                                | Closure, <sup>4</sup> 2, 3.             |
| (5) | $\neg K_{Ha_t} [\neg SH] \ \& \ K_{Ha_t} [\neg SH]$ | & Introduction, 1, 4.                   |
| (6) | $\neg K_{Ha_t} [O]$                                 | <i>Reductio Ad Absurdum</i> , 3, 5.     |

What the contextualist will deny, however, is that this result is able to impact against our ordinary knowledge claims when, rather than being indexed to this demanding 'sceptical' standard of knowledge, they are instead indexed to the 'low' standards ('L') of everyday usage:

- |     |                                    |   |
|-----|------------------------------------|---|
| (1) | $\neg K_{La_t} [\neg SH]$          | 'Indexed' Sceptical Premise.            |
| (2) | $K_{La_t} [O \rightarrow \neg SH]$ | 'High' Knowledge of a Conceptual Truth. |
| (3) | $K_{La_t} [O]$                     | 'Indexed' Everyday Knowledge.           |
| (4) | $K_{La_t} [\neg SH]$               | Closure, 2, 3.                          |

When faced with the clash between our lack of 'high' knowledge of the denial of sceptical hypotheses and our possession of 'low' knowledge of everyday propositions, all that Closure will yield will be the lowest common denominator of the two - 'low' knowledge of the denial of sceptical hypotheses. Accordingly, the sceptic is unable to motivate his *reductio* [e.g. DeRose 1995; 1999; cf. Schiffer 1996].<sup>5</sup>

Contextualism thus potentially constitutes one way in which the sceptical

<sup>4</sup> In order to give Contextualism a run for its money, we shall take it for granted that Closure preserves the lowest contextual standard at issue as regards the agent's knowledge of either the antecedent proposition or the entailment to the consequent proposition.

<sup>5</sup> This is not say, of course, that a Contextualist theory is *incompatible* with the denial of Closure, since there may be other reasons which are independent of concerns over scepticism that might motivate the contextualist to deny this principle. For an argument that we should both endorse Contextualism *and* deny Closure, see Heller [1999a]. I offer a critique of this suggestion in Pritchard [2000a]. The important point for our purposes is only that it is not part of the Contextualist anti-sceptical strategy to deny Closure.

premise can be conceded *and* the principle of Closure endorsed without thereby falling foul of radical scepticism. On this account, the problem with a view such as that developed by Dretske [1970; 1971] or Nozick [1981] is that it fails to recognise that, properly understood, the knowledge operator ought to be indexed to a contextual standard. As a consequence of this omission (or so the story goes), proponents of this view are compelled to deny Closure rather than keep Closure and restrict their construal of the knowledge that transmits across the entailment. Both camps agree with the sceptic that we do not know that the sceptical hypothesis does not obtain, but whereas the Dretskean line limits the harmful effects of this admission by denying Closure, the contextualist attempts to contain them by denying that it is the same context (and thus the same knowledge operator) that is at issue in the two cases. Accordingly, neither the Dretskean nor the contextualist will allow that we lack knowledge of everyday propositions on the basis of our lack of knowledge that the sceptical hypothesis does not obtain, but for different reasons.

Indeed, in order to get a better handle on the Contextualist position it is worthwhile comparing it to the model endorsed by Dretske [1970; 1971] that we rejected in the last chapter. Essentially, Dretske argues that it follows from the counterexamples that he posed to Closure that only a certain set of alternative propositions are ‘relevant’ to the determination of knowledge. Let an *alternative* be a proposition that is logically incompatible with the proposition (putatively) known. On Dretske’s account, an alternative, *h*, is *relevant* to an agent’s knowledge that *P* when, in order to know *P*, the agent must also know that not-*h* obtains. Whereas an ‘absolutist’ about knowledge [e.g. Unger 1975] rather unreasonably demands that knowledge that *P* requires knowledge that *every* alternative does not obtain, Dretske’s idea is that the sort of alternatives that need to be excluded in order to know (the ‘relevant alternatives’) will vary depending upon the knowledge at issue. This is why Closure fails, because the circumstances surrounding my knowledge that, for instance, the animal before me is a zebra, may not require me to exclude the possibility that the animal before me is not a cleverly disguised mule. It follows then that I can know that the animal before me is a zebra and

know that this entails that it is not a cleverly disguised mule, without thereby knowing that the animal is not a cleverly disguised mule.

Equally, however, the contextualist will attempt to respond to the same phenomena of changing relevance within a Contextualist account of knowledge. Gail C. Stine [1976], for instance, has argued that rather than allowing the criterion of relevance to vary and thereby denying Closure, we should instead index knowledge to a criterion of relevance. The sort of knowledge that one has will then be dependent upon what standard is applied where the standard is measured in terms of the alternatives that are eliminated by one's knowledge (i.e., the greater the 'breadth' of alternatives eliminated, the stronger the knowledge). She is not alone in her Contextualist interpretation of Dretske's model - both Stewart Cohen [1987; 1988; 1990; 1991] and Keith DeRose [1995] have made similar suggestions. Dretske has, however, been quite explicit in his rejection of these interpretations of his work. For instance, *contra* Cohen's [1991] Contextualist characterisation of his position, he writes:

Knowledge is relative, yes, but relative to the extra-evidential circumstances of *the knower* and those who, like the knower, have the same stake in what is true in the matter in question. Knowledge is context sensitive, according to this view, but it is not indexical. If two people disagree about what is known, they have a genuine disagreement. They can't both be right. [Dretske 1991, p. 191]

So whereas the Dretskean believes that, once we have established what the contextual features of the situation are, any particular knowledge claim will have a determinate truth-value that will not vary with context, the contextualist demurs. His claim is that whether or not an agent knows a proposition will essentially depend upon the standards employed by those who are (or would be) assessing that knowledge - on the context of *ascription*.<sup>6</sup>

What must be added to an epistemology which is responsive to contextual factors in order to make the theory a specifically *Contextualist* epistemology is thus the claim

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<sup>6</sup> The distinction being sketched here is sometimes expressed as a difference between 'subject' and 'attributer' Contextualism, where only the latter involves a substantive (indexed) Contextualist epistemological theory [see DeRose 1999, pp. 190-1, cf. DeRose 1992, part II; Brower 1998]. Although M. Williams' [1991] version of Contextualism indexes knowledge to a context of inquiry, his view is not to be confused with a 'subject' Contextualist view for reasons which should become obvious below.

that whether or not an agent knows a proposition will depend upon the criterion employed by the one who *ascribes* the knowledge to that agent. Without this extra thesis, there is nothing distinctive about the Contextualist account, and certainly nothing that would license the indexation move that was made above in order to block the sceptical paradox. To say that a subject knows a certain proposition is to say that it is known relative to a context of ascription. Accordingly, whether or not a subject knows a certain proposition can depend upon who is evaluating it; whether it is, for instance an individual with no particular philosophical concerns who therefore applies a quotidian standard, or a sceptic employing a demanding sceptical standard.<sup>7</sup>

Contextualists thus deny what Peter Unger [1984; 1986; cf. Craig 1990b, appendix] calls “invariantism”, which is the view with respect to the semantics of a particular term that there is a single standard for its correct use which applies in all contexts in which it is or may be employed. In contrast, the Contextualist thesis holds that the standard for the application of this term - and thus the truth-value of any proposition in which this term is embedded - will change depending upon the context at issue. On the Contextualist picture, then, it is possible that two people could assert apparently conflicting statements as to whether a third person knows a certain proposition, whilst agreeing on the truth-condition of the proposition claimed and all the relevant external factors involved in the formation of the queried belief (including the agent’s other beliefs), *whilst not contradicting one another*.

So put, the view seems counter-intuitive enough. It is important, then, to remember what is motivating a position of this sort. Essentially, the Contextualist claim is that we should take at face value the fact that we seem willing to ascribe knowledge in non-sceptical contexts that we wouldn’t ascribe in sceptical contexts. Properly understood, the contextualist argues, *both* ascriptions can be correct. It is thus in this sense that the contextualist claims to be capturing the ‘phenomenology’ of scepticism. Saying this is one thing, however, making the position plausible another. After all, as

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<sup>7</sup> These remarks are meant to be consistent with the possibility that one might *self*-ascribe knowledge in terms of different epistemic standards at different times.

matters stand we seem to have just as much reason simply to think that the 'high' standard employed by the sceptic is the right standard, and that the 'low' standard is no standard at all (and, remember, the sceptic always wins draws). Indeed, this was precisely the thought that we saw the exponents of the infallibilist position advancing in chapter three. We must thus look to how a Contextualist view is developed. In what follows I shall examine the most evolved version of Contextualism in the literature - due, primarily, to DeRose [1995], and which expands upon the Contextualism advanced by David Lewis [1979; cf. Lewis 1996] - and evaluate its anti-sceptical potential. Later on, I shall consider a more extravagant Contextualist thesis due to Michael Williams [1991].

### §3. DeRose's Contextualism.

For DeRose [1995], the basic Contextualist strategy pivots upon the acceptability, and appropriate use, of the following Contextualist thesis:

Suppose a speaker A (for "attributor") says, "S knows that P", of a subject S's true belief that P. According to contextualist theories of knowledge attributions, how strong an epistemic position S must be in with respect to P for A's assertion to be true can vary according to features of A's conversational context. [DeRose 1995, p. 4]

DeRose employs this thesis as a means of explaining the following supposed features of the 'phenomenology' of scepticism. First, that ascriptions of knowledge to subjects in conversational contexts in which sceptical error-possibilities have been raised seems wholly wrong. Second, that in conversational contexts in which no sceptical error-possibilities are in play it seems perfectly appropriate to ascribe knowledge to subjects. And, third, that all that may change when one moves from a non-sceptical conversational context to a sceptical context are mere conversational factors. Intuitively, these three 'intuitions' are in conflict because, or so the standard non-Contextualist thought runs, *one* of these judgements must be wrong. That is, since conversational topic has no obvious bearing on the epistemic status of a subject's beliefs, it ought to be universally true (i.e., *whatever* the conversational context) that the subject either does or does not know the propositions in question. Contextualism opposes this thought with

the suggestion that what is actually occurring is not a contradiction but a responsiveness, on the part of the attributor of knowledge, to a fluctuation in the epistemic standards (and with them the subject's possession of knowledge) caused by a change in the conversational context. Simply opposing this thought is not enough, though, what is also required is a motivation for this new Contextualist construal of our epistemic concepts.

The first thing that DeRose tries to capture is the intuition that as one moves from one conversational context to another one's epistemic situation (one's total informational state for instance) could remain exactly the same. DeRose accommodates this intuition in conjunction with the Contextualist picture by arguing, as the above quotation indicates, that although one's "epistemic position" is constant at any one time, the epistemic position that one *needs to be in* so as to count as possessing knowledge can be variable. Strength of "epistemic position" is characterised by DeRose as follows:

[...] being in a strong epistemic position with respect to P is to have a belief as to whether P is true match the fact of the matter as to whether P is true, not only in the actual world, but also at the worlds sufficiently close to the actual world. That is, one's belief should not only be true, but also should be non-accidentally true, where this requires one's belief as to whether P is true to match the fact of the matter at nearby worlds. The further away one gets from the actual world, while still having it be the case that one's belief matches the fact at worlds that far away and closer, the stronger a position one is in with respect to P. [DeRose 1995, p. 34]

In order to see this, imagine that Lars believes that his car is outside on the basis of a certain fixed informational state (which involves, perhaps, his memory of the car being there a few hours ago, his grounds for believing that no-one would steal it, and so forth). Now imagine an exact counterpart of Lars - Lars\* - who is in exactly the same cognitive state except that he has the extra piece of information that the car was there a minute ago (perhaps he looked). Clearly, Lars\* will be in a better epistemic position with respect to his belief that his car is outside than Lars. Although they will, in general, track the truth across the same set of possible worlds, Lars\* will track the truth in a few extra possible worlds, such as the possible worlds in which the car was stolen ten minutes ago.

We are now a little nearer to understanding DeRose's initial formulation of the

Contextualist position in terms of the variability of “how strong an epistemic position S must be in with respect to P for A’s assertion [*that S knows P*] to be true.” DeRose’s idea is that the Dretskean notion of sensitivity - whilst not essential to knowledge possession itself - will play a part in the mechanism that changes a conversational context in such a way as to raise (or lower) the strength of epistemic position that one needs in order to count as knowing. Recall that for an agent to have a belief in P which is Dretskean sensitive, the agent must not only have a true belief in P in the actual world, but also *not* believe P in the nearest possible world in which P is false. DeRose’s thought is that in any particular conversational context there is a certain set of propositions that are explicitly at issue and the agent must, at the very least, be Dretskean sensitive to all these ‘explicit’ propositions if he is to know them. Moreover, the most demanding of these propositions - the proposition which has a negation that occupies the furthest-out possible world - will set the standard for that conversational context since this not-P world will determine the extent of possible worlds that one’s beliefs must be able to track if one is to truly be said to know a proposition in that context. Knowing a proposition thus involves being in an epistemic position sufficient to track the truth across the range of possible worlds determined by the most demanding proposition explicit in that context. Crucially, however (and I shall be expanding upon this detail in a moment), this point also applies to propositions which are *implicit* in a conversational context (i.e., propositions which one believes but which are not explicit in that conversational context). In order to know such a proposition - even if one’s belief in that proposition is not Dretskean sensitive - one need only be in a sufficient epistemic position to meet the standards of that context. (The importance of this point shall become apparent in a moment).

DeRose then characterises the mechanism that brings about an upward shift in epistemic standards as follows:

When it is asserted that some subject S knows (or does not know) some proposition P, the standards for knowledge (the standards for how good an epistemic position one must be in to count as knowing) tend to be raised, if need be, to such a level as to require S’s belief in that particular P to be [*Dretskean*] sensitive for it to count as knowledge. [DeRose 1995, p. 36]

That is, what changes a conversational context is when a new proposition is made explicit in that context which is more demanding than any of the propositions currently under consideration. This will thus increase the range of possible worlds at issue in the determination of knowledge, and thereby increase the strength of epistemic position required in order to be truly said to know.

What motivates this claim is the fact that, as Lewis [1979] famously argued, when it comes to 'context-sensitive' terms like 'flat' or, (as DeRose would claim), 'knowledge', the conversational 'score' tends to change depending upon the assertions of that context. We may all agree that the table in front of us is 'flat' in an everyday context, but, *ceteris paribus*, if someone enters the room and denies that it is flat we do not thereby disagree with him. Instead, we take it that he means 'flat' in some more demanding sense and so raise the standards for 'flatness' so as to make his assertion true (this is what Lewis calls a "rule of accommodation"). That is, we take it that the new participant of our conversational context means flat in some more restricted sense so that the barely perceptible bumps on the table before us are sufficient to make the claim "This table is flat" false. DeRose considers the Lewis line to have captured something intuitive about the pragmatics of how we use our 'context-sensitive' terms and, moreover, believes that epistemic terms such as 'knowledge' behave in a similar way.<sup>8</sup>

An example will help clarify matters here. Imagine an agent in a quotidian context in which only everyday propositions, such as whether or not one saw one's brother this afternoon (P), or whether or not the garden gate has been closed (Q), are at issue. Dretskean sensitivity to these everyday propositions will only require the consideration of nearby possible worlds and thus the strength of epistemic position demanded will be very weak. Let us say, plausibly, that the possible world in which one did not see one's brother this afternoon is 'further-out' than the possible world in which the garden gate is not closed. This proposition will thus determine the range of possible

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<sup>8</sup> Lewis agrees. In Lewis [1979] he briefly applies this line of argument to epistemic terms (and thus to the sceptical problem), and expands upon this thought in Lewis [1996].

worlds at issue in the determination of knowledge in that conversational context. Let us suppose that the agent in question does have a Dretskean sensitive belief in this proposition. The issue of what other propositions the subject knows will now be decided by whether the agent's belief in those propositions will track the truth across the range of possible worlds determined by not-P. If, for instance, the agent's belief that the garden gate is closed matches the truth as to whether Q in all of the possible worlds within that range, then he will know Q. Equally, however, if the subject's belief in a proposition which is implicit in that conversational context tracks the truth across this range of possible worlds then that proposition will be known also, even if the agent's belief in that proposition is not Dretskean sensitive.

Consider, for instance, the agent's belief that he is not a BIV, a proposition which one cannot be Dretskean sensitive to since in the nearest BIV-world, the agent still believes that he is not a BIV. On the Contextualist model, however, if one is in a conversational context in which such a proposition is not explicit, then one can know this proposition just so long as one has a belief as to whether this proposition is true which matches the facts as to whether it is true within the range of possible worlds at issue. And, clearly, this demand will be trivially satisfied in the above scenario. As we saw in chapter four, insofar as the agent knows a proposition like P, which entails not-BIV,<sup>9</sup> then there could be no BIV-worlds within that range of possible worlds. Accordingly, all the subject needs is a stubborn belief that not-BIV in order to be truly said to know this proposition in this conversational context. The contextualist can thus capture the second element of the 'phenomenology' of scepticism - that, in quotidian conversational contexts, we are perfectly willing to ascribe knowledge of everyday propositions and also feel that we must know the denials of sceptical hypotheses as well.

One might wonder why I use the word "feel" here. Well, the reason is that, on the Contextualist account, if one were to explicitly mention these anti-sceptical propositions

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<sup>9</sup> At least where the BIV hypothesis is understood as demanding that the agent was envatted earlier than this afternoon.

(as one would if one were to verbally ascribe knowledge of them to oneself), then one would thereby make that proposition explicit in the conversational context and so change the epistemic standards needed for knowledge accordingly.<sup>10</sup> In order to have knowledge within that context one's belief that one is not a BIV must now exhibit Dretskean sensitivity, and the possible worlds relevant to the determination of that Dretskean sensitivity will be relevant to one's knowledge of even everyday propositions. Accordingly, one will now lack knowledge both of the denial of the sceptical hypothesis (because one's beliefs in this respect are not Dretskean sensitive), *and* of the everyday propositions (since even though one's beliefs in these propositions are Dretskean sensitive, one can never be in an epistemic position that would support knowledge of them which would be strong enough to track the truth in far-off BIV-worlds). Again, the contextualist claims to have captured another aspect of the 'phenomenology' of scepticism, which is the fact that we are completely unwilling to ascribe knowledge in sceptical conversational contexts even though the only thing that may have changed from the non-sceptical conversational context in which we were willing to ascribe knowledge is the course of the conversation. Moreover, the contextualist has done this without either conceding the universal truth of scepticism (since scepticism is false in everyday contexts), or denying Closure (since there is no single context in which one both knows an everyday proposition whilst lacking knowledge of the denial of a sceptical hypothesis). Accordingly, DeRose claims to have 'solved' the sceptical paradox in an entirely intuitive manner.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Indeed, one may not even actually have to mention this possibility in order to make it explicit in that conversational context. Most contextualists are extremely vague as how we are to determine exactly what makes a proposition explicit in this way. DeRose [1995], for instance, merely notes that simply mentioning a proposition won't always be enough, whilst also arguing that sometimes a proposition can be brought into a context in a non-standard (non-verbal?) way. I let this lack of clarity in the account pass here, however, since I think that there are more pressing problems with the view.

<sup>11</sup> Of course, although the contextualist has not directly denied any of the usual claims that make up the traditional formulation of the paradox, he has denied a claim which was implicit in the formation of that paradox; *viz.*, that the possession of knowledge does not vary with respect to mere conversational factors. Crucial to the Contextualist account, however, is the thought that this 'intuition' is entirely philosophical in nature and thus is not reflected in our everyday practices. It is this claim that I shall be challenging below.

#### §4. Contextualism and the Problem of 'Epistemic Descent'.

Of the numerous objections that have been levelled at DeRose's account, one of the most interesting has been put forward by Stephen Schiffer [1996; cf. Schiffer 1992; DeRose 1999, p. 203n], who argues that there are good reasons to be sceptical about the very plausibility of the contextualist's 'indexation' thesis. In essence, Schiffer's charge is that it is incoherent to view our everyday claims to know (and ascriptions of knowledge to others) as being implicitly elliptical expressions which assert something of an indexed form. As he puts the matter, on the Contextualist story the use of knowledge claims is equivalent to other indexical sentences like 'It's raining', the only difference being that, unlike the assertions about the rain, people are capable of systematically failing to recognise their misuse of the expressions [Schiffer 1996, pp. 325-6]. After all, as Schiffer argues, without such a semantic 'error theory'<sup>12</sup> a contextualist like DeRose would be unable to make sense of even the *prima facie* intuitiveness of sceptical paradoxes. The idea must be that centuries of epistemological confusion have been generated simply by a failure to appreciate the fact that a standard knowledge claim leaves something crucial unstated - *viz.*, its 'hidden' indexical. But, as Schiffer argues, it is far from sensible to suppose that we are prone to such systematic error in our treatment of the concept of knowledge. To use Schiffer's example, this would be akin to a fluent and sane speaker, who knows where he is, asserting the proposition that it is raining in London when he meant to assert the proposition that it is raining in Oxford.

Moreover, (and again unlike indexed claims about the rain), Schiffer [1996, p. 327] points out that it is rare to find instances of knowledge claims where one is willing to expand on the unstated indexical element - or even clear *what* one would say if one were so willing. If you were to ask someone to specify the context of his assertion of "It is raining", that person could at least tell you that he means that it is raining *here, now*. But, to use one of Schiffer's own examples, if you were to hear someone say "I know that Placido Domingo is scheduled to sing at the Met this season", and you asked this

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<sup>12</sup> Analogues of such an 'error theory' approach with respect to a certain discourse can be found in Mackie [1977], as regards an ethical discourse, and Field [1980; 1989], as regards 'fictionalism' with respect to pure mathematics.

person what, *exactly*, he meant by this, the chances are that if you got a reply at all (rather than just a bemused expression), it would simply consist of the repetition of the proposition which he claimed to know.

In a related fashion, Edward Craig [1993; cf. Craig 1990b; Brower 1998] has argued that it is implausible to suppose that a concept so essential to our survival as a species - because it is used to tag reliable information and informants - could possibly be unconsciously indexed in this manner. Moreover, of what practical use would such a concept be if its correct employment depends upon conversational factors in this esoteric way? When we use the knowledge operator, argues Craig, we do so in a way that *commits* us to the information contained therein for as long as our informational state remains the same. In this way, using the term ensures that we can co-operate so as to manoeuvre our way around our environment in the safest manner. Having a concept of knowledge that was indexed to conversational contexts in the style that DeRose suggests would thus undermine the practical utility of the knowledge operator.<sup>13</sup> In general, then, it would appear that we have very good reason to be sceptical about the contextualist's claim to have captured the intuitive extension of our epistemic concepts.

Significantly, another type of objection to Contextualism - and one of the most compelling - was actually raised by a proponent of the Contextualist view. In essence, it revolves around the counterintuitive consequences that follow from the Contextualist claim that simply raising a sceptical error-possibility is enough to destroy knowledge. Whilst developing his own brand of Contextualism, Lewis [1996] becomes troubled by the problem of how it is that agents who are considering sceptical possibilities nevertheless seem to know a great deal. He gives the example of two epistemologists walking through the Australian Bush discussing scepticism. "Do they know where they are going?", he asks. His response to this problem is, however, singularly unsatisfying. He argues that we should reject the idea of a unitary knowing subject and instead offer a "compartmentalised" view whereby the *same* subject can both know and not know the

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<sup>13</sup> Craig's remarks are actually specifically directed at M. Williams' [1991] version of Contextualism that we shall consider in a moment. Nevertheless, as Brower [1998] notes, his comments will apply to most Contextualist views, including DeRose's.

*same* proposition at the *same* time [Lewis 1996, p. 565]. If anything, this seems to be a *reductio ad absurdum* of the Contextualist position.

Although there is clearly a great deal of philosophical mileage to be had from these objections, I think that we can get a more interesting angle on the Contextualist project by considering how it deals with context-change as one moves from a sceptical conversational context back to a non-sceptical conversational context. For although DeRose says a great deal about the phenomenon of 'epistemic ascent' - when a change in the conversational context brings about an *elevation* in the epistemic standards - he says very little about the related notion of 'epistemic descent', which is when the conversational context changes such that there is - or ought to be - a *drop* in epistemic standards.

In terms of the sceptical debate the interesting instances of these mechanisms will be when the epistemic standards are raised to accommodate a sceptical error-possibility and our knowledge is thereby destroyed; and when the epistemic standards lower thereafter so that we are reunited once more with our erstwhile knowledge. It is, of course, essential to the anti-sceptical import of the Contextualist account that the sceptical phenomenon of epistemic ascent be matched by an equal and opposing phenomenon of epistemic descent, for otherwise knowledge lost in sceptical contexts would never be regained. Given that this is so, it is troubling that all that DeRose says about epistemic descent is that:

[...] the fact that the skeptic can install very high standards that we don't live up to has no tendency to show that we don't satisfy more relaxed standards that are in place in more ordinary conversations and debates. [DeRose 1995, p. 38]

Presumably, then, the Contextualist account of epistemic descent that DeRose has in mind is that such descent simply occurs when the conversation changes back to more everyday concerns and "the conversational air has cleared" [DeRose 1995, p. 42]. Everyday knowledge is defeated by the epistemic ascent to sceptical standards, but is regained once the conversation returns to normal and those standards are dropped. This neat picture of epistemic fluctuation is put under pressure, however, by considering what happens in otherwise entirely analogous cases of putative epistemic

ascent and descent that do not involve the extremal case of radical scepticism.

Compare, for example, the sceptical case of epistemic ascent with that which occurs in the following scenario. Keith is working in his local store and sees Lewis walk by. He notices that the time is 10.30 am. He knows that it is Lewis who walked by since he comes into the shop everyday and he knows him well. Moreover, he got to have a good long look at him. Furthermore, let us grant that he does know that it was Lewis that walked by in that conversational context. Unfortunately for Lewis, however, he is in trouble (he has stolen Kripke's car, let us say), and as his alibi he has maintained that he was out of the town that morning. Knowing that he was in the town that day, the police call for witnesses and take a statement from Keith who states that he knows that it was Lewis who walked past the window of his shop at 10.30 am that morning.

Now, however, suppose that the case goes to court and Keith, as a witness, is called to the stand. The defending QC asks Keith about his testimony. In particular, knowing that Keith is a contextualist, he questions him about the strength of his conviction that it was Lewis who walked past his shop window that day. Could it, he asks, mischievously, have been his identical twin brother and, if so, would he have been able to tell the difference? Note that there is no suggestion here that Lewis actually has a twin brother, let alone that his twin was in town that day.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, Keith, being a good contextualist, recognises that this presentation of a new error-possibility raises the epistemic standard, and consequently he changes his story. He now claims that he does *not* know that it was Lewis who walked by that day. Although he knows Lewis well, he couldn't be sure that he'd be able to tell him apart from an identical twin were he to have one, and thus, since he lacks a Dretskean sensitive belief in the proposition at issue, he realises that as a contextualist he must now claim that he does not know that it was Lewis who walked by that day. As a result, Lewis' alibi is secure and he walks free from the courtroom.

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<sup>14</sup> This stipulation is obviously important because if the QC were making such a claim then this would constitute collateral information. The example would then be made void since we would no longer have a case in which the epistemic status of Keith's belief has changed solely in response to conversational factors.

Of course, that an agent would reverse his testimony in this way in the absence of a change in his epistemic position seems highly questionable, if not a case of perjury, but we shall let this counterintuitive aspect of Contextualism go by for the time being. The crucial question is, given that he now claims that he does *not* know, would it be proper for Lewis to return to asserting knowledge of the proposition in question once he leaves the courtroom and the epistemic standards have returned to normal? Imagine, for example, that Keith exits the courthouse amid the glare of the camera flashes and, upon being asked by the local reporters, announces that he does know the proposition in question after all (perhaps adding, for good measure, that it was only in the courtroom that he did not know). I take it that there is a strong intuition at work here that acts against our finding such behaviour appropriate. Even if the Contextualist story is correct and Keith does know this proposition once the contextual standard returns to normal, it remains that he certainly cannot properly *claim* such knowledge if, as he freely grants, he was willing to claim that he *lacked* such knowledge in a previous context in which his epistemic position was exactly the same.<sup>15</sup>

We have thus seen two problems with the Contextualist account insofar as it is applied to oneself by a thoroughgoing contextualist. First, that *reversing* (i.e., going from asserting that one knows to that one does *not* know) one's judgement as to the epistemic status of one's own beliefs in response to a mere conversational factor seems counterintuitive.<sup>16</sup> Seemingly, if one's claim to know is influenced by these factors then one should not have claimed such knowledge in the first place. Second, and more importantly for our purposes, it appears that once one grants that one does not know a certain proposition then, provided that the only thing that changes in the intervening period is the nature of the conversational context, one cannot, thereafter, properly claim to know that proposition. Both problems put pressure on the contextualist's claim to

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<sup>15</sup> Putnam [1998] raises a similar objection against the Contextualist account offered by M. Williams [1991].

<sup>16</sup> Note that it is not enough for the Contextualist to argue against this particular scenario on the grounds that, in this case (for some reason), merely mentioning the error-possibility does not make it relevant. After all, there *will* be cases in which a mere mention of an error-possibility will make it relevant (this is what is supposed to explain the attraction of scepticism), and, accordingly, one will be able to run an example which is completely analogous to this one.

have intuitively captured the *variability* of our knowledge - that the *possession* of knowledge fluctuates in response to mere conversational factors - by highlighting how the supposition of such variability leads to counterintuitive consequences.

The reason for this unease is due to the fact that making a claim to know carries with it certain conversational implicatures that are grounded in the conditions (some of them not social at all, but epistemic) for appropriate assertions of knowledge claims. *Ceteris paribus*, an agent's claim to know will carry the conversational implicature that he can be *trusted* on this point - that this is a claim that he will *stick to* and that, for example, he has, as far as he is aware at least, no substantive reason to doubt that his claim to know is faulty.<sup>17</sup> The problem for the contextualist is that such implicatures seem to be entirely non-Contextualist in spirit. For instance, reversing a claim to know in the face of a mere conversational change offends against the 'trustworthiness' aspect of a knowledge claim. If one claims knowledge then one is committed to 'sticking-by' that claim in all conversational contexts. In a related fashion, if one claims that one does *not* know a certain proposition then, insofar as one continues to regard this claim to be accurate, going on to claim knowledge of that proposition in the same epistemic position offends against the 'credibility' aspect of a knowledge claim. It would be highly misleading to claim knowledge of a proposition that one previously claimed not to know where there had been no relevant difference in one's epistemic situation in the meantime.

Crucially, however, if such instances of epistemic ascent and descent are questionable here, then they will be equally problematic in analogous sceptical cases. According to the Contextualist story, in the everyday context an agent can know both an everyday proposition like *O* and the denial of a sceptical hypothesis ( $\neg$  SH), and be in a position to claim knowledge of *O*. Once the issue of whether SH is raised and the standards are elevated, however, the agent's knowledge of both of these propositions will be lost and he will revise his assessment of the epistemic status of his beliefs

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<sup>17</sup> Craig's [1993; cf. Craig 1990b] remarks about the "practical" role of the concept of knowledge will no doubt at least partly explain why these sorts of implicatures would have come to have been generated.

accordingly, claiming, if necessary, that he does *not* know the propositions believed. Given the nature of the previous examples, we should be suspicious about this move - *reversing* a claim to know on the basis of a mere change in the conversation seems highly dubious, especially since our protagonist will continue to believe that he *did* know both O and  $\neg$  SH in the previous context and that his epistemic position with respect to these propositions is unchanged.

Once the standards have lowered again, however, DeRose maintains that the epistemic status of our protagonist's beliefs will return to normal and thus that he will regain his knowledge. This may be so, but this does not seem to affect the fact that this person is unable to properly claim knowledge of O even at this lowered standard. If he has claimed not to know a certain proposition, then it would be improper for him to subsequently claim knowledge if the only factor that has altered in the interim was a change in the conversation. It may be that he does know, and he may even recognise (as a good contextualist) that he must know, but given that his knowledge was defeated in the previous context by considerations which still cannot be ruled-out now, he is unable to properly claim that knowledge. Instead of matters returning to normal once the sceptical context has passed, it seems that after an engagement with the sceptic one is left with merely a mute epistemic defence thereafter.

Indeed, there is one internally coherent way out of this, which is to maintain that scepticism would have been false had no-one ever mentioned it. That is, that it is only once the problem is raised that it becomes relevant and thus destroys our knowledge. This would thus be an example of 'one-way' Contextualism, a view that would be tantamount to scepticism given that such a possibility *has* been raised. A number of philosophers have been attracted by this suggestion - what Catherine Elgin [1988] has described as the view that there is an "epistemic efficacy in stupidity" - including Unger [1984; 1986], Craig [1990b, chapter XII], and Lewis [1996] himself. The difference between a one-way Contextualism and a two-way view are, however, startling. Rather than incorporating a response to the sceptic, this line of argument instead merely explains why the sceptic is right whilst appearing to be wrong prior to one's

engagement with scepticism. It is thus a *diagnosis* of the truth of scepticism, not a rejection.

An alternative to the epistemic ascent line taken by DeRose and Lewis that might evade this particular difficulty would be to deny that different contexts can be placed in a hierarchy in this way. Williams [1991] makes just such a claim, and it is this suggestion that we will now consider.

### §5. Williams' 'Ultra' Contextualism and the Deflation of Knowledge.

On Williams' view, Contextualism - (henceforth 'Contextualism<sub>W</sub>') - is the thesis that there is *no* such hierarchy of epistemic contexts - instead, each context is, epistemically speaking, autonomous. To think otherwise is, he thinks, to fall victim to the doctrine of "epistemological realism" - the view that the objects of epistemological inquiry have an inherent, and thus context-independent, structure. In contrast, the Contextualism<sub>W</sub> that he advances is defined as the denial of this thesis. It holds that:

[...] the epistemic status of a given proposition is liable to shift with situational, disciplinary and other contextually variable factors: it is to hold that, independently of such influences, a proposition has no epistemic status whatsoever. [M. Williams 1991, p. 119]

And Williams is quite clear that this last phrase "has no epistemic status whatsoever" is meant to indicate that there is no context-independent means by which we can evaluate the standards wrought in different contexts. He describes his view as a "deflationary" theory of knowledge, in that it holds that there need be nothing that ties all instances of knowledge together other than the fact that they are instances of knowledge. He writes:

A deflationary account of "know" may show how the word is embedded in a teachable and useful linguistic practice, without supposing that "being known to be true" denotes a property that groups propositions into a theoretically significant kind. We can have an account of the use and utility of "know" without supposing that there is such a thing as human knowledge. [M. Williams 1991, p. 113]

It is as a consequence of such a view that the very validity of the epistemological enterprise, at least as it is commonly understood, is called into question:

If we give up the idea of pervasive, underlying epistemological constraints; if we start to see the plurality of constraints that inform the various special disciplines, never mind ordinary, unsystematic factual discourse, as genuinely irreducible; if we become

suspicious of the idea that "our powers and faculties" can be evaluated independently of everything having to do with the world and our place in it: then we lose our grip on the idea of "human knowledge" as an object of theory. [M. Williams 1991, p. 106; cf. M. Williams 1991, pp. 254-65; 1993a]

And to say that "human knowledge" is not a suitable object of theory is itself to say that the epistemological project cannot be *systematically* conceived. On Williams' view there is no epistemological analysis to be conducted outside of contextual parameters and, accordingly, there are no context-independent standards either as the conventional Contextualist model would suggest.

It is as a consequence of this stance that Williams is forced to concede that the sceptic is perfectly correct in his assessment of our knowledge, but only because he is employing an epistemic context that utilises a standard which defeats our everyday knowledge. That is, the sceptic's conclusions are correct, but, by being confined to a specific epistemic context, they lack the hegemony that he requires in order to cause the intended epistemic harm. It does not follow from the truth of scepticism that our everyday knowledge claims are unwarrantable, or even that they are inferior to the knowledge that the sceptic had in mind (which would presuppose a hierarchy). That is:

The sceptic takes himself to have discovered, under the conditions of philosophical reflection, that knowledge of the world is impossible. But in fact, the most he has discovered is that knowledge of the world is *impossible under the conditions of philosophical reflection*. [M. Williams 1991, p. 130]

So whereas the 'hierarchical' camp of contextualists tended to individuate contexts in terms of a context-transcendent criterion of rigour, Williams' schema allows no such ordering of contexts. For him, a context is individuated purely in terms of the epistemic structure it endorses - in terms of the inferential relations that obtain between the types of beliefs which that context is interested in. And since no context employs universal standards, this contextual epistemic structure is also identified in terms of what it takes for granted - which propositions it regards as being immune from doubt in terms of that context. Williams calls the defining assumptions of a context of inquiry its "methodological necessities". When we do history, for example, we take the general veracity of historical documentation for granted, as well as the denials of certain

sceptical scenarios such as that the world came into existence five minutes ago replete with the traces of a distant ancestry (the 'Russellian Hypothesis'). To doubt such methodological necessities is not to conduct our historical investigations in a more exacting fashion, but rather to engage in a different sort of investigation altogether, such as one guided by traditional epistemological concerns. Williams' theme here is explicitly Wittgensteinian. Like Wittgenstein's notion of a hinge proposition which was discussed in earlier chapters, these methodological necessities of a context are meant to be exempt from doubt because they "lie apart from the route travelled by enquiry" [OC §88]. The important difference between Williams' notion of a hinge proposition and that discussed earlier, however, is that Williams views these propositions as only having their hinge status relative to a specific context of inquiry. For Williams, therefore, there are no global hinge propositions.

The methodological necessities of the traditional epistemological project which, Williams argues, spawns the sceptical threat, are meant to involve a commitment to this false doctrine of epistemological realism. This leads, he argues, to an antiquated foundationalism,<sup>18</sup> one manifestation of which is the traditional epistemologist's concern with the problem of the external world. This problem is meant to reflect the inadequacy of beliefs of one type - concerning immediate experience - at serving the purpose of epistemically supporting beliefs of another type - concerning material objects in the external world. With the problem so characterised, Williams argues that it should come as no surprise to find that it is without a solution (there are no beliefs concerning immediate experience that are able to act as epistemic guarantors for beliefs concerning objects in the material world). But, he contends, this need not result in a general external-world scepticism because this conception of the inferential ordering needed for warranted beliefs about 'external' objects is far from necessary. In terms of another type of inquiry, such as psychological investigations of perception for example, we may legitimately begin with beliefs about material objects and draw inferences about

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<sup>18</sup> Williams [1991, chapters 7 & 8] puts forward a sophisticated set of arguments to the effect that even supposedly non-foundationalist epistemologies such as coherence theory or reliabilism involve an implicit commitment to the basic foundationalist structure.

immediate experience. And since no context has any epistemological ascendancy over any other, the project of justifying psychological beliefs with reference to external world beliefs is just as valid as any epistemological theory which demanded that the inferential relations should point in the opposite direction.

Even supposing that we grant that Williams has indeed supplied us with a scepticism-proof sketch of how to construe the epistemological enterprise, however, it remains that his solution is, at best, a 'sceptical solution' to the problem in hand. We wanted some general criteria through which we could evaluate our knowledge, and upon the grounds of which we could, hopefully, dismiss sceptical claims. Instead, we have a completely relativised epistemology which seems to lack any sort of normative merit.<sup>19</sup>

One of the oddest elements of Williams' view is that, despite his extreme Contextualism, there does not seem to be *any* context in which the denials of sceptical hypotheses are known. This should surprise us, since one would think that the very advantage of employing a Contextualist model would be that one could account for our knowledge of these propositions in everyday contexts. The problem with these propositions, for Williams, is that they are always methodological necessities (and so cannot be brought forth for evaluation), *except* in the context of the sceptical inquiry where they are evaluated and found to be unwarranted. As a result they are *unwarrantable*, and therefore unknowable. But why should this be so? Why is there not a context with methodological necessities such that we do know these propositions?<sup>20</sup>

Indeed, it is difficult to dispel the idea that moving from an historical investigation into, say, the events surrounding the French Revolution, to an epistemological inquiry into, for example, the availability of a warrant for our belief in

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<sup>19</sup> Indeed, one might wonder whether such a 'deflationary' conception of epistemology could be advocated independently of a general Quietist approach to philosophical problems. Some commentators may not, of course, see this as an objection to the theory - although Rorty, for one, does not seem to regard the approach as Quietist enough [e.g. Rorty 1997; 1999; cf. M. Williams 1993a; 1997; 1999b] - but it would seem preferable to be able to find an answer to the sceptical paradox which does not trade upon such a meta-philosophical view.

<sup>20</sup> This is especially odd given that a substantial part of Williams' book on this subject [Williams 1991] is devoted to arguing that the sceptic is labouring under a mistaken view of our epistemological concepts. Why, then, isn't the sceptic's context of inquiry simply illegitimate?

the denial of the Russellian Hypothesis, *must* involve more than merely a change of subject. Williams wants to argue that in shifting subject in this way we are merely replacing one set of assumptions - and one set of inferential epistemic relations among beliefs - with another. But we can agree that the historian behaves perfectly reasonably in conducting his historical investigations without first determining an answer to the issue surrounding the Russellian Hypothesis, whilst still maintaining that, nevertheless, there ought to be a warrant available for the assumptions that the historian makes which the epistemologist can discover. Accordingly, or so the thought goes, there is a very real difference in terms of *epistemological* rigour<sup>21</sup> between the context of historical analysis and that of epistemological theorising. By eliminating this difference of degree between the two subjects - and thereby making all knowledge dependent upon unwarrantable assumptions - Williams' theory seems to confuse mere practical constraints with necessary epistemic posits. The sceptic said we knew very little *because* we based our knowledge on unwarrantable foundations, whilst Williams' response is to say that we know a great deal *even though* we base our knowledge on unwarrantable assumptions. In the final analysis, this is not much of a difference at all.<sup>22</sup>

Of course, Williams' 'negative' response to critiques of this nature is to argue that *no* epistemologically realist epistemology can evade scepticism (and thus, equivalently - given how Williams characterises his thesis - that only Contextualist<sub>w</sub> epistemologies can meet scepticism). If making unwarrantable assumptions is indeed necessary *in* order to engage in *any* project, even an epistemological one, then it is at the very least reasonable for Williams to say in his defence that the sceptic (and hence, the traditional epistemologist) has simply misunderstood our epistemic concepts. The trouble with this defence is that there *does* exist a solution to scepticism - the solution that I have been

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<sup>21</sup> Though not, of course, *historical* rigour. The epistemologist is not doing history in a more exacting way by seeking a warrant for his belief in the denial of the Russellian Hypothesis.

<sup>22</sup> Skorupski [1994] and Stroud [1996] have both offered arguments against Williams' view which run along similar lines. It is interesting to note the similarity between Williams' use of "hinge" propositions (in terms of "methodological necessities"), and the manner in which they are employed by the proponents of the non-epistemic solution to scepticism that we discussed in chapter two. Indeed, one could reasonably view Williams as taking that train of thought to its natural conclusion by showing how a commitment to the non-epistemic reading of hinge propositions is in fact compatible with the Closure principle. I argue for such a construal in Pritchard [2000f].

offering in this thesis - which does not trade on Contextualism<sub>W</sub> and which, therefore, is implicitly allied to epistemological realism. It follows that Williams cannot legitimate his approach via an appeal to a supposedly inextricable relationship between epistemological realism and scepticism.

Rather than simply leaving the matter there, however, it is worthwhile explicitly highlighting the juncture at which Williams' theory and my own part company. After all, unlike most other anti-sceptical theories, Williams' account does at least recognise that the sceptic is utilising contentious epistemologically internalist arguments. Accordingly, much of his negative critique of scepticism is roughly compatible with my own anti-sceptical line. Where his theory falters, however, is where it comes to offering a positive account of epistemology *after* scepticism. In particular, Williams fails to appreciate the dialectical moves which his commitment to epistemological externalism allows him to make, and therefore feels compelled to endorse an implausible post-sceptical epistemological theory.

Recall that Williams regards the methodological necessities that are assumed within a context of inquiry as *lacking* epistemic status in that context. The reasoning behind this claim is that since these initial conditions which allow knowledge in a certain context are never (at least in that context), brought forward for investigation, so they can never be plausibly regarded as themselves expressing knowledge. And since anti-sceptical propositions are methodological necessities of *every* project (except the traditional epistemological project where they are evaluated and found to be unwarranted), so they are unwarrantable *tout court*. This is the point at which Williams reveals his debt to the very internalist intuitions that he was attacking. In essence, Williams' mistake consists in thinking that externalism *only* licenses you in believing that

[...] if a given claim is to express knowledge, then, although the appropriate contextual constraints must be met, they do not always have to be known, or even believed to be met. [Williams 1991, p. 119]

Crucially, however, the core externalist thesis is not this claim at all, but the contention

that a subject can know a proposition even though he lacks the means to reflectively access the grounds which license that knowledge. As we saw in chapters three and four, it does not follow from the fact that hinge propositions - or, as Williams calls them, "methodological necessities" - cannot be internalistically known that they are therefore in principle *unknowable*.

In order to see this distinction, consider the example of the historian who conducts his investigations without ever checking his assumption that the universe did not come into existence five minutes ago. We can agree with Williams that this is a perfectly reasonable way to go about doing history, and that, if our protagonist did ever turn his attention to this assumption, then he would no longer be engaging in the subject of history but would instead be participating another sort of inquiry altogether (epistemology). Where Williams' account and my own diverge is on the construal we offer of the epistemic status of the historian's belief in this assumption. In contrast to Williams' theory, I have argued that so long as the historian's beliefs in this respect are appropriately related to the facts - as long as they are, that is, appropriately *sensitive* - then on any plausible externalist theory of knowledge he ought to be regarded as knowing the proposition assumed. This is a central component of the externalist account of knowledge - that a subject's beliefs can be in an appropriate epistemological relationship to the facts - and thus express knowledge - *even if* the subject has not undertaken any investigation to determine that this is so - *even if* the grounds for that knowledge are not reflectively accessible to the subject.

Williams' failure to see that he can make this move is fatal to his account. For now his theory must allow that the relationship which our beliefs bear to the world is not, at root, of an epistemic nature. And in order to distinguish this claim from scepticism it is necessary that he be able to illustrate that such a condition is *essential* to any truth-seeking enterprise. That is, that the sceptic's demand for beliefs that are epistemically supported throughout is itself borne of a misconstrual of our epistemic concepts. In common with a number of other anti-sceptical theories, then, by being misled by an implicit commitment to certain erroneous internalist intuitions, Williams'

account ends up retreating in the face of scepticism.

In any case, Williams offers a completely unintuitive response to the sceptic. It is thus worthwhile returning to the *prima facie* intuitive response offered by DeRose and highlighting how the motivation for that account can be subsumed within the non-Contextualist theory advanced here.

### §6. A Non-Contextualist Diagnosis of Contextualism.

Given the fact that DeRose's version of Contextualism was unable to meet the sceptical threat in an intuitive manner, it follows that his account is now on a dialectical par with other anti-sceptical theories that can only meet scepticism by making important concessions. Where the contextualist goes wrong, I submit, is in identifying the 'phenomenology' of scepticism in a way that fails to pay sufficient attention to the differences between the *propriety* conditions and the *truth* conditions for knowledge claims that we discussed in chapter three.<sup>23</sup> The Contextualist account of the phenomenology of scepticism rested upon the following supposed features of the variability of our practice of using epistemic terms in response to different conversational contexts. First, that we claim to know many everyday propositions in non-sceptical conversational contexts. Second, that we withdraw our claims to know these propositions in sceptical conversational contexts in which sceptical hypotheses are at issue. And, third, that we continue to claim knowledge of everyday propositions once the sceptical conversational context has passed and we are back in a non-sceptical conversational context. If the preceding argument concerning the impropriety of first-person ascriptions of knowledge on the Contextualist account is right, however, then we have cause to doubt this picture of the 'phenomenology' of scepticism.

The problem lies in the second claim, since there is an equivocation here that the contextualist plays upon. On the Contextualist story, what ought to happen in sceptical contexts is that agents not only withdraw their claims to know, but that they should also

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<sup>23</sup> To DeRose's credit, he does make a limited defence of the Contextualist interpretation in this respect. See DeRose [1995, pp. 42ff.; 1999, pp. 187-205]. In neither case, however, does he consider the sort of objections raised here.

be willing to claim that they do *not* know. It was this feature of the Contextualist account that created the problems, since on the assumption of a uniform epistemic position across contexts, it seemed incoherent to, first, *reverse* one's knowledge claim and then, second, *reaffirm* the original knowledge claim once more. For although one can imagine an equivocation in one's epistemic stance *vis-à-vis* claims to know, it seems highly counterintuitive that one should both assert and deny knowledge of the same proposition whilst self-consciously remaining in the *same* epistemic position, and this intuition works in favour of the non-Contextualist position.

For example, contrast the Contextualist account in this respect with a simple non-Contextualist picture whereby the conditions for proper assertion of knowledge claims, but not the conditions for knowledge possession, change in response to mere conversational factors. Now reconsider the 'phenomenology' of scepticism. When faced with a sceptical error-possibility it is certainly uncontroversially true that we withdraw claims to know, and we shall explore some of the reasons for this below. What is controversial is that we actually *reverse* that claim to know as the contextualist contends. Usually, and this conforms to the non-Contextualist picture, this will not happen, and thus we do not get the problem of how knowledge can be reasserted once we return to the everyday context. The only cases in which it does happen are those situations in which one changes one's conception of one's epistemic position - where one thought one knew, but, upon being presented with the sceptical argument, one realises that one didn't know after all. Crucially, however, if this is an accurate representation of one's epistemic position then this too would be a case in which knowledge possession (or rather the lack of it) remained constant throughout the change in conversational context. Accordingly, it would offer no respite to the Contextualist account, since in this scenario one should continue to claim a lack of knowledge in all subsequent conversational contexts provided that one's epistemic position remains constant.

Thus, the point at which the Contextualist account falters - i.e., regarding self-ascriptions of knowledge - provides us with the leverage necessary to motivate an entirely different account of the phenomenology of scepticism along non-Contextualist

lines. This is not to reject DeRose's account out of hand, however, since I believe that we can resurrect the core elements of his thesis in a non-Contextualist guise in such a way as to capture this phenomenology more accurately.

Continue to assume an invariantist thesis about knowledge (that the conditions for knowledge possession, unlike the conditions for proper assertion of knowledge claims, are not affected by mere conversational factors). Now consider the following adapted thesis from DeRose's account:

- A. *ceteris paribus*, one ought not claim knowledge of a proposition if one recognises that one's belief in that proposition is not Dretskean sensitive.

This seems an eminently plausible rule. If one lacks a Dretskean sensitive belief in  $\emptyset$  then one should not claim to know  $\emptyset$  because making a claim to know carries the implicature that one can personally vouch for the truth of the proposition known, something which one cannot do if one recognises that, in the nearest possible world in which that belief is false, one would still believe it. Indeed, think of a paradigm example of a 'bad' claim to know - one where, for instance, the agent has very weak grounds for believing the (true) proposition in question. In such cases part of the problem will be that there is a very near-by possible world in which that proposition is false and yet the agent continues to believe it. This rule would also further explain why a claim to know the denial of a sceptical hypothesis seems out of place in *every* conversational context since these are propositions the truth of which we can never be Dretskean sensitive to. This rule would thus constitute an extra restriction on the assertibility of claims to know, over and above the conditions spelled-out in chapter three.

Now consider this second rule adapted from DeRose's account:

- B. *ceteris paribus*, one ought not claim knowledge of a proposition if one recognises that this assertion carries the conversational implicature that one is in a position to claim knowledge of a second proposition where one recognises that one's belief in that second proposition is not Dretskean sensitive.

Insofar as A is a plausible rule, then B ought to be equally plausible. After all, if one ought not to claim knowledge in cases where one recognises that one lacks a Dretskean sensitive belief, then neither should one claim knowledge in cases in which one

recognises that this assertion will carry the conversational implicature that one is in a position to claim to know a second proposition one's belief in which is not Dretskean sensitive. Moreover, this rule would also be 'contextual' in one sense, since the sort of implicatures that are generated by an assertion can change from conversational content to conversational context.

For example, claiming to know that the noise that one just heard is only the sound of the creaking pipes can carry different implicatures depending upon the conversational context at issue. If the claim is made in response to a frightened spouse's query, for example, it may carry the implicature that one takes oneself to be in a position to claim to know that there is nothing to worry about. If made in response to an idle question, on the other hand, it may carry no such implicature.

However, that this rule is 'contextual' in this way does not itself mean that it can be put to service by the contextualist. After all, that the assertibility conditions for a proposition are contextually variable need not in any way mean that the truth-conditions for that proposition are contextually variable. Indeed, since there are only pragmatic features of the context at issue here, the default assumption would naturally be to think that the truth-conditions of the knowledge claim will remain constant. Moreover, under this non-Contextualist construal of how the propriety of a claim to know can change, we also get a more plausible account of the phenomenology of scepticism.

In quotidian conversational contexts where only everyday propositions that one is Dretskean sensitive to are being considered, one can, *ceteris paribus*, claim knowledge with impunity. After all, in such a context claiming knowledge of an everyday proposition carries no implicature that one is in a position to claim knowledge of the denial of a sceptical hypothesis, even though it does imply that one knows such a proposition. Moving into a sceptical conversational context, however - a context in which sceptical hypotheses are at issue - changes the situation because then there is a proposition relevant to that context which one is *not* Dretskean sensitive to. Accordingly, in this context not only can one not claim knowledge of this proposition,

but one also cannot claim knowledge of an everyday proposition either.

Consider again the Moorean response to scepticism. Part of what is wrong with Moore's claim to know that he has two hands is that he makes such a claim in a sceptical context in which it clearly carries the conversational implicature (which he is happy for his audience to draw), that he is willing to claim knowledge of the denial of a sceptical hypothesis.<sup>24</sup> In general, if one is in a conversational context in which the truth of a sceptical proposition is at issue, then the claim to know an everyday proposition will carry the implicature that one is in a position to claim knowledge of the sceptical proposition. As expected, there will thus be a world of difference between saying that one knows that one has two hands in a 'sceptical' conversational context where this carries the implicature that one knows that one is not a BIV, and in a 'non-sceptical' conversational context in which it carries no such implicature.<sup>25</sup>

This picture of the mechanisms underlying the shifting assertion conditions for knowledge claims is also neatly reflected in non-sceptical cases of context-change. Although Keith's claim to know that it was Lewis who walked by his shop entails that it was not Lewis' identical twin that walked by, it does not carry the implicature that Keith believes himself to be in a position to claim knowledge of this entailed proposition since such an error possibility is not relevant in that conversational context. Were such an error possibility to become relevant, however, then for Keith to repeat his claim to know *would* carry the implicature that he is in a position to claim that it was not Lewis' identical twin that walked by. And since such a claim to know would not be properly assertible by Keith (since he lacks a Dretskean sensitive belief in this respect), so he cannot properly make this claim in this conversational context and hence he must withdraw his claim to know.

That one should withdraw one's claim to know in such a situation is not,

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<sup>24</sup> This is not, of course, the *only* thing wrong with Moore's claim to know that he has two hands, as we saw in chapter three. As with most of the remarks on conversational implicature made here, one should read them with the comments from chapter three in mind.

<sup>25</sup> As Wittgenstein points out, of course, there are actually very few 'non-sceptical' conversational contexts in which one could properly make this assertion, but we need not trouble ourselves with that complicating factor here.

however, the same as *reversing* one's claim to know, and this is the equivocation that the contextualist plays upon. Typically, one will not reverse one's claim to know in a sceptical context for the simple reason that since only conversational factors are involved, so only the conditions for proper assertion have changed. Accordingly, as far as the agent is concerned, he is simply trying to avoid misleading his audience - he is not endeavouring to accurately report his epistemic position. Moreover, even in those non-standard cases where knowledge claims *are* reversed - where one, for instance, becomes convinced by scepticism and therefore regards the mere raising of a sceptical possibility as highlighting the fact that one did not know in the first place - this will not, as far as the agent is concerned at any rate, indicate a change in one's epistemic position, but rather that one's previous reports were false. Either way, then, changes in the conditions for proper assertion of knowledge claims are not reflecting *changes* in the truth-conditions for knowledge (one either knows or does not know in *both* contexts), and thus we do not have an account of the 'phenomenology' of scepticism which supports a Contextualist interpretation.

On such an invariantist construal, we can now neatly incorporate the Contextualist picture of scepticism into that offered in this thesis. For since the truth-conditions for knowledge possession are not changing, it follows that the epistemic position that one needs to be in so as to count as knowing will be fixed across all conversational contexts. And this is just to say that one's epistemic position should be sufficient to meet the demand of sensitivity that was outlined in chapter three. The Contextualist model thus captures some of the changes in the assertibility conditions of knowledge claims that occur when one is confronted with radical scepticism, whilst leaving intact the non-Contextualist anti-sceptical account that has been advocated here.

### §7. Concluding Remarks.

With the Contextualist account shown to be either internally incoherent or (/and) unintuitive, we have therefore disarmed the last main competitor to the view outlined in this thesis. We are thus left with an intuitive response to scepticism which, whilst incorporating elements of other non-traditional anti-sceptical accounts - in particular those theories which either went non-epistemic, denied Closure, or went contextualist - nevertheless forges a very traditional approach to scepticism. Like the classical anti-sceptical strategy of old which was aimed at showing how we do know the denials of anti-sceptical hypotheses after all, the approach sketched here has tried to establish that there are no *a priori* grounds for believing that we lack knowledge of these propositions. By placing this stance within an externalist epistemology, however, this view has gained the sort of plausibility that was so lacking in the classical account. The simple trick is, it seems, merely to disentangle the question of whether or not we actually know these propositions from the sceptic's claim to have discovered *a priori* reasons for thinking such knowledge to be absent. With these *a priori* grounds undermined, it follows that the issue of whether or not we do in fact know these "hinge" propositions is settled by the usual tribunal of Nature, *not* by a sceptical argument.

Of course, there will be those who seek more than this - who will demand, for instance, that we actually *show* that we are not BIVs, or that the Russellian Hypothesis is false. As I have emphasised throughout this thesis, this is to make an impossible demand. Crucially, however, impossible though it may be to meet this charge, this fact alone is unable to support the intellectually catastrophic conclusions that a radical sceptical argument canvases. It is only, I submit, in appreciating this feature of the sceptical puzzle that one is able to resolve the enigma of radical scepticism.

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