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The Truth of Scepticism: on the Varieties of Epistemological Doubt

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PhD Philosophy

The University of Edinburgh

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Declaration:

I, Guido Tana, hereby declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree. Except where stated otherwise by reference or acknowledgment, the work presented is entirely my own.

Signature

Guido Tana

Date:
28th of May, 2021

Acknowledgments

This research is the product of a long engagement with the problem of scepticism that in one way or another has kept me occupied since the days of my first undergraduate lectures in Theoretical Philosophy at the University of Pavia, almost twelve years ago. While the scope and content of the studies and of my interests in the years that followed have had quite a broad and unforeseen development, ultimately they all trace back to this fundamental issue at the core of not only epistemology, but of western philosophy itself.

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Wir fingen an zu philosophieren aus Übermut
und brachten uns dadurch um unseren Unschuld;
Wir erblickte unsere Nacktheit,
und philosophieren seitdem aus Not für unsere Erlösung
J.G. Fichte – Brief an F.H. Jacobi

–

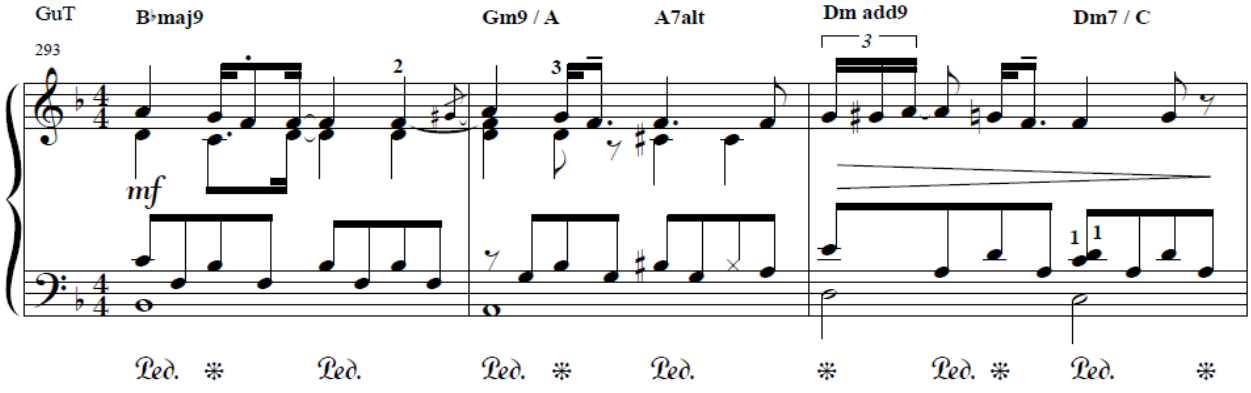
Monito terrorista
Che la retta è per chi ha fretta
Non conosce pendenze
Smottamenti, rimonte
Densamente spopolata è la felicità
La felicità è senza limite
E viene e va

–

Yes, there were times, I'm sure you knew
When I bit off more than I could chew
But through it all when there was doubt
I ate it up and spit it out

–

Ai miei genitori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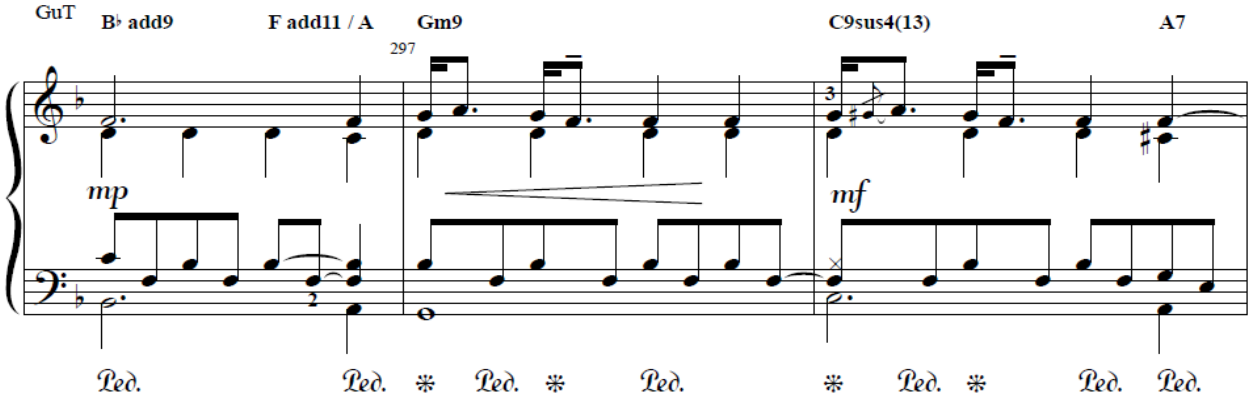
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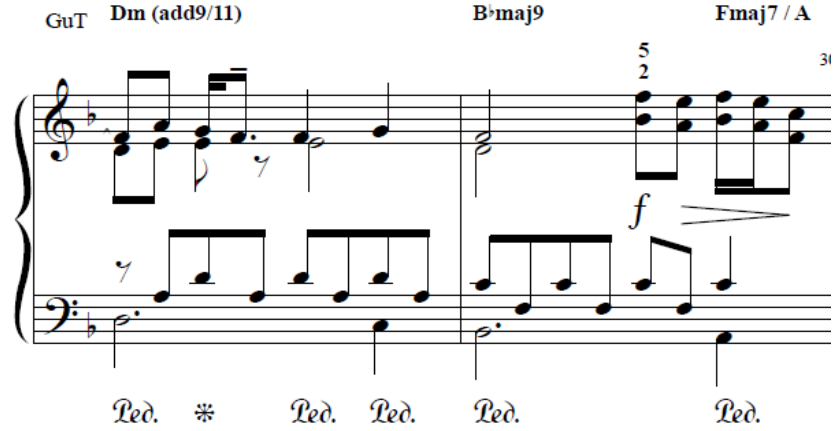
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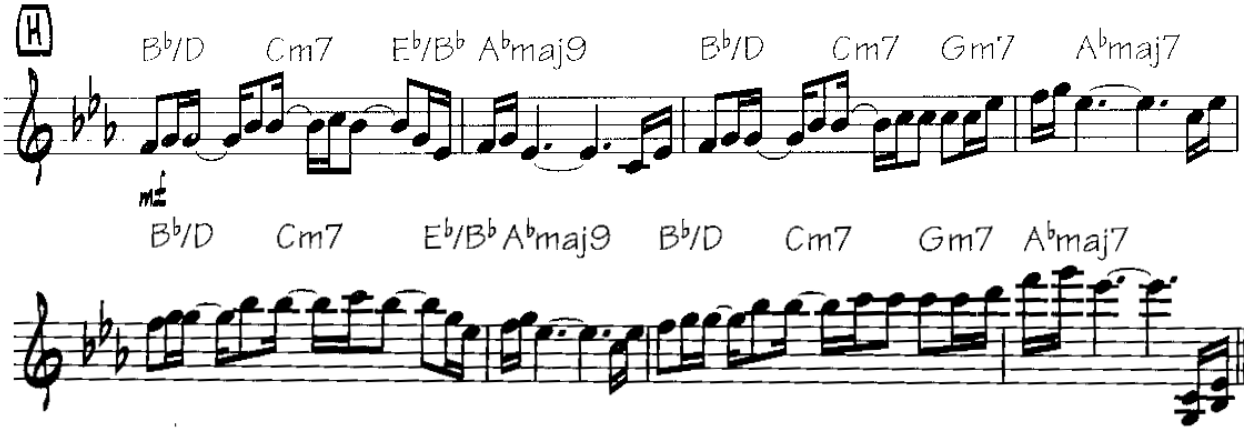
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Abstract

This research aims to analyse and investigate the character and philosophical strength of epistemological scepticism and whether contemporary anti-sceptical stances can conclusively refute its threat. It proposes an understanding of scepticism that differs from the traditional scenario-based model of possible deception and tries to capture scepticism as raising a legitimate philosophical question about the rational standings of our beliefs. The expected outcome of this analysis is twofold. Firstly, to establish scepticism as a bona fide philosophical issue that cannot be neglected in contemporary theories of knowledge. Secondly, the careful examination of the anti-sceptical attempts in the various chapters makes a case for the impossibility of refuting epistemological scepticism without simultaneously accepting some of its key insights. It is proposed that scepticism is not to be conceived as a foe of philosophy but as its rational and free side.

The problem of scepticism is developed starting from the historical background and its standard reception within analytic epistemology. The analysis of the engagement with anti-sceptical endeavours supports the idea that scepticism raises a genuine epistemological question targeting the possibility of rational belief in general and the rational support that our knowledge-claims are presumed to possess. This will involve rejecting the idea that scepticism relies merely on error scenarios or that it can only be made intelligible appealing to uneliminated possibilities of deception. This strategy attempts to rehabilitate scepticism as a bona fide and essential philosophical question about rational belief. This question stems from the very demands of philosophical reflection, against the idea that scepticism is merely ‘a disease’ or an idle worry that we have no requirement to take seriously.

The research is structured as a series of engagements with anti-sceptical perspectives in order to assess whether they mistakenly characterise the issue and if they manage to provide a conclusive refutation of the problem to epistemological standards. The analysis starts in chapter one by presenting the main characteristics of the two classical varieties of scepticism, Cartesian and Pyrrhonian. The scope of the first chapter is to highlight the rational and therapeutic element within scepticism that is often overlooked in contemporary treatments of the subject. Chapter two investigates the closure principle as

the primary source for sceptical arguments in contemporary analytic epistemology, offering a defence of the sceptical argument based on it against recent objections.

Chapter three introduces a radical answer to scepticism, neo-Moorean dogmatism, which will become a sort of sparring partner for the middle part of the thesis. It will be assessed whether it is a necessary requirement for the epistemologist to engage with scepticism for the proposed epistemological theory to be epistemically sound. This will set off the trajectory of both chapters four and five. It is shown that the neo-Moorean attempt fails because it cannot evade engaging with scepticism by simply waving it off as a dialectical concern. To develop this thesis adequately, in chapter four, the focus will shift on the classical Pyrrhonian dialectic of the Problem of the Criterion, which will then be carried on in chapter five into the problem of the Agrippan Modes and the problem of arbitrariness. The goal is to show how the dogmatic perspective cannot vindicate the status of our epistemic belief as being more than arbitrary and that this does not require any contentious assumption on behalf of the sceptic, nor placing scepticism outside of legitimate epistemological inquiry. If scepticism is tied to a philosophical demand concerning reasons for belief, it cannot be cast aside as irrelevant and must be confronted.

This outcome is then generalised in the same chapter by appealing to the Underdetermination principle. The problem establishes scepticism as a justificatory challenge concerning the very possibility of offering non-arbitrary rational support for beliefs and knowledge-claims. In chapter six the sceptical argument based on underdetermination is understood as unveiling a semantic problem, underlying the implicit normativity of the common-sense picture of the world the dogmatist tries to defend, through a recourse to Sellars' Myth of the Given. At the heart of the sceptical problem, this semantic challenge is then established under the guise of rule-following scepticism via Wittgenstein and Kripke. It is argued that the conceptual and normative demands of rational support pertain to, and ultimately establish, a distinctive Kantian question about the rational purport of our thoughts about the world. A sceptical solution is analysed and proposed in the last chapter. Kripke's own communal solution is partly defended as individuating the right track to address scepticism as a problem properly, but it is found to

be crucially wanting as a definitive answer. An amendment is proposed through appeal to Hegel's integration of scepticism within the epistemological enterprise and his concept of normative mutual recognition as constituting the basis of justificatory statuses. It is argued that to salvage rational normative justification, we must understand it as a dialectical intersubjective practice, where what constitutes objective, rational support for our beliefs is the recognitive structure of those activities we engage in with other subjects. Knowledge and justification are conceived as immanent practices, normative all the way down, eschewing reductions to something non-normative. This solution aims at embodying the following insight: scepticism is not an epistemological foe but emerges as the rational side of philosophy and epistemology. It constitutes a standing philosophical question about the rational status purportedly possessed by our beliefs and knowledge-claims. It acts as a reminder of the contingent and ineradicable fallible character of our reasons and attributions of knowledge and justification, which, however, does not impede us from claiming and endorsing our beliefs as objective and justified.

Lay Summary

How do we know how the world that we inhabit is? How do we acquire knowledge in a way that makes it genuine, something that can be endorsed, defended, and shared? One of the founding aims of western philosophy revolves around providing an account that is both adequate and powerful enough to explain what is an incredibly multi-faceted and unpredictable enterprise. However, these attempts are usually hampered by one of the most pervasive problems within epistemology, the problem of scepticism. Scepticism attacks any purported knowledge claim by showing that we cannot acquire the required basis, certainty, or assurance, to establish our beliefs as genuine cases of knowledge. This is generally achieved by postulating some scenario where we are subject to some kind of indistinguishable deceptive experience, which we cannot tell apart from how things really are.

Much of the epistemological engagement with scepticism in the contemporary debate aims at conclusively refuting scepticism, conceived as a standing threat to all human knowledge, and the viaticum to perilous forms of idealism, subjectivism, or idealism. However, the resistance of sceptical doubts to such attempts has seemingly resulted in a stand-still of the debate, which served as an easy excuse for many epistemologists not to engage seriously with this problem anymore. This research aims at providing a different understanding of scepticism, one where the question it raises concerns the rational credentials our beliefs can possess in general. Far from being the expression of a mere philosophical nuisance, scepticism acts instead as the rational and negative side of philosophical thinking, of our attempts at claiming how things are in a way that is both objective and non-arbitrary. Therefore, much of this thesis argues against the idea that scepticism needs to rely on the uneliminated possibility of deceptive scenario or cases. The trajectory of this thesis starts from analysing the standard structures of sceptical arguments and proceeds to uncover their motivation as originating from the character of epistemological inquiry itself. Ultimately scepticism is shown to be a semantic problem pertaining to the norms and concepts we employ in our ordinary understanding of how things are, and that scepticism is a standing request of rationally defending our reasons for beliefs. This suggests that the best strategy available is to cease viewing scepticism

merely as a foe and integrate it within our epistemology by understanding knowledge and justification as normative and conceptual practices, which we engage in with other subjects.

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Preface

This research is a defence of scepticism. Not in the sense of defending its conclusion that knowledge is impossible or that we cannot ever possess it even if it somehow managed to exist. The defence of scepticism we aim at proposing is a defence of philosophical doubt as an integral aspect of philosophy and rational inquiry itself.

Contemporary analytic epistemology views scepticism as a problematic foe at best, something to be refuted as false, question-begging, ridiculous or ludicrous depending on the preference of the individual philosopher. It is seen as something whose goal is to impede the very enterprise of epistemological theorising, and that has to be dealt with as if it were an alien stance, to be utterly resisted and rejected. At worst, however, scepticism is conceived as little more than a nuisance, an old relic of the modern period of Western philosophy, with some peculiar antecedents in ancient Greek times. This thesis tries to make the opposite point. It attempts to show how scepticism uncovers something problematic within most philosophical standpoints themselves but that this is not a reason to conceive it merely as a foe. Scepticism is revealed instead the role of the self-critical, rational inquiry philosophy must go through in order to save epistemology and knowledge from the paradoxes they are led into. This attempt will be made by offering a systematic approach to what constitutes the real engine of sceptical problems, while at the same time being strongly informed by those past philosophers that viewed scepticism as something more than an enemy, or that, in any case, defended stances that managed to integrate key sceptical insights. These are Pyrrhonism, Descartes, Hegel, and Wittgenstein.

The Pyrrhonian and Hegelian perspectives will act as a sort of companion throughout this itinerary, driven by trying to meet specific issues and anti-sceptical positions within contemporary analytic epistemology. As our main foe, we adopt a neo-Moorean position that has enjoyed a particular resurgence in recent decades. Even though it is not a universally endorsed position in contemporary epistemology – and it might be far from it actually – it embodies quite clearly two of the understandings that we will be fighting against throughout this whole research. The first one is the view that understands scepticism simply as a problem concerning the truth of our beliefs and that it is effective

via recourse to scenarios of possible but uneliminated defeat. Much of the thesis will be a kind of backwards journey from this superficial but very common understanding of the sceptical problem to its semantic engine, which targets the concept of rational belief in general. One of the main goal of this thesis is to establish scepticism as a genuine philosophical question that needs to be engaged with by any theory of knowledge put forth. Many contemporary approaches try to show that the sceptic is either committing some basic epistemic fallacy or simply raises a question that cannot be answered *ab initio*. We will argue that this assessment is deeply mistaken.

This is connected to the second theme we will develop in this research. In recent years, a tendency has arisen to simply rule out scepticism as an epistemological disease and something we should ignore. It is at times conceded that our responses to scepticism might fail on a merely dialectical level, but this does not taint the epistemic credentials of our reasons nor of the epistemological stances we accordingly endorse. This research establishes the opposite point: the perceived dialectical inefficacy is merely a sign of a more fundamental problem concerning the epistemic merit and validity of our reasons for beliefs. We will argue that there is no real possibility for an epistemological stance to escape a confrontation with scepticism. Epistemological theories must make a move in the sceptical dialectic due to their positive proposal, and they cannot simply refuse to engage with it if they aim at retaining a non-arbitrary status.

The direction of the thesis goes from the classical idea of sceptical hypotheses as scenarios of deception, and gradually moves toward a question about the criteria and the validity of the basis we ground our beliefs on. We argue that sceptical scenarios engender a problem of ignorance concerning the validity of our epistemic reasons, but this only adverts to a semantic issue within the problem of knowledge. A certain conception of how we engage with the world makes scepticism appear as a threat. However, by engaging with it, we create the possibility of viewing scepticism as a genuine, essential component of epistemological theorising itself, the self-reflective moment that investigates why we deem our theories and epistemic stances as broadly in order. To accomplish this task, we will be investigating most varieties of sceptical doubt: Cartesian, Pyrrhonian, Humean,

and finally Kantian normative scepticism, targeting the objective purport of our judgments in general, without the need of evil demons or Brains-in-vats scenarios.

This will allow us in the last two chapters to draw in the discussion a sceptical problem that is ordinarily considered apart from standard sceptical problems and rarely discussed in contemporary epistemology. This is the rule-following paradox Kripke extracted from Wittgenstein's later reflections on language and meaning. This is where the, admittedly brief, constructive part of the thesis takes place. We will analyse what is valuable in the communal solution to the rule-following problem Kripke's proposed, and we'll employ the Hegelian conceptual arsenal as developed in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, to suggest a way for integrating scepticism within our epistemic agency, arguing that knowledge and justification are at their core *intersubjective practices*. Engaging with the world is an activity where we propose reasons, defend our beliefs, revise, restructure, and recollect our epistemic standings. Therefore, this research can be seen as undermining all those stances that try to reduce our engagement with the world as something ultimately non-normative or externally given. To obtain knowledge of the world, we cannot but rely on our concepts, and we do this not in a one-sided, arbitrary manner, but as a dialectical activity with other epistemic, normative agents we recognise as such. The authority and non-arbitrary status of such concepts and practices is not established via recourse to external facts, independent of our epistemic agency, but is immanent to it. This is a conclusion that requires us to acknowledge the conditional correctness of scepticism. If knowledge can only be achieved via an appeal to subject-independent factivity and invariant structures of the world, we will never be able to establish to our own satisfaction that we do know how things are. If knowledge is ultimately conceived as hinging merely on matters of truth, and the authority of our epistemic reasons as established via this ultimate court of appeal, we will always be fall short of our goal.

The way out is through. To engage with scepticism means exercising a rational activity which also cures us from implicit, unwarranted conceptions and a priori perspectives on how we engage with the world. However, this is not a fundamentally revisionary approach. The truth of scepticism lies in showing us that the validity of what we do, think, and believe, was already beside us and that the errors of our epistemic ways were to see in

merely finite, particular, given aspects of our experience the tortoise upon which the weight of the world could be made rest.

This thesis comes with two appendices, that try to elucidate certain passages in the thesis that might puzzle the reader. Appendix I clarifies a stance which in the thesis itself we mostly assumed as correct, namely that the Underdetermination principle is the fundamental source of epistemological scepticism, instead of the closure principle. Given that this is a fairly complicated and under-researched debate, we thought the arguments offered in that appendix could provide some progress in this debate. The second appendix might be the most speculative part of this research: it is an attempt, based on recent scholarship, to bring together Hegel and Wittgenstein on the topic of Pyrrhonism. While we will not claim any final verdict on how much their respective therapies converge, and if their stances ought to be treated as presenting substantial sceptical insights, we believe that the material offered will explain a bit better why we appeal to Hegel in the closing sections of this research. It might offer the opportunity for future investigations on this, maybe unlikely, rapprochement.

Chapter 1

Scepticism as a Problem?

This chapter aims to provide a historical-epistemological introduction to most of the themes that we will deal with throughout the research. Given the topic, it seems intuitive to start from Descartes' epistemological methodology and engagement with scepticism and analyse its relationship to the other main variety of scepticism, Pyrrhonism. There is no intent to provide innovative readings of Cartesian or Pyrrhonian reflections on the topic of knowledge. The aim is instead to present the features of epistemological doubt that constitute the main structures of contemporary engagements with the problem whose features we will develop as the core sceptical issues. One of the main aims of this research is to establish that epistemological scepticism is not merely constituted by the possibility of far-fetched scenarios which we are unable to rule out. Instead, it raises a genuine philosophical problem about what constitutes the basis of our engagement with the world, and the acquisition of rational beliefs. Ultimately the idea we'll suggest is that scepticism has a broader reach than the epistemological domain narrowly conceived.

Analysing Descartes' reflection is fruitful for introducing both impulses behind this attempt. Cartesian scepticism is often raised as a kind of strawman in contemporary epistemology, something that both mischaracterises the nature of philosophical doubt and lends itself to easy refutations. However, Descartes' own reflections do contain the seed of many developments that philosophical scepticism has followed, both before – in its Pyrrhonian guise – and after the Cartesian revolution within modern western philosophy. Additionally, given that Pyrrhonism will keep us company throughout this research as a kind of argumentative arsenal at crucial moments, it seems required to present its fundamental features here, especially how it can constitute a philosophical stance along the traits we'll identify as fundamental to scepticism as a whole. This will allow it to emerge throughout this investigation on the varieties of epistemological doubt as the self-reflective, negative side of epistemological inquiry.

1.1 Cartesian Reason, Cartesian Certainty

To better grasp the Cartesian approach, we must introduce the kind of intellectual environment that Descartes crafted his radical methodology in. Descartes finds himself in, and crucially *reacts* to, the reign of late Scholasticism, what he calls 'vulgar philosophy'.[1] He argues it must be replaced by a new connection between philosophy and the Galilean science that had begun its proper course (Garber 1986:82). This new relationship consists of a radical upheaval of the relation between mind and world; more specifically, it endorses the subjection of sense-experience to Reason (Hill 2012:36). Reason is the centrepiece of the Cartesian method, with philosophical scepticism not only conceived as a foe to be vanquished but crucially as the *rational* method to achieve this new philosophy. Contemporary epistemological approaches understand Cartesian radical scepticism as the bogey that needs to be refuted, and already here, we can outline a crucial divergence from the *rational* import of philosophical doubt that Descartes endorsed.[2]

Descartes' overall aim is to provide a foundational, rational method for scientific inquiry, issued in advance to lead to truth (Stroud 1984:4). He understands the Scholasticism of his age as little more than a hotbed of disagreements and uncertainty, with sciences that borrow from *this* philosophy offering little in terms of actual knowledge (AT VI:8). Mathematics is the only scientific field to which he assigns the required certainty and self-evident status he is looking for (ibid:19).[3] The methodology of mathematics is what establishes the possibility of a science whose prowess is independent of its subject matter, and therefore ought to be applied to general epistemological endeavours (ibid:21; X:378). But if mathematics adverts to the *possibility* of this scientific method, it is only philosophy that which can identify and establish such "primary rudiments of human reason" (ibid:374). Reason does not borrow the required method from external sources, but establishes the method itself. This method is nothing else than the activity of Reason in establishing *the order* in which it is to concern itself with objects of inquiry (ibid:379-80; Schouls 1972:32-3). The famous image of the whole of philosophy as a tree whose individual scientific disciplines are its branches (AT IXB:14) represents this idea that only philosophy can supply the required principles for the exercise of Reason, whose product

is a system of knowledge (Schouls 1972:34-5). Philosophy's proper task is to establish the new edifice of scientific knowledge (AT VI:11, 22). This takes its most forceful guise at the beginning of the *Meditations*, where Descartes elects to raze to the ground everything thus far presupposed and assumed as certain to set straight the systematic enterprise of scientific knowledge (VII:17). It is philosophical doubt the instrument by whose means the general overthrow of beliefs is to be carried out. Scepticism has a crucial binary role in Descartes' project: to methodically demolish what was unreflectively and dogmatically held as true, *and* as what ultimately will have to be defeated itself in order to leave the stage to philosophical science (Hookway 1990:42).

Scepticism is not brought onto the scene by Descartes via recourse to merely theoretical considerations, which could be considered foreign to the project of science as Descartes envisions it. Scepticism is instead *motivated* by philosophical science, or better, by its need to go against the mistaken view of the world generated by Scholasticism and commonsense. Its own problem is, of course, that scepticism alone will offer little viable replacement (Bermudez 1997:769).[4]

Cartesian epistemology, in its Janus-faced character – rational and sceptical –, is "fundamentally connected with [Descartes'] projected revolution in science" (Wilson 1978:3), and this should be a good reason not to conceive his engagement with scepticism as something merely accidental, or a *Spiel* which only generates a philosophical conundrum.[5] If scepticism is capable of invalidating and nullifying the actual content of scientific knowledge, it becomes a problem concerning the objectivity and rationality even of our ordinary knowledge-claims. Therefore, it should not be seen – as it often happens in contemporary dismissive treatment of the problem – as a merely pedantic debate. As Descartes' himself envisioned it, a careful engagement with scepticism should be able instead to uncover what is essential of our concept of knowledge, of its value, and of what it means to lay a claim on how things are. In this sense, engaging with scepticism answers to a distinctively *rational* demand.

Of the characters that define Cartesian Science as an epistemological enterprise, *certainty* is arguably the centrepiece, so much in fact that it might give the appearance that it substitutes knowledge as the main topic of inquiry. This importance can be seen in

the 'privileged' status he assigns to mathematical science and its methods. In the opening sections of the *Rules*, science is outspokenly identified with certain knowledge (AT X:364-5; Curley 1978:23). The success of his confrontation with scepticism hinges entirely on what can be salvaged as *indubitable* and *certain* cognition, as no other property could satisfy the foundational aim of his project (AT X:362). This entails rejecting everything that can be considered *dubitable*, as we'll see shortly.

This is a crucial development of the Cartesian stance because it highlights a clear divergence from ordinary understanding of knowledge-claims. We usually treat knowledge as fallible and corrigible, and we wouldn't require absolute assurance in everyday circumstances. However, it is true at the same time that there are situations where we would not be willing to admit anything less than full certainty, such as in recollections of events that have taken place in the immediate past, conceptual or logical statements. The example of mathematical propositions is a clear case of something we'd ordinarily hold to an absolute standard (AT X:365). Therefore, Descartes is not merely executing a ‘gratuitous distortion of human knowledge, but might instead be unearthing something essential but implicit to our concept of inquiry (Williams 1978:22).

Cartesian certainty is further developed by establishing as the object of investigation that which can be intuited or deduced clearly and evidently (AT X:366-70). Intuition and deduction are raised as the only means through which mankind can be placed on the road to secure knowledge without fear of being misled (AT X:425; Schouls 1972:32-3). Intuition is the mark of a clear and attentive mind, and given that the mind is to be directed by Reason, it is present in any "train of reasoning whatever" (AT X:369). Concerning deduction, it is a form of proper reasoning. If conducted from self-evident and certain premises it ought to yield the same kind of certainty that the premises possess. The main distinction between the two is that intuition is an immediate form of self-evidence. At the same time, deduction is a matter of a *sequence* of reasoning, and comparable immediacy is not needed (ibid:370).

The notion of certainty acquires a more crucial role in the central project of Cartesian epistemology when it is tied to what has been called the *Maxim of Assent* (Broughton 2002:43) or the *Cartesian Imperative* (Markie 1981:191).[6] It is expressed in the *Discourse*,

where Descartes takes the resolution to reject as absolutely false everything which he can imagine a doubt for (AT VI:31). In the *Meditations*, where he heeds the call of reason to hold back assent from every opinion which is not completely certain and indubitable, and to treat these opinions as if they were not different from patently false opinions (VII:18). The rationale for the Maxim of assenting only to what is completely certain is due to the very aim of the Cartesian project. If he is to demolish all uncertain beliefs in order to discover the foundations for genuine philosophical science, the Maxim of Assent seems to suit this purpose (Broughton 2002:45). Following this methodology, the new beliefs that will arise after the *pars destruens* is completed will have the status of certainty that Descartes requires. Therefore, the demand for certainty is the only possible path to truth, and engaging with scepticism is necessary to put oneself on this path in the first place (Williams 1978:34).[7] There is no room for epistemic error in Descartes' re-foundation of philosophical science, and this shapes the scope of scepticism that the *Meditator* – Descartes' doppelgänger in the *Meditations* – will pick up in the quest for knowledge, which has to be discovered as that certainty which is complete and cannot be possibly undermined (AT VII:145; Macarthur 2003:163).

Of course, this desideratum ought to unsettle our ordinary outlook on knowledge, and it legitimately raises the worry whether anything of the sort Descartes envisions can be reasonably attained.[8] There is an intuitive peril here: either this demand ends up undercutting the scope of the Cartesian enterprise altogether making us reject the absolute and infallible requirements, *or* it becomes an obstacle itself for knowledge, establishing that the demand for absolute certainty is cogent but unattainable. Bernard Williams expressed it in the following passage:

> To give up the Cartesian search for certainty may seem a fairly easy option, but can we so easily give up the idea of an absolute conception of reality, if there is to be any knowledge at all? Even a thorough-going fallibilism does not make it easy to accept the reflection that one's entire conception of the world … may be … a local idiosyncrasy, without there being any objective standpoint (Williams 1978:197)

Williams himself opted for the first strategy, holding onto Descartes' aspiration for a conception of the world that transcends mere locality while letting the requirement for absolute certainty go (ibid:287-8). In this research, we'll be essentially tasked with

understanding how and if the request for objectivity can, after all, be satisfied, rejecting easy shortcuts on the score or rational argumentation or dispensing of one's own rational desiderata as a kind of 'hail Mary' shot at the last second to defeat scepticism. This ought to establish the engagement with scepticism as being the rational, reflective side of philosophical investigation. If we realise that defeating scepticism would require us contravening to some legitimate norm of rational inquiry, then scepticism becomes the moment of self-reflection and self-criticism required to understand which of our undisputed conceptions about knowledge and rationality we have to let go to avoid ending up in a completely arbitrary or irrational position. However, there is also the peril that this enterprise of revision will simply make us agree with the sceptic in a rather roundabout way, landing us in what Michael Williams has called the *Epistemologist's Dilemma* (Williams 1996:22). Either scepticism is correct, or we have to revise our epistemic practices in a way that shows the sceptic to have been *essentially* right. For Williams, both horns are ultimately unacceptable. In this research, we'll argue that if scepticism can be integrated as the reflective, negative side of epistemology, the second horn of the dilemma might not be an untenable outcome.

Looking at Michael Williams' understanding of the Cartesian enterprise is also instructive to present a perspective that will run a subterranean thread in this research, i.e. whether sceptical doubts fundamentally rely on contentious assumptions that have ultimately nothing to do with how we ordinarily engage with the world. Williams argues that the perceived unassailability of radical scepticism is due to the Cartesian strategy that ends up smuggling in the ordinary conception of knowledge, untenable *foundationalist assumptions*, that impose on the very concept of knowing an autonomous structure – autonomous from any context and subject of inquiry –. This structure establishes a hierarchy of relations of epistemic priority which cannot be satisfied by us finite creatures (Williams 1986:126). Descartes would be, therefore, guilty of projecting on an ordinary concept such as knowledge a distinctive kind of metaphysics which at the same time blocks us from obtaining something that in our everyday life we seem to possess most of the time (ibid:124). The idea would be then to reject this foundational demand at the heart of the Cartesian attempt and reject viewing Cartesian knowledge and its associated scepticism as an extension and correction of common sense (ibid:129).[9]

Williams' reflections are crucial because if they hold, they would undercut the Cartesian project and go against the idea that genuine scepticism is an expression of a rational demand within philosophy itself. While Williams' charge of Foundationalism does hold water pertaining to Cartesian epistemology, at least prima facie,[10] our judgment here is that Williams oversells his idea of the ordinary conception of certainty as completely unproblematic, neglecting that Descartes does have reasons to select foundational certainty as the goal of its inquiry. The very concept of pursuing truth, which underlies the attempt, does have a substantial, even covertly metaphysical content, even in its ordinary usage. Much if not all of this research will engage with showing how relatively ordinary and commonsense positions do allow for legitimate, sceptical scrutiny because of their own implicit commitments they can't properly discharge. The attempt to simply dissolve the sceptical problematic by claiming to endorse a relatively neutral position fails due to misunderstanding what constitutes the real engine behind scepticism itself.

Before moving on to the Cartesian method of doubt, we need to briefly mention a decisive distinction that Descartes executes on matters of certainty, the distinction between *scientia* and *cognitio*. The first is systematic knowledge based on ascertained grounds, and it is the expression that in the original text of the *Rules* is translated as *knowledge* (AT X:362, 366, 387, 393, 400).[11] The latter is a kind of a particular act of cognition or awareness carried out in accordance with the precept of intuition and deduction that lacks the required basis of assurance, notwithstanding its strength.[12] Descartes expresses the distinction as the one between an atheist geometer, who has clear and distinct intuition of the truth of a particular theorem, and the kind of indubitable knowledge of the same theorem obtained after the absolute, God-given certainty of its ground has been ascertained, which can only be obtained after the path of the *Meditations* has been completed (AT VII:141). We won't be working with this Cartesian distinction in this work. However, we will be pushing one of its insights, namely that identifying and claiming a ground for belief as rational does not manage by itself to discharge automatically a question about its legitimacy and epistemic authority, which in a context of rational evaluation does appear as a legitimate question. This issue will start arising from the next chapter but will crucially dominate the second half of this research.[13]

1.2 The Method of Doubt

The focus of Descartes' engagement with scepticism takes place in the *Meditations*, albeit we can find traces of the same systematic attitudes in other works.[14] The strategy he undertakes is to provide possible reasons for doubt which entail giving up all of one's beliefs (AT VII:12, 17; cf. also VI:31; I:127). This is in line with rejecting the extant architecture of knowledge and science to ultimately uncover something that withstands the sceptical onslaught. Scepticism acts here both as an element of extremization of uncertainty, as well as that which guides us out of it (Williams 1983:231). This strategy has two main features. The rejection of beliefs must be *achievable* and in accordance with the Maxim of Assent. This means that it has to be compatible with the limitations of human cognition and direct itself at "the basic principles on which all my former beliefs rested" (AT VII:18). The second aspect is that this rejection attacks the deliverances of sensory experience: the first meditation targets the idea that knowledge rests on the senses. This attack lays the ground for a different conception of knowledge guided by Reason (Larmore 2014:48). The idea pursued is, therefore, to *turn the mind away from the senses*. This entails that Cartesian methodology places a quite pronounced emphasis on the autonomy of Reason and that as inquirers we ought to understand ourselves as exercising at least some degree of control over the acquisition of beliefs. In the *Meditations* is of central importance the insight that it is Reason that which plays an active role in understanding how things really are, as a matter of reflective procedures on what we should believe (Cottingham 2002:352). This is in open contrast with those, mostly empiricist, stances that postulate a *passive* reception of data from without as that which crucially determines what we ought to believe.

In the first Meditation, Descartes outlines three sceptical scenarios: the argument from Illusion (or Lunacy), Dreaming, and the Evil Deceiver. They correspond to progressive stages of doubt which establish increasingly general scenarios, where each ground we appeal to motivate our beliefs is undercut. We thereby lack the means to ascertain conclusively their truth (Broughton 2002:64).[15] Scepticism must be motivated by *powerful* and *well-thought-out* reasons (AT VII:18, 22).[16] The prowess of these reasons is a function of their specialised role in undermining our natural confidence and trust in the

senses. In our commonsense persuasion, our beliefs about what surrounds us are generally correct. Doubting is therefore an exercise of our volition against this persuasion. The judgment to rule out as uncertain everything that lacks complete certainty is dependent on the will of our intellect.[17] Cartesian methodology is *agentive*. This is also shown in a crucial passage right after Descartes presents the last of the three varieties of doubt; he realises that for all he knows he would still listen to his highly probable opinions notwithstanding the possibility of doubt that befalls them (AT VII:22). He therefore explicitly rejects these certainties, ruling them as mere opinions he ought not to believe at this point of the meditative journey. Descartes is resolute in suspending his trust in these opinions, a suspension that could not happen without an intentional, volitional act to 'counterbalance' these habitual impressions.[18]

The argument from Illusion targets the naïve trust in our sense-experience. The Meditator realises that she has accepted the testimony of the senses without any assurance of whether they are indeed reliable. She might be instead simply assuming that what she attends is true, in a not too dissimilar fashion from those suffering delusions. However, the mere possibility of error or indistinguishability on a local level is not enough for Descartes to engender radical doubt.[19] Simple deception is ruled as insufficient for a complete upheaval of our worldly beliefs. Particular, sporadic defects of the senses are easy to recognise, and deceptive experiences can be balanced out by the whole corpus of extant beliefs, judging such occasions as merely aberrant occurrences.[20] While it is true that we are sometimes deceived, this cannot be a powerful enough reason to discard all of our beliefs at once.[21] Our world experience might be naïve to some degree, but we do appear to retain a certain kind of normative grasp on what is to be judged as truthful even if environmental circumstances are unfavourable, and what should instead entice us to suspend judgment.[22]

However, a naïve endorsement of this implicit normative grasp is indeed what Descartes aims to relinquish,[23] because the normative content provided by sense-experience is liable to radical doubt. This must be a general rejection of the testimony of the senses, not piecemeal, as Descartes clarifies in his reply to Gassendi (AT VII:350). The famous case of the stick bent in water (ibid:333, 418) shows how we ordinarily correct ourselves

simple instances of deception. Still, the senses are not sufficient in general to give us the kind of assurance that we attach naively to their testimony; something more is required (ibid:439). If we seek certainty, both of the sort we presume to possess ordinarily, but also of the kind that ought to ground scientific knowledge, it is not a wise choice to unreflectively rely on the senses. It would amount to arbitrarily privileging preferential conditions for experience (Bermudez 2008:57; Frankfurt 1970:62).

The dreaming possibility is more severe as it establishes a proper attack on the naïve normative grasp of experience, thereby introducing a first radical sceptical possibility. It is innovative in proceeding via uncovering implicit assumptions and contradictions in our commonsense conception of knowledge, assuming an essential *dialectical* aspect (ibid:47). Dreaming strips sense-experience of it providing effective criteria for knowledge. What we attend to when dreaming is seemingly of the same kind of experiences we attend to when awake, or at least we cannot recognise their difference *while in the dream* (AT VII:19). Therefore, a paradigmatic wakeful experience appears compatible with its being merely dreamt at least in terms of subjective experience. This establishes a gap between representational experience and how things really are (Stroud 1984:32). The epistemic and normative warrant provided by sensible experience is undercut. The sceptical question, at this stage, concerns what reasons do we possess to claim that we are not dreaming in a specific moment? Lacking such a rational assurance, we'd lack reasons to conceive what are *presumed to be* wakeful states as reliable guides to obtain certainty.[24] By adhering to the Maxim of assent, endorsed at the beginning of the work, the Meditator is bound to abandon trust and assurance in beliefs based merely on sensory experiences, notwithstanding the higher confidence she has in her senses and their prima facie reasonableness (Macarthur 2003:169).[25]

However, the dreaming scenario is considered by Descartes as having insufficient reach. The elements making up what is dreamt might not exist, but their components do. They must have "been fashioned in the likeness of things that are real" (AT VII:20) hence making them not merely fictitious. A clear example is via mathematics, which deals only with the "simplest and most general things" whose reality is not denied by being dreamt.

Triangles have three sides, notwithstanding whether they have been parts of dreams, dreamt theorems appear to possess rational warrant nevertheless.[26]

Descartes opts, therefore, for a different variety of doubt, one where even such rational warrant is undercut. This is established by the *Hyperbolic doubt* found in the Evil deceiver hypothesis. The Meditator finds in herself the idea of an omnipotent God, who would be able to deceive her at any time, even on matters as clear and evident as mathematical propositions. Even worse, any cognitive state of certainty and assurance could be a mere product of fate, a haphazard, accidental concoction that would bear no sign of truth and certainty. In the Third Meditation, Descartes radicalises this possibility by entertaining the idea that the nature of the cognitive subject might be fundamentally flawed and defective (ibid:36), casting doubt even on the actual recognition of mundane experiences of error.[27] The basic question that the hyperbolic doubt establishes is the following: on which ground are we entitled to hold the very Reason through which we are investigating knowledge and certainty as adequate for this task, without already assuming that our rational faculties can put us in touch with the world? The Hyperbolic doubt makes us aware that we are left in the dark concerning our epistemic capacities by lacking some positive reasons for this presumption. Until the dreaming argument, what was at stake seemed to concern the reality and truthfulness of our experiences. Now the issue is whether there's any possibility of having something that can be an actual experience in general. The main problem is revealed by switching from a question about mere reliability of the senses to the inherent capability and nature of human Reason itself (Frankfurt 1970:69).

This aspect is crucially underestimated in the way Cartesian scepticism is engaged in contemporary epistemological debates. The traditional Cartesian problem is conceived mostly as concerned with the veridicality and actuality of one's experience (Conant 2012:5).[28] Contending with scepticism is conceived as a matter of refuting counter-possibilities that leave one liable to doubt and that try to exploit a strictly *veridical* gap between the world and our cognitive resources (ibid:25) as if there were always something that could theoretically get in the way between us and our epistemic goals. In this research, we'll be continuously attacking this perspective. This conception of scepticism as a kind of hurdle-race misses what the proper question motivating

epistemological doubt is. While concerns belonging to the actual truth of our beliefs *do* play a role in scepticism, constraining the problem in this fashion makes it too easy to conceive of scepticism as little more than a nuisance. But the issues made vivid by dreaming and the hyperbolic doubt go beyond a simple 'How do you know?' request. They instead target what constitutes the intelligibility of any engagement with reality and the reasons and norms we appeal to in this task.

The varieties of doubt rehearsed thus far all have precedents in past sceptical philosophies. Dreaming was famously a feature of Academic sceptics such as Cicero, the hyperbolic scenario has antecedents in Plutarch (Brown 2013:27). This perceived lack of originality would be held against Descartes by Hobbes (AT VII:171),[29] who highlighted how the theme of mistrust in the senses belonged to philosophy since Plato. However, many commentators have highlighted that Cartesian scepticism does diverge to a significant degree from ancient varieties of philosophical doubt, especially *Pyrrhonism*, which treaded on raising contrary statements of equal strength to generate equipollence and *ataraxia*, instead of the general undercutting varieties of doubt Descartes present. Not only are Cartesian doubts general, but also contain in themselves their antidote in the goal of uncovering some kind of foundational entity that resists sceptical worries (Williams 2010:289-90). Furthermore, Cartesian scepticism is given a methodological role, while Pyrrhonian scepticism is ordinarily conceived to have a more practical concern (Fine 2000:212). These might be taken as elements to judge the standard construal of the Cartesian problem as the straightforwardly more worrying of the two. This is an implication that should be avoided, as varieties of Pyrrhonism could beat Cartesian scepticism on its own ground of *generality*, which is what constitutes scepticism as *radical*[30]*,* and limiting Pyrrhonian scepticism to a mere *practical* concern is to miss its genuine philosophical weight (Williams 1988a:548). Before analysing Pyrrhonism, it should be a valuable choice to analyse what it means for Cartesian scepticism to harbour its own antidote.

The wax example (AT VII:30) lends itself quite aptly to this attempt. Its role is to highlight the function that the mind plays in examining what is essential to the object one has experience of *in general*. The wax, ever-changing in its determinable qualities, becomes the object of an applied methodological doubt in carefully scrutinising what is the faculty

that identifies the essence of the wax. Sensibility is ruled out: notwithstanding its losing and mutating every sensible feature it possessed initially, the wax remains the same wax. Imagination has a limited reach, incapable of running through the uncountable changes the object goes through (ibid:31). Instead, only our faculty of reasoning is truly able to perceive what the 'wax' is.[31] Only rational intellective scrutiny can fulfil this task. This reverses the order of explanation that we'd assume in an ordinary, broadly empiricist setting. The agent identifies what constitutes the nature of the wax and what must be excluded from it.[32] This explains why the very faculty of Reason, which grants the insight on objects of experience, has to come under scrutiny.

The wax example establishes two fundamental insights: the mind is better known than the object delivered by the senses, and bodies are perceived through intellect alone. This establishes the primacy and priority of Reason in its intellectual capacities of understanding and judging.[33] The sceptical methodology in the *Meditations* is directed towards the self-validation of Reason, as it will be Reason that which will provide the resources to escape from philosophical scepticism. The second insight is the establishment of a bridge back to the world, from the newfound primacy of reason at the end of the sceptical path. It is only by breaking the spell of empirical immediacy that the external world can be won back (Mijuskovic 1971:323-33). For this option to be available, the pre-reflective stance of the subject must be transformed and divested of its confused ideas and commitments, such as the deeply entrenched thought that the senses allow much more distinctness than the inquiring mind itself.[34] The whole example appears as a kind of therapeutic exercise for the reader in which sceptical doubts pave the way from a sense-based epistemology to one that is grounded on the priority of the intellect.[35] This element is crucial for an adequate understanding of scepticism because it shows how even in its Cartesian inception it is not merely a foe to vanquish. It instead serves a purpose within philosophical and epistemological inquiries, as if it were its 'free side'. Most importantly, by questioning what constitutes the possibility of our engagement with the world, it manages to raise a genuine philosophical question that cannot be cast aside that easily.

1.3 Cartesian Therapy

The passages at the end of the first Meditations where Descartes, after introducing the evil demon, realises that his ordinary opinions still maintain a very probable and vivid character for him and that it is necessary for him to make an effort to carry on in his meditative undertaking, seem to possess more therapeutic strength than argumentative character (Wachbrit 1996:112). But what does therapy mean for Descartes, and how is it tied to his employment of sceptical doubts? The idea of philosophical therapy seems prima facie incompatible with the received view of Cartesian philosophy. Descartes has been held guilty of projecting back into our ordinary engagement with reality his own metaphysical foundationalist presuppositions (Williams 1986:131). His epistemological project has been viewed as the classic attempt of discovering the foundations of our non-inferential, direct acquaintance with *simple natures,*[36] which is customarily considered a substantial philosophical attempt. Such readings are of interest because they seem to ultimately track Descartes' epistemology back to the attempt of obtaining true beliefs via the same deliverances of the senses he attacks. Scepticism would therefore serve the goal of rescuing the reliability of experience from its very sceptical mistrust (cf. Macarthur 2003:160-1). The wax passage would exemplify such use of inquiring reason as a back-and-forth between sense experience and the insight of the mind.

It is plausible that some of Descartes' attempts do go in that direction, especially if one heeds those passages in the sixth Meditation where he professes certainty in the criteria that establish the truth of what is attended to in experience. However, it would be a mistake to reduce the entire Cartesian methodology to such expressions, which pertain only to a completed meditative journey. At the beginning of the third Meditation, Descartes reports how habitual beliefs that the Meditator thought to perceive clearly have been defeated. If anything was to be found true it was by no means due to sensible perception (AT VII:35). In the sixth replies – which appear as a whole to form a retrospective account of Cartesian therapy – Descartes recounts how the habitual form of our judgments and rational inferences influences the way we conceive of sense-perception (ibid:438). These considerations do not portray Descartes as simply endorsing a picture of experiential given and relying on epistemic priority relations. His employment of scepticism shows

instead a viaticum to the authority of the investigative mind in ascertaining the validity of our engagement with the world. While experiences are involved in the genesis of empirical beliefs, there is no strict attempt at discovering a kind of perceptual foundationalism whose epistemic status is independent of the inquiring activity of reason (Bermudez 2008:55). Turning away the mind from the senses and removing their influence is a recurrent theme of Cartesian inquiry.[37]

The therapeutic import of this route is especially clear if viewed in the Scholastic/Aristotelian context Descartes was reacting against. The two fundamental maxims of Aquinean heritage, '*nihil est in intellectu quod non sit prius in sensu*' and the doctrine of the *adaequatio rei et intellectus* understood as phenomenal resemblance, form the backbone of the perspective that Descartes is trying to cure the reader from. The former establishes the fundamental *a posteriori* possibility of knowledge via sensible faculties. The latter is the idea that the phenomenal experience we entertain can only be intelligible by possessing an epistemic character modelled along blankly external objects whose epistemic content is merely material nature. Such characterisations are conceived to be entirely natural, and they do hold sway in an ordinary, unreflective outlook on the world. After all, the presumption of commonsense is precisely the one targeted here, that what we know about the world is what is non-problematically obtained by deliverances of the senses, and that in these deliverances the truth of how things are is already relayed to us:

> But the chief question at this point concerns the ideas which I take to be derived from things existing outside me: what is my reason for thinking that they resemble these things? Nature has apparently taught me to think this […] the most obvious judgement for me to make is that the thing in question transmits to me its own likeness rather than something else […] When I say 'nature taught me to think this' all I mean is that a spontaneous impulse leads me to believe it, not that its truth has been revealed to me by some *natural light* (AT VII:38)

In this received picture, the role of the inquiring mind is limited to sift through what is already determined by sensible faculties. The subject heeds a spontaneous impulse, not the *lumen naturae* of Reason. The adjustments of the relation between mind and world are imposed by the sensible realm upon the human mind, quite the opposite of what the wax example was supposed to portray.

This empiricism views the relation between subject and reality as unproblematic but for Descartes, this is instead a source of distress. It entices a genuine problem concerning the notion of a meaningful distinction between the internal and the external, precisely what Scholasticism held as most perspicuous (Koistinen 2014:224). In connection with dreaming scepticism, we can see this problem arising as the realisation that sensory experience does not give us the required basis for beliefs as world-involving, and all of a sudden, "we are confined to ideas of things around us" (Stroud 1984:32).

Scepticism becomes the instrument for Cartesian therapy: by turning the mind away from the senses, the result will be the destruction of "the principles of Aristotle" (AT III:297-8). This will deliver the foundation for the new philosophical science.[38] Even the status of mathematics within Cartesian epistemology is to be read under the light of this therapeutic battle, a battle against the mere *abstraction*[39] from sensible data, as Aristotelian science had understood mathematical rules. For Descartes, the situation is turned on its head, with the autonomous authority of Reason to be established over the raw material given by the senses, and with mathematics resting on *a priori* principles which are then *applied* to the empirical and sensible realms (Hill 2012:30; Hatfield 1986:46). For Descartes, only this perspective, achieved via sceptical reflection, will provide the required foundation for *scientia* and allow the pure concepts of mathematics and geometry to produce true thinking in the absence of the sensible imagery provided by the senses (Hill 2012:37).

This does mean that Descartes is in search of a foundation. His therapy is not quietist; he does provide a new methodology for scientific knowledge that can discover what is true and certain. Cartesian epistemology endorses *methodological foundationalism, which sets it apart from Aristotelian science's merely explanatory character,* aimed at elucidating what was already conceived as warranted and foundational. The epistemology built on this methodology is *justificatory*. It provides reasons supporting the idea that knowledge is possible and truth and certainty can be attained. What matters is discovering a method, not of a basic set of propositions (Bermudez 1997:765). It is true that this conception still endorses substantial commitments concerning the structure of epistemic reasons, and it does seem to fall neatly within the kind of epistemological realism that Michael Williams has identified as the main harbinger of radical scepticism, or better as its crucial

presupposition. Epistemological realism argues that human knowledge must be supported by unitary epistemological structures independently from the specific domain of inquiry. It is this structure that makes possible knowledge of the world (Williams 1996:108-9). However, Descartes' stance is not illicitly endorsing this structural idea of knowledge, especially if we keep in mind the stance that Descartes is arguing against, the naïve empiricist conception of the world, an entirely *natural* perspective of systematic trust in the senses which Aristotelianism had given philosophical form to (AT VII:441-3; Larmore 2006:20).[40] The fundamental faith in the senses reflects the world of commonsense perception, and Scholastic elaboration is its metaphysical counterpart (Garber 1986:88; Bermudez 1997:766). Scepticism, far from being a mere disease of the mind which takes us away from what we always already know, is instead a treatment of the unquestioned prejudice in favour of the senses by subjecting them to the light of Reason, essentially subverting the explanatory nature of Aristotelian epistemology.[41] It breaks the spell of the unreflective confidence in the senses and the associated claim that external objects are something ultimately foreign and blankly external "whose character is just what it seems to be" (Frankfurt 1970:19).

As we already mentioned the Cartesian approach is fundamentally agentive – in this sense a direct opposition to the empiricist *tabula rasa* – because our holding fast to habitual opinions is a tendency we must put an effort in to be dissolved (AT VII:34). Sceptical doubt counterbalances – not too differently from a Pyrrhonian fashion – the images of the senses. Without this labour, the envisioned outcome is a mind overwhelmed and besieged by heteronomous constraints (ibid:22, 69). Only "those who really concentrate and meditate and withdraw their minds from corporeal things, as far as is possible" (ibid:157) can achieve this result.

Meditation through the medium of scepticism is what provides the means to properly understand how the mind can operate on its own (Hatfield 1986:47), asserting its pre-eminence and validating its crucial role. The whole structure of the second Meditation embodies the necessity of this procedure, for example, by placing the wax passage right after the Cartesian Cogito is introduced (AT VII:27; Cunning 2010:69). This is a clear instance of a recurring theme in the Meditation, the need to continue the effort as the

habitual opinions will recur in our thoughts (AT VII:22). What nature has taught us continues to have a grip on us (ibid:38).[42] The continuous tug-of-war is a proper feature of the therapy based on Descartes' *Meditations*. It highlights how the process must fundamentally be gradual in moving our standpoint from naïve naturalism and empiricism to the rational standpoint Descartes seeks to achieve. Undergoing the required paradigm shift has no chance of succeeding if our intellect remains in need of emendation.[43] This is a conversion process, transforming not only one's beliefs but the very self in the way it recognises how its initially assumed outlook is essentially off-track (Hill 2012:23-4; Morris 2014:120). It is a proper *struggle*, from the rejection of the philosophical picture of commonsense to the possibility of a genuine epistemological foundation for science (Garber 1986:91-3). The employment of Reason is therefore present in both the *pars destruens* and in the *pars construens* of the process. In the former Reason nullifies the epistemic credence of senses by showing how they are unable to provide a satisfactory epistemological content (Marlies 1978:98). This is achieved by pitting one against the other our bad habits through sceptical reasoning, showing either their inherent contradictoriness or bringing them to a breaking point. The various habitual and common-sensual attempts are each given a possibility to establish in rationally the way the world is (ibid:104; Garber 1986:66).[44]

A better stance is then crafted through the proper employment of Reason, granting us the understanding and knowledge of the external world we seek (AT VII:39). Ultimately, in the sixth Mediation, the faculties of common sense are to be endorsed "under the watchful eye and domination of reason" (Garber 1986:107; AT VII:82-3). Cartesian methodological scepticism is therefore engaged in establishing the primacy and autonomy of Reason, whose powers, divested of heteronomous habits and blankly external determinations, are now able to set the picture of the world aright. The overall method which combines therapy and the search for truth as proper of the autonomous dimension of reason is summed up fittingly by Hegel in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. Descartes' establishes that it is free thought that is to be recognised as valid as such. This can only be carried out by free thought itself: "That which is valid must be established in the world by the subject's own thought; what is to rank as established must have warranted itself by means of thought" (Hegel 1826:120).[45] The requirement of radical scepticism at the heart of

Cartesian methodology is nothing else than the idea that thinking should begin from itself, "and what is presupposed is not so in virtue of thinking, but it is other from it" (ibid:127).

1.4 Pyrrhonism

The above should suffice as a general introduction to themes we'll engage with throughout this research. Most importantly, it allows us to introduce the subterranean ideas that will motivate our general defence of scepticism. For us, what is of particular concern is to highlight how scepticism plays a distinctive rational and therapeutical role, establishing itself as, in Hegelian jargon, the *rational-negative* side of philosophy itself (1830:§79). On this score, there is a fundamental precedent in the history of scepticism that we should now heed, namely ancient Pyrrhonian scepticism. Pyrrhonism will be a sort of companion throughout most of this research, especially for establishing sceptical questions not as mere idle requests but as probing the arbitrary and dogmatic presuppositions of the ordinary understanding of how we engage with the world. Pyrrhonism in its ancient form has reached us mostly through the texts of Diogenes Laertius and Sextus Empiricus. We will focus on the latter for this brief presentation of its character.

Pyrrhonism is born out of a *zetetic* character. The sceptic is conceived first and foremost as an investigator – and a completely unbiased one at that –, whose activity is to inquire (*skèptesthai*) into what is not clear, reflectively instituting scrutiny on what is presumed to be already fully grasped. To be a sceptic is an attitude distinct from those who already presume to have reached the truth, the dogmatists, and those who proclaim that truth is unattainable, the Academics, or negative dogmatists. (PH I.1-4). The Pyrrhonian attitude envisions its activity as one of inquiry and suspension, which comes as a by-product of the investigation and issues from an impossibility of reconciling different inclinations of assent and negation towards its objects of inquiry (ibid:7). But this suspension, *epoché,* is not merely something experienced as a mere collateral effect that the inquirer is supposed to get rid of. This would make the sceptic either a dogmatist or a negative dogmatist if she were to resolve this suspension by either following assent or denial once and for all. Suspension of judgment is instead actively sought by the sceptic once she realizes that it delivers the kind of tranquillity one initially sought from inquiry. This requires

endorsing a specific method to issue against every positive claim, every proposed way of apprehending an object or of conceiving a particular subject matter, an opposite and equally convincing claim. This is the method of equipollence, which issues equality in terms of neither opposing proposition having more support, even if inconclusive support, over the other. This generates as its consequence tranquillity, *ataraxia*, that substitutes the feeling of distress experienced in the investigation (ibid:8-10). This angst is experienced at every level of the ordinary investigative process, both at the initial discovery of a purported truth, and as well when conflicting reports, sensory testimonies, and disagreement in rational reconstructions of how the world is induce one to retreat the initial pretence to knowledge and truth.

The Pyrrhonist is the sceptic that realises how the suspension induced by this conflict is capable of generating that kind of intellectual peace that was one of the motivations behind the initial zetetic impulse. Therefore, she endorses the suspension of judgment as a general method, by actively bringing it about via establishing equipollent proposition. "A Pyrrhonian is someone who possesses this ability [*dynamis*]" (PH I.11). General scepticism arises, not as a death knell positively affirming the inexistence of truth, but as a general method of suspension of judgment from everything that is claimed to be thus-and-so and encounters equally persuasive disagreement.

Here, we can see some convergences between the Cartesian perspective and Pyrrhonism, limited for now at the dimension of actively taking part in inquiry that characterises both stances. Given that such an attitude is an integral part of the traditional image of philosophy, this should already advert that scepticism is not a mere retreat from the undertaking of investigation and explanation, nor a kind of cheap nihilism whose only philosophical engagement is to raise empty doubts to make the philosopher scramble at every turn for a plausible reply. Descartes' own Maxim of Assent institutes a suspension of judgment concerning most if not every belief, notwithstanding this rejection of beliefs being merely *temporary*, as established by their rehabilitation in the Sixth Meditation.[46]

However, the stance of active inquiry does outline a difference between the Cartesian and the Pyrrhonian perspective, namely that Pyrrhonism lacks the features of modern doubt in targeting the possibility of human knowledge. Its target is much broader in

targeting belief in general (Annas&Barnes 1985:8; Vogt 1998:23-4; Broughton 2002:33).[47] A further divergence might appear in the traditional distinction applied between Cartesian and Pyrrhonian methodologies on this score. The former makes use of sceptical scenarios to push forward the meditative journey. At the same time, the latter methodologies rely on specific *Modes* to induce equipollence and *epoché* on a piecemeal basis instead of issuing in a general sceptical doubt.[48] The modes are one of the most distinctive aspects of Pyrrhonian scepticism and are usually divided into two groups having different heritage and distinct methodological goals. The overall goal is to institute a dialectical counterpart to what the dogmatists propose. The various schools of Hellenistic philosophy, more specifically Stoicism and Epicureanism, proposed specific criteria in order to distinguish what could be claimed as true and what was to be rejected as false. Pyrrhonism shows how to each particular account, a different and incompatible account can be proposed, which possesses equal power of persuasion. Every dogmatic proposal aiming at establishing how things are, is opposed by the sceptic with another dogmatic account having equal convincingness. The sceptic doesn't need to endorse or believe the account proposed. She merely shows that by adopting the same dogmatic procedures that the various schools select as their own method, a non-arbitrary conclusion cannot be reached (PH I.202-4). In this way, Pyrrhonism's sceptical methodology is *ad hominem*, not in the sense of the logical fallacy, but in the sense of adopting the criteria and reasoning of their opponent and then arguing that one can reach a conclusion incompatible with the one offered initially whose appearance commands equal persuasion.[49]

The ten *Aenesideman* modes are more strictly correlated with actual equipollence (PH I.35) because they offer actual ways of creating propositions incompatible with what the dogmatists or even our commonsense inclination purport to represent as true. Their strategy is to establish conflicts in appearances or in beliefs concerning properties of things (Striker 1983:119; Annas&Barnes 1985:22). This leads to the realisation that assertions about the nature of the objects we form beliefs or assertions about – more generally, the *dogmata* one endorses – are disqualified, and what we can non-arbitrarily lay claim to are assertions at most about mere appearances (PH I.213). The problem of undecidability – *anepikritos diaphonia* – is therefore at the heart of the *Aenesideman*

tropes. They target the authority upon which we pronounce our claims, even ordinary ones,[50] by showing how it falls short of what should be considered adequate by the dogmatist's own lights. But this is not the only form of argument in the ten modes, because undecidability might be sooner or later defeated. The second kind of argument in these modes is relativity, as established in the trope of relation (PH I.135), and it seems to issue a stronger claim than mere undecidability.

Given that relations do not pertain to the individual object, but only when taken together with other objects or with the subject who is making the claims, this is purported to indicate that the properties we assign to objects do not actually belong to the nature of the object in itself. This would also explain our disagreements about the nature of things (Striker 1983:129). This means that we cannot take our pronouncements on objects as properly world-involving. However, this argument seems rather weak and, most importantly, endorses dogmatic assumptions. It would require the nature of things to belong necessarily to the thing taken in isolation. Supporting this idea would need an argument that obviously the sceptic isn't in the position to give.[51] The undecidability route to establish equipollence appears to be better suited to avoid endorsing a variety of negative dogmatism (ibid:133).[52] Even if read under these lights however, the ten modes will hardly impress themselves upon a contemporary reader, as they seem to rely on perceptual and circumstantial differences in appearances that could not be strong enough to engender scepticism, and if they did, they would at most construe a very tame variety, clearly inferior to Cartesian scepticism. Sextus himself did not seem very trusting of these modes either (PH I.35). They rely too much on unspoken and indefensible assumptions to be of any real efficacy and betraying commitments to an implicit form of Platonism.[53]

The Agrippan modes (PH I.164-77) are instead of a different character. They are directed against any attempt at resolving the issues of equipollence and undecidability that arise from conflicting experiences, theories and appearances of things. They establish some of the argumentative strategies that belong to contemporary epistemology and not just specifically to sceptical rhetoric. These are disagreement, relativity, circularity, infinite regress, and the trope of hypothesis or arbitrariness, which will play a distinctive role in the second half of this research. They are usually divided into material or challenging

modes, including the tropes of disagreement and relativity, and the formal or dialectical modes – circularity, regress and arbitrariness/hypothesis.[54] Of interest here, for now, is to notice that the crucial trope is disagreement – *diaphonia*, which was also a crucial component in the ten modes[55] –, which is not casually the first of these modes. By instituting a dispute about a particular statement or about a set of theoretical criteria (cf. PH II.17-8), as long as the dispute itself is left unresolved, i.e. the disagreement is still undecided, scepticism follows because suspension of judgment is the only rationally defensible attitude (Barnes 1990:20). It must be remarked that the opposition is not merely the presence of a difference or of a changing relation as in the Aenesideman modes. The disagreement concerns *logoi*, accounts that are actually claimed as true (PH I:31-3; Barnes 1990:116), and suspension must issue from the lack of convincing reasons for either part (Sienkiewicz 2018:42). The dialectical modes are then available to the sceptic to impede any possible resolution of the initial disagreement, characterising what has been called the sceptic's *Net* (PH I.170-7). *Diaphonia* works as the lead into the justificatory dead-ends that characterise even contemporary forms of doubt.[56]

This should suffice for the presentation of the Pyrrhonian modes. The Agrippan tropes will be the ones that will recur most frequently in this research. We can also, at this point, comment on whether the registered divergence from Cartesian scepticism on these methodological aspects really holds water. Although they obviously cannot be reduced to one another, they don't actually seem to inhabit incommunicable sceptical worlds. Firstly, while Descartes' sceptical methodology relies on deception scenarios, we should be careful to ultimately reduce it to the *reception* of Cartesian doubt in contemporary epistemology. One of the points that we've tried to highlight in the earlier sections of this chapter was that ultimately scepticism is not a mere question about possibilities of deception, but an investigation of Reason by Reason itself, a self-critical analysis of its presuppositions. In this sense, there seems to be a clear convergence with the Pyrrhonian modes, especially the Agrippan ones, in requesting an analysis of the epistemic credentials our beliefs enjoy, which translates in a suspension of judgment concerning their rational or evidential basis. This will be a major topic for us, starting already from the next chapter.

Additionally, while Cartesian and Pyrrhonian scepticism are held to differ on grounds of general and particular methodology, with Pyrrhonism considered as being mostly restricted to the ethical level and lacking a proper epistemic methodology (Gabriel 2008:119-120; Williams 2010:288), the above analysis should instead suggest that this is not entirely accurate. Pyrrhonism does seem to adopt a general technique for instituting equipollence, one of "critically examining any given impression" (Vogt 2012:138). In its Agrippan fashion, it also establishes a general justificatory scepticism targeting rational beliefs, curtailing any proposal available to dogmatic philosophers to resolve issues of disagreement (Striker 2001:116). Pyrrhonism does indeed raise piecemeal doubt instead of proposing universal evaluation all at once as Descartes aims to do (Williams 2010:290). Still, Pyrrhonism does allow for a *hairesis*, a procedure of justificatory doubt, without establishing a positive theory (PH I.16-7).[57]

One of the main counter-arguments that are raised against Pyrrhonism is the self-refutation charge, the elenctic argument. It is especially visible if applied to Agrippan modes, because the dogmatist can reply that the sceptic is endorsing criteria of sound reasoning as criteria of truth. When the sceptic uses the trope of disagreement and emits the injunction that it would be arbitrary to continue claiming to have reached the truth despite undecided disagreement, the dogmatist faults this to the sceptic as a dogmatic move.[58] However, if we adopt the *urbane* idea that the sceptic's beliefs pertain to how things appear to her and not how they are, we can make sense of an *ad hominem* use of the argumentative structure of the tropes, because it is the dogmatist herself who ought to endorse what they establish. The sceptic experiences a psychological persuasiveness that allows her to employ the same criteria of rationality the dogmatist endorses, against the dogmatist herself.[59] The sceptic makes the dogmatist pay attention to the fact that suspension of judgment is not something that they merely *should* consider. *Epoché* is *necessary* if the dogmatist really is as rational as she claims to be (Perin 2010:39-42).

The topic of rational argumentation criteria and how the sceptic uses them allows us to go back full circle to those features of scepticism we identified in the previous section of the chapter, namely their rational *and* therapeutic content. How can the Pyrrhonian enterprise be considered rational? This could be already glimpsed from the fact that

through the employment of the equipollence method, the sceptic adopts a thoroughly rational stance in requiring whoever presents a certain claim or criterion to defend and substantiate their declarations against the threat of disagreement and undecidability and to endorse *epoché* should the attempt fail. However, if it stopped at this, it would merely be a kind parasitic rationality, dependent upon the project of the dogmatist. It seems furthermore that the sceptic is seeking equipollence not for some distinct rational or epistemic goal. Equipollence seems to be instituted for the sake of *ataraxia*. This idea, called the *tranquillity* charge, attacks the conception that the Pyrrhonist could ever be a genuine investigator because of her ultimate disregard for truth. There seems to be no space in the Pyrrhonian stance to ever be *satisfied* with finding truth (Palmer 2000:355). The very existence of the modes forbids the sceptic to hold on to truth even as a 'notional' goal (ibid:359). Ultimately, the Pyrrhonist has to endorse and collapse into a kind of normative dogmatism where the very possibility of encountering truth cannot be claimed as plausible anymore (ibid:370; Striker 2001:128).

If *ataraxia* is identified as what motivates scepticism, which is something Sextus seems to endorse when he says that the causal principle of scepticism is 'the hope of becoming tranquil' (PH I.12, 26) then the whole sceptical endeavour might have little to do with an inquiry on the power of reason and the possibility of reaching truth. If these were hopes that the sceptic still harboured, then there would be no actual tranquillity achieved (Palmer 2000:369). For *ataraxia* to be obtained, a kind of 'equilibrium' must be obtained, and it can only happen when one is quite assured that no truth is forthcoming (Burnyeat 1980:56).

This would be a distinctive problematic outcome for the analysis we'll be proposing because it subtracts scepticism from the realm of epistemic and rational inquiry, which would greatly diminish its theoretical value. There would be at this point a genuine reason not to engage with it, at least not in the form that targets rational belief. The strategy – which we'll look at better in chapter three – of leaving scepticism to its own carousel would also indicate that the only avenue left for scepticism would be to appeal to ever so wild scenarios of possible and uneliminated deception. Unless the sceptic strikes only against

a thoroughly substantial infallibilist stance, this won't manage to institute a severe or sound philosophical doubt.

However, the interpretation that sees Pyrrhonism, and his brand of rational, justificatory scepticism, falter because of a disregard for truth doesn't constitute a warranted reading. Sextus' text doesn't support the idea that the sceptic employs methods for equipollence and suspension only because they initially sought tranquillity. He is quite clear in saying that tranquillity is merely a result of *epoché*; it results from it in the same way the painting of the horse emerged from Apelles throwing the sponge at the wall (PH I.29). It results from the *inability* to discover truth that suspension is endorsed and tranquillity *fortuitously* followed (I.26). Suspension is always a function of the claims and opinions surveyed so far (Perin 2010:18). Still, there is no need to believe that the sceptic has to endorse a negative thesis about the *impossibility* of discovering truth. In fact, the whole of the method of equipollence is applied to those claims that a dogmatic opponent proposes. This appears quite clearly from the end of Book I of Sextus' *Outlines*. Equipollence itself is not uttered as a final verdict or judgment, but is only a reflection of how things appear to the sceptic in the disagreement, the suspension itself is merely a *holding back* from asserting anything positive on the matter at hand (PH I.191, 196).

Furthermore, the sceptic doesn't issue general theses about everything being indeterminate, but focuses on "those unclear matters investigated by the Dogmatists which he has considered" (I.198). Only insofar as something is proposed does the sceptic raise a question of equipollence, but this also indicates that there is no pre-conceived stance of necessary failure from her.[60] It is true that scepticism has a crucial reactive function to what is proposed, but we will argue in this research that this is precisely what constitutes it as the rational moment of philosophy. The sceptic investigates *logoi* after all. Ultimately, the idea that scepticism is incompatible with rational inquiry and that it disregards truth because of its endpoint being *ataraxia* rests on mistaken assumptions concerning from which angle can the question of truth be approached. While those who argue that the Pyrrhonist is not concerned with truth, tend to see its value as being limited to its *actual* discovery and to how many truths we manage to acquire, this is an overly narrow conception. It ignores that application of the sceptical methodology is perfectly

compatible with an appreciation of truth that is not simply reduced to how many truths we in fact discover, but is established in different truth-related values, such as avoidance of falsehoods (Vogt 2012:133-6), or the rejection of conceit and rash judgments.

This is where the element of therapy wedges its way in. By recognising that the sceptic is sensitive to a whole constellation of values and practical benefits that are tied to a genuine and honest search for truth, even if she herself cannot actually set these values but are simply those that pertain to her life and shared customs, it can be observed that the sceptical method and the resulting tranquillity do manage to cure us of the anxiety we endured in our pre-sceptical practices, from the conceit and rashness we attached to our theoretical and philosophical claims. The sceptical method entertains a dimension of *conversion*, which we've already highlighted as present in Descartes. The experiences of conflict and anomaly are something we are bound to go through in our ordinary engagement with the world. This will induce us a specific cognitive distress in which we are pulled in different directions by the various appearances one is subjected to (Vogt 2012:126; cf. PH II.51-2). When the epistemic agent undergoes sceptical conversion and discovers tranquillity, the outcome is that the beliefs that she produced as a result of those conflicting appearances are given up. One is thereby cured of the distress directed at providing some satisfactory account that reconciles this phenomenal plurality. But this conversion doesn't occur with a simultaneous negative thesis that truth won't ever be reached, at least not on a necessary basis. There is open-mindedness concerning its possible eventual occurrence (Johnsen 2001:543). There might even be a fundamental revision of the place and role truth has to play within our everyday endeavours.[61] The settled sceptic, not pulled anymore in all directions by conflicting appearances, realizes that the new standpoint she reached won't bring her back again into the abyss of epistemic angst if truth as she expected it before the conversion were found not to be discoverable.

The very sceptical methodology and strategy used to reach suspension and tranquillity will be overcome and left behind as a purgative drug which leaves the body (PH I.206) as, if the conversion really has happened, the conditions for its application will disappear as well, at least when the sceptic considers herself specifically. Ultimately the conceit and

rashness that came with the search for truth won't affect us anymore. However, the sceptic will always be capable of applying her method as a therapy to others who haven't undergone the process of conversion yet (III.280-1). It is crucial to notice that this achievement is no rejection of Reason or truth. The sceptic has discovered something weighty indeed here: the idea that only theoretical reflection will be able to grasp the structure of the world is a mistaken ideal, and she is open to the possibility that there is no actual *structure* to grasp (Machuca 2009:120). Our everyday commitments need not to be commitments to a reality metaphysically intended. These commitments need not be *doxastic* in the sense of beliefs as dogmata, as instituting and following criteria of truth. The commitments of our ordinary lives reveal instead a practical nature that determines how appearances strike us and leave their mark of persuasion on our minds.[62] The apparent tension between our epistemic and pragmatic goals is resolved in viewing the formers as essentially instituted by the latter as a matter of collective endeavour with other human agents (Machuca 2019:218). This is broadly the theme that will emerge towards the end of the research. It embodies Stanley Cavell's (1979:241) insight that the truth of scepticism resides in making us realise that our relationship to the world is not epistemic, in the sense we unreflectively endorsed before the sceptical journey. The sceptic opens our eyes to two aspects of our *condition humaine*: the first is that we are unable to stand in relation to the world as we would have initially wanted. We discover that the concepts we privileged to explain how we can obtain knowledge cannot bear the theoretical burden we assigned them (Marušić 2010:68; Fogelin 1994:206). The second is that we remain within a distinctive rational engagement with the world, in revising, restructuring, re-thinking how we live and go by the appearances, depending on how we decide to inhabit our world (Marušić 2010:76).[63] One of the outcomes of this research will be that this rational task is at bottom sceptical, as that which allows us to reflect and stand back on what seems to us to be the case, and constitutes an essentially intersubjective endeavour.

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1 Cf. AT I:421; III:420; IV:30; Garber 1986:85; Curley 1978:35.

2 In this sense, Descartes belongs to a tradition from Pyrrhonism to Hegel (cf. Sosa 2009:150). Hegel's conception of scepticism as turning against arbitrary presuppositions and assurances – starkly influenced by Pyrrhonism (PH I:12, 20, 65, 175; II:19, 96; M VIII:103-6, 159) –, and its role as the negative and rational side of philosophy is visible from his early writings in

Jena (1802:322-3) to his later *Encyclopaedia Logic* (1830:§24Z3, §78-9; cf. on this Vieweg 2007:45-9; Heidemann 2011:93; 2018:435-6). On the *rational* essence of Pyrrhonism in instituting a *rational* demand on knowledge cf. Barnes 1990:143ff; Perin 2010:50, 114-121 and Sienkiewicz 2018:44-6 and the end of this chapter.

[3] When in the *Rules* (AT X:363-4) he presents the precepts required to arrive at knowledge of things, he identifies only arithmetic and geometry as the disciplines that can satisfy them due to their use of rational arguments the certainty of their reasonings (ibid:365, VI:7).

[4] A further similarity with the early Hegel. The need for philosophy arises from the "rigidified opposition between subjectivity and objectivity" (Hegel 1801a:62-4; 1801b:91; 1830:§24) due to the contingent perspective of the time. Scepticism finds its proper application "against ordinary common sense ... against the ordinary consciousness, which holds fast to the given, the fact, the finite" (1802:332), cf. Vieweg 2007:23-5. The agreement also extends on understanding scepticism in isolation as something that merely *nullifies* epistemic claims (Hegel 1830:§81; 1825:359; Heidemann 2018:437).

[5] See on this Grene 1999:558.

[6] Michael Williams (2010:293) identifies this as the *doxastic norm* obtained via implementation of the sceptical procedure when we recognise that our method is unsuited to our epistemic goals due to a problematic obstacle.

[7] This placing rigorous demands on knowledge has been recognised by most contemporary commentators, such as Charles Larmore (2014:62) and Ernest Sosa (2016:247), who argues that certainty is to "hit the mark of truth entirely due to superlatively avoiding error ... [endorsing a belief as correct] requires certainty and the belief must manifest infallible competence".

[8] For some reflections on Cartesian demands for infallibilism cf. Larmore 2006:29.

[9] This is the same basis upon which Williams understands scepticism not as a natural aspect of our engagement with reality, but as something which in order to be cogent needs to presuppose the same foundationalism it is trying to attack, in the way "the rabbit emerges out of the conjuror's hat" (Williams 1996:59).

[10] Cf. Curley 2006:30, Larmore 2014:62, Hookway 1990:68-9, Fumerton 2018:4677. Bernard Williams (1978:45-6) adopts a more nuanced conception of what the foundations of knowledge require, highlighting that they pertain specifically to the *possibility* of knowledge.

[11] See also in *The Search for Truth* (AT X:513).

[12] The distinction has been received in contemporary epistemology by Ernest Sosa, who ties *cognitio* to first-order animal knowledge, apt belief whose correctness manifests the required epistemic competence (2016:233), and *scientia* to the higher-order, reflective knowledge which requires reflective endorsement of that aptness as that which allows one to avoid *error* (ibid:250). See Baz 2014:268 for a criticism of Sosa's aptness as having anything to do with 'everyday knowledge'.

[13] We cannot here investigate more in detail Descartes' taxonomy of *certainty*, such as metaphysical, moral, and psychological certainty. See the work of Peter Markie (1981; 1986:36-39, 197-200), and some passages in Descartes' work (AT VI:37-8; VII:65, 69-80, 73, 471, 475

[14] Cf. *The Principles of Philosophy* (AT VIIIA:5-7), and the *Discourse* (AT VI:32-40).

[15] Cf. Curley 1978:86-91 who ties the scenarios of doubt introduced here as progressively general and encompassing "explanation[s] of error". This aspect will be contested in this research, as from chapter two onwards it is argued that the sceptical issue goes well beyond mere truth of our knowledge claims

[16] However, these are sometimes presented as giving only a minimal ground of suspicion or are even *feeble* reasons outright (AT VII:162). While this is enough to generate suspension of assent this suggests that Descartes doesn't always have in clear sight what is to be a *reason* for doubt. Cf. Markie 1986:42-6; Wachbrit 1996:123.

[17] See on this Owens 2008:166; Hill 2012:53-4.

[18] Cf. for this reading Curley (1993:15) who highlights that these certainties appear to barely miss the mark for the metaphysical assurance Descartes is after. Robert Wachbrit (1996:113) takes these passages to signal that Descartes' never considers these opinions false and is merely *pretending* them to be. Therefore, there is no actual *discovery* of doubt, against commentators like Bernard Williams (1978:56) who argues that the evil demon marks the arrival of a new epistemological development, or Harry Frankfurt, who views Descartes as actively believing deception is occurring (1970:86). While Wachbrit's reading might be onto something, this risks viewing Descartes as acting in mere pretence – against his outspoken resolution (AT VII:24, 34) – because he establishes the sceptical possibility from the domain of what is already assumed as secure (Baz 2014:286, Clarke 1972:766). There is however no psychological impossibility of doubting out of more than mere pretence.

[19] One of the contentions of this research will be that scepticism, in order not to be dismissed as self-refuting, is not narrowly motivated on matters of *indistinguishability*.

[20] See Polyander's reply to Eudoxus in the *Search for Truth* about the claim that it is ridiculous to trust our senses due to their occasional unreliability (AT X:510).

[21] Cf. Lennon&Hickson (2013:11, 14) on how this is connected to the *rational* aspect of methodological doubt in Descartes.

[22] Sosa's account of cognition in terms of Situation, Shape, and Skill – deeply influenced by Cartesian epistemology – is an example of how even in unfavourable circumstances we retain a general normative competence (2016:83) allowing us to navigate our way among the possibility of error.

[23] The rejection of sense-certainty on the basis of something like a lunacy argument is something a classical or Scholastic *empiricist* would do (Larmore 2006:23)

[24] On this reading of the dreaming threat, cf. Hookway 1990:50 and Williams 2001:69-70.

[25] For the idea of begging the question once dreaming's undercutting property is recognized, cf. Curley 1978:51.

[26] The next chapter will show some reason to doubt this as well.

[27] This establishes a genuine *fourth* variety of doubt. We'll argue in this research that no actual deceptive scenario is required for scepticism. This *flawed nature* possibility is representative of the core sceptical issues about the validity of any reason in general we ground our knowledge claims on. For an opposing interpretation of this transition, based on Descartes' perceived resolution to deceive himself, cf. Wachbrit 1996:115. However, Wachbrit does understand the argument from flawed origin to have independent strength even when considered apart from the evil demon possibility (ibid:128). Lennon&Hickson (2013:16) argue instead that the flawed nature argument is to be understood both as an example of a God that would merely *allow* us to be deceived and as an improvement over the evil demon hypothesis. This is because the latter requires active deception on behalf of the demon and wilful self-deceit, which are dispelled as *implausible* reasons for doubt after the discovery of the *Cogito*. This reading appears unwarranted. The discovery of the cogito is the first instance of a clear and distinct perception which cannot be doubted, but it is epistemically meagre until a proof of the transcendent ground for all clear and distinct perceptions is reached. It might be impossible for me to doubt that I am thinking right now, but this does not tell me much on its own concerning what I can know about the world. All it tells so far concerns a psychological impossibility about me.

[28] The choice of Conant's analysis is not casual, as he tries to show the different domain that pertains to scepticism as a problem revolving the very *aboutness* of experience, what he calls *Kantian Scepticism* (Conant 2012:28), which can be very summarily expressed as Kant's question in the letter to Marcus Herz: "On what grounds rests the reference of what in us is called representation to the object?" (Kant 1772:130). More on this in chapters five and six.

[29] For an acknowledgment by Descartes of his predecessors cf. his reply to Mersenne (AT VII:130).

[30] See in fact Williams' depiction of *Agrippan* Scepticism, one of the main guises of ancient Pyrrhonism as establishing a *universal* problematic (2001:61-4).

[31] This development converges in a substantial manner with Kant's treatment of 'replacement change' or *Wechsel*, in the first analogy of experience (1787:A182/B224). Only in presence of something that persists can experience be possible, and change in appearances are all alterations of those entities that undergo the relevant experience. This necessarily involves the inquiring intellect (cf. Allison 2004:239ff).

[32] Descartes is quite close to Hegel's reflections on what constitutes perception of an everyday object: "The *this* is therefore posited ad *not-this*, or as *sublated*, and thereby as not nothing but as a determinate nothing, or as a *nothing of a specific content*, namely, of *the This*. The sensuous is thereby itself still present, but not as it is supposed to be in immediate certainty, or as the singular that was mean, but instead as the universal, or as that which is determined to be a *property*" (Hegel 1806:§113). Hegel rejects the idea that the intelligibility of experience rests on immediate experiences of sensory *givenness*; the very ground of determinate content of experience – the authority of sensible experience – is instead a matter of its *excluding* what it cannot be (cf. Brandom 2019:134, 138). In both Descartes and Hegel the activity of reason in investigating how we know has an effect on the object of knowing (Bristow 2007:237), as in the passage of the Introduction of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* that the examination changes both the knower's criteria and what is known (1806:§85, Brandom 2019:89-90; Emundts 2018:77). The activity of our rational faculty is the capacity "to think in and through ideal universal [conceptual and normative] schemes" (Limnatis 2010:179).

[33] Cf. on this aspect Loeb 1990:116; Koistinen 2014:225; Alanen 2014:100.

[34] See for example Cunning 2010:92; Morris 2014:107.

[35] For similar readings of the passage as having therapeutic characters, see Macarthur 2003:179; Cunning 2010:97; Morris 2014:121.

[36] Cf. Cling 1985:148,153; Fumerton 2018:4680

[37] Cf. *The Search for Truth* (AT X:512), the *Principles of Philosophy* (VIIIA:9, 41-2), and the *Meditations* themselves (AT VII:12, 14, 52-3, 131-4, 555)

[38] Cf. Hatfield 1993:264-5 and Garber 1986:83 on this reading.

[39] Mere abstraction is conceived by Descartes as something suspicious. What matters most is a *determinate act of* thinking (Cottingham 1993:35). On this he continues his agreement with Hegel. Cf. Hegel 1801b:96-7; 1830:§19Z2; 1806:§§33-7, §82. See on this Heidemann 2011:82-3.

[40] This is also valid as an answer to Williams' contention (1996:17) that scepticism is unnatural because it rests on completely unnatural demands of systematic unity of knowledge. Descartes in the *Meditations* establishes why the naive stance ought to be abandoned. The appearance of scepticism on the scene is then a logical consequence This explains why as Barry Stroud highlighted (1984:39), scepticism's grip does appeal to something *deep* in our nature and condition. As Hill notices (2012:37), in Kantian terms the Scholastic reliance and trust on the empirical is nothing more than a form of *Transcendental Dogmatism*.

[41] Employing scepticism as a weapon of reason to turn on their heads dogmatic conceptions, guiding us through a systematic path towards true knowledge, is Hegel's idea of 'self-fulfilling scepticism' (1806:§78; Heidemann 2010:163), as his understanding of the dialectical structure of Plato's *Parmenides* attests (Hegel 1802:323-4; cf. Düsing 1990:181-2; Daskalaki 2017:29)

[42] For other instances of such passages see the fourth Replies (AT VII:249) or the sixth Meditation (ibid:72-82).

[43] Cf. Cunning 2010:60-6, Curley 1986:157-9.

[44] This approach is paralleled by Hegel in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, where he raises each conception of knowing, from naive sense certainty and propositional perception to Kantian transcendental idealism and shows how each, by pointing beyond itself, fails to satisfy its own criteria and leads to the development of the next form of knowledge (Hegel 1806:§85-6;

Heidemann 2011:84, 87). In Descartes this begins with a *decision*, the maxim for assent, a resolution to find the truth by doubting everything that is not absolutely certain. For Hegel, the modern tendency of seeking criteria for rational thinking and for knowledge, *before* actually engaging with real inquiry is its most crucial limit (Hegel 1806:§73; 1830:§10, §41Z).

[45] Notice however that for Hegel this is also the limit of Cartesian methodological scepticism, conceiving thought itself as *immediate*, making his sceptical method reach not far enough. See. Hegel 1802:329, 337; 1825:332; 1830:§64, cf. Forster 1989:14-17, 21 and Brandom 2019:39-40.

[46] Broughton, who is eager in highlighting divergences between Cartesianism and Pyrrhonism, identifies a clear convergence between the two here. Their difference ultimately lies in the respective goals of the stances (2002:60-1).

[47] Fine (2000:195-6) seems to include this in one of the reasons why Pyrrhonism has been received as more *modest* than Cartesian doubt, but it doesn't seem to fit with the other elements she presents for this verdict.

[48] For appeals to this distinction cf. Perin 2008:54; Broughton 2002:64-6;, Curley 1978:86-89. Academic scepticism instead did provide something resembling scenarios. On this see Broughton 2002:81; Williams 2010:308; Striker 1983:124.

[49] And this concerns not only the individual assertions and claims made by the dogmatist, but also the methodological criteria selected, so that the sceptic can raise a problem about the procedure of apprehension of objects and concepts (PH II.1-12). This is the engine for the *Problem of the Criterion* which we'll investigate in chapters four and five.

[50] Striker (1983:121) argues that this is the most important aspect of the ten modes, and that its presence can be found in the following passages: PH I.88, 8, 102-3, 112, 121, 189; II.39-41.

[51] Cf. Johnsen 2001:559 for the idea that reading the modes as comprising a relativistic strategy requires endorsing a kind of Platonism.

[52] For another anti-relativistic perspective cf. Annas&Barnes 1985 who argue that relativism is not the conclusion of the sceptical modes (ibid:98), albeit they acknowledge that the two have a complex relationship, as the eight mode starts from relativity to scepticism (ibid:130-1). Gaukroger defends the relativistic reading against Annas&Barnes, arguing that ancient sceptics were considered relativists and that ancient relativism could stablish a form of systematic doubt through the employment of the modes (1995:372-3, 382). The modes of relativity strike specifically at the naturalistic construal of perception (ibid:378).

[53] Cf. Sienkiewicz 2018:127-8; Striker 1983:33, 2001:121, and Woodruff 2010:219. Annas&Barnes (1985:29) suggest that Sextus' presentation of the ten modes is influenced in a crucial manner by the later Agrippan tropes. They also argue that some of the modes are overall quite fragile (ibid:41-2). Woodruff (2010:216) argues that the only interpretation that could ground the modes as effective is to read them as inducing suspension from belief in what has been forcefully shown not to be the case. However, this appears of limited usefulness.

[54] This is a quite common subgrouping, cf. Hankinson 1995:182; Fogelin 1994:116-7; Williams 2010:296; Bullock 2016:413.

[55] Cf. Sienkiewicz (2018:22-5) for an analysis of the difference between *diaphonia* simpliciter and *anepikritos diaphonia*, and Barnes 1990:17-20 for their interpretations concerning *undecidability*.

[56] The mode of relativity is usually considered to be the weakest of the five modes, and it is usually kept separate in ascertaining the efficacy of the Net. It is generally considered a *lesser mode* or grounded on *diaphonia* (Barnes 1990:113; Hankinson 1995:185; Woodruff 2010:224-5), notwithstanding the fact that Sextus does seem to employ it on par with the others (PH I.177; II.36; M VIII.161-2). Sienkiewicz (2018:148ff) argues that it is incompatible with *diaphonia*, and that after all, the sceptic is no relativist. Bullock (2016:427-31) argues instead that the mode of relativity is the only one that saves the Agrippan modes from dogmatism.

[57] Cf. Vogt 1998:53; Hankinson 1995:24.

[58] The sceptic is not committed to rules of inference as being *true* (Machuca 2009:107). However, this is an objection that is still raised meaningfully today, cf. Bullock 2016:414. We'll say something more on this in chapter three where an epistemological counterpart of the argument will be briefly analysed. But see also Sextus himself in his attack against the criterion of truth when he answers whether he is begging the question against the dogmatist by implicitly using a criterion himself (M VII.440-44).

[59] See PH I.130, 192; II.79; III.29; M VIII.473-7. Cf. on these aspects Machuca 2009:118-22; 2019:204; Johnsen 2001:538-9, and Hankinson 1995:192.

[60] Even the Agrippan modes might fail in their task, cf. Perin 2010:28; Hankinson 1995:183.

[61] Perin, who supports the idea that the search for truth is an integral part of Pyrrhonism, sees the therapeutic impulse as incompatible with this aspect (2010:118-21). This seems to be predicated on the mistaken idea that philosophical therapy can only be conceived as anti-rationalist and quietist. However, this is not the case. Cf. Machuca 2019:214-8 for a reply to Perin, and Quante 2011:53-5 for a broader perspective on this idea drawing from Hegel.

[62] Cf. Machuca 2019:212, the suspension of judgment does not affect our 'psychological hard-wiring'.

[63] Marušić defends the idea that nothing *specific* follows from this realization (2010:76-8). This should be taken to indicate that the revision of our commitments is not a specific *prescriptive* enterprise, we are not given a set of determinate rules that guide us on exactly what to do next as a result of sceptical reflection. But in a sense something does happen through scepticism. We went up the ladder and we threw it away. We can now understand where our distress concerning our knowledge-claims came from, but we're not able to get these back in the way we experienced them before. The epistemic and philosophical task after the sceptical therapy becomes one of *rational recollection*.

Chapter 2

The Closure Problem

In the previous chapter, we introduced radical scepticism along its Cartesian lines. We began introducing the idea that while it may be mostly considered a philosophical foe, scepticism might have more in store than simply being an opponent to be defeated. In this chapter, we turn to the contemporary discussion of radical scepticism, which individuates the problem as arising from principles belonging to our ordinary epistemic practices. If it were shown that scepticism is the product of otherwise completely unobjectionable epistemic reasoning, then the encounter with scepticism would have to be taken quite seriously, as it would mean that we have met the enemy and they are us.

The following quotation from Peter Unger manages to present quite aptly the reasoning behind the standard sceptical argument as received in contemporary epistemology:

> Since any of your experiences may be due to a scientist's operations, they can never give you any reasons for believing that there is no scientist deceiving falsely into believing that there are rocks … But, if you are reasonable in believing that there are rocks, the first premise will read, then, on the assumption of reasoning, you *can* be reasonable in believing that there is no such scientist. Therefore, by this parallel argument, you ***aren't*** reasonable in believing that there are rocks (Unger 1975:39)

While the discussion is at times modelled along the lines of either knowledge, justification, or reasonable belief, we'll hold that justification is at least a necessary element of knowledge, and a justified belief cannot be a non-rational belief.[1] The premise mentioned in the passage is the conditional "if you know that there are rocks, then you know there is no evil scientist tricking you into falsely believing that there are rocks". However, if your experiences cannot give you knowledge of the consequent of the conditional, this means that you cannot run the modus ponens on the argument. What is left available is instead the modus tollens, which denies the antecedent. You do not know that there are rocks. This generalises to all ordinary experiential propositions. Radical scepticism follows. The entailment expressed by the conditional above is, unfortunately, quite mundane. If you know an ordinary proposition, this should entail the negation of whatever proposition is incompatible with it, including that you falsely believe that proposition. The general

intuition is that it is enough to accept this very plausible principle to make the sceptical reasoning irresistible (Stroud 1984:23-4).

The principle is called the *Closure Principle*. It establishes competent epistemic deduction pertaining to all propositions that we can claim to know. The plan for this chapter is to present the argument and ascertain whether it is indeed capable of engendering radical scepticism. This will be done by analysing several contemporary objections to the sceptical capability of the principle. They target whether it is consistent or of any use to the sceptic, whether the argument based on it is blatantly question-begging and finally, whether it endorses a mistaken conception of perceptual reasons. The proposed answer is that these objections fail as they are all guilty of mischaracterising the sceptical reasoning established by the principle. While current understanding focuses on scepticism as treading on matters of veridicality of our beliefs, the real problem to be uncovered concerns what kind, if any, epistemic credentials our beliefs can enjoy. As long as we are not able to provide positive reasons in their support, we are in a state of epistemic ignorance that forbids us from executing the modus ponens route. Most of the debate on closure has focused on whether the principle should be rejected to avoid the sceptical conclusion, but this debate won't be a focus of this chapter.

2.1 The Closure Based Sceptical Argument

The Closure principle concerning knowledge can be formalized initially as:

CP) For any S, p, q, if S knows that p and p implies q, then S knows that q

This principle is formulated for knowledge, but it can also be considered to be valid for justification. While knowledge closure is considered the thorny issue, the debate is sometimes couched in terms of justification.

As any epistemologist will immediately recognize, the above formulation of CP is indefensible. It implies an unrealistic kind of logical omniscience.[2] It is impossible to acquire new knowledge merely in virtue of the logical entailment between a known proposition and what that proposition entails. This is, at times, an overlooked aspect because of the superficial resemblance of closure to modus ponens (Dretske 2005:28). However, knowledge-closure is more than a merely logical relation. It establishes an

epistemic one. Therefore, we can amend the principle as follows following Brueckner (1985:89):

> **CP')** For any S, p, q, if S knows p, and knows that p entails q, then S knows q

This appears to be a less-contentious expression concerning a principle of epistemic deduction. It establishes the reasonable idea that when S knows something is the case and that S knows that this implies something else being the case, S is at least *in the position* to know that the entailed proposition is the case. Of course, given that we're interested in a principle of epistemic deduction, we have to exclude possible reasoning errors. We have thusly the final formulation:

> **CP***) For any S, p, q, If S knows p, knows that p implies q, and competently deduces q from p, thereby coming to believe q while retaining her knowledge that p, S knows q (Hawthorne 2004:34; 2005:43).[3]

CP* seems to provide a satisfactory principle upholding competent epistemic deduction. Knowledge is supposed to be closed under this deductive operator because all propositions that belong to the set of what can be known are presumed to fall under it (Kvanvig 2006:256; 2008:457). It also expresses the primary motivation for why we would want to endorse such a principle. It explains how epistemic deduction *expands* our knowledge from what we know to what we don't know yet.[4]

This rather plausible principle generates a fundamental obstacle once scepticism enters the picture. It ends up depriving us of ordinary propositions. Let a sceptical hypothesis [SK] be any scenario, condition, or epistemic situation that is incompatible with knowledge [K] of any ordinary proposition [H] and whose actuality cannot be ascertained by our knowledge of a specific sceptical proposition.[5] The closure-based argument is then:

> **1C)** If S knows that here is a hand, then S knows the denial of the sceptical hypothesis [KH→K¬SK – CP*]
>
> **2C)** S doesn't know ¬SK [¬(K¬SK) – *minor premise*]
>
> **3C)** S doesn't know H [¬KH – 1,2, mt]

Why should this argument be heeded? Couldn't we apply the modus ponens instead of the modus tollens, given that it seems ordinarily unquestionable that we know H? This is the neo-Moorean answer to scepticism, which argues that denial of SK – i.e., knowledge that there is an external world – can be had directly via epistemic deduction from ordinary propositions we know. This is the position we'll engage in the next chapter.[6] Now the question is: how can we substantiate the sceptical modus tollens route so that it possesses at least intuitive pull?

One of the main ideas for this possibility is due to the radical character of external world scepticism. Whatever is hindering our knowledge of everyday propositions is not something we could discover or rule out via simple empirical investigation. Otherwise, we wouldn't have on our hands a genuine global sceptical possibility. The general idea is that neither a posteriori evidence nor a priori reasons concerning this evidence can do the trick because they cannot grant us knowledge of ordinary propositions. The standard strategy is to reject one of the aspects of this idea or deny the closure principle (Avnur 2012:2-4).

If the modus tollens is defended in this way, then the argument can be presented more perspicuously to highlight a significant constraint of the problem that anti-sceptical proposals must address. Given that the implication $KH \rightarrow K\neg SK$ bears for epistemological proposals the hallmarks of a material conditional, there is prima facie reason to endorse the following relationships of epistemic dependence:

I) KH is sufficient for $K\neg SK$

II) $K\neg SK$ is necessary for KH

III) $\neg(K\neg SK)$ is sufficient for $\neg H$, which is the contrapositive of I)[7]

Relation III allows for the reformulation of the problem in this way

1C*) If $\neg(K\neg SK)$ then $\neg KH$

2C*) $\neg(K\neg SK)$

3C*) $\neg KH$ (mp)

This formulation is called the *Argument from Ignorance*.[8] It clarifies that the sceptical argument establishes an epistemic relation between proposition H and the denial of the sceptical hypothesis. *As long as* we are in a situation of ignorance concerning whether SK obtains, we cannot properly lay claim to know H. This formulation appears to give prima facie support to the sceptical modus tollens if no argument or reason is established as valid to grant us antecedent knowledge of ¬SK (Hetherington 2004:105-6). As long as things are left in this way, it appears unwarranted to pursue the modus ponens. We need reasons to claim that we are not in a situation where knowledge of ordinary proposition is unavailable to us. The minor premise or the *ignorance* premise of the closure-based argument seems therefore intuitive. One cannot claim to know H unless one also has concurrent knowledge of the denial of the sceptical hypothesis.[9]

This reasoning might be objected to by arguing that the ignorance-based modus tollens relies on a necessity element that should not be lightly granted, for example, in Ernest Sosa's formulation (1988:154).

C1) Assumption: S knows that if S knows H, then S knows ¬SK

C2) Assumption: If C1, then, if S is to know H, S must know ¬SK

C3) From C1 and C2: If S is to know H, S must know ¬SK

C4) Assumption: S doesn't know ¬SK

C5) From C3, C4; S doesn't know H

For Sosa, premise C2 is what does the trick, the necessity clause requiring a more complex defence than the one we offered. This is undoubtedly correct. However, its defence cannot occur at this stage as it involves going beyond the closure principle.[10] However, in the absence of a positive argument as to how H is available to be known *before* antecedent knowledge of ¬SK, we have a prima facie entitlement to regard the sceptical argument as sound. After all, at this point, faced with this argument, professing ignorance concerning our epistemic status doesn't seem too much of a stretch.

The outcome so far is that in the absence of a positive argument as to how H is available as something to be known *before* antecedent knowledge of ¬SK there can be a prima facie entitlement to regard the sceptical argument as sound. Professing ignorance about

the merit of our epistemic standing does not seem an unwarranted option. Until proven otherwise, we have no warrant for holding the epistemic merit of empirical evidence or other evidential reasons we might appeal to as knowledge-conducive. What we have might be, at best, an educated guess, falling short of knowledge. Closure reveals its negative side. From being a helpful principle of epistemic deduction to robbing us of knowledge we presumed to possess unproblematically.

In many analyses of the problem, it is customary to address how to engage it by pointing out that the closure-based problem can also be understood as a paradox consisting of the following inconsistent triad:

A) We do not trivially know ¬SK,

B) We accept the closure principle

C) We have widespread everyday knowledge[11]

Rejecting C is scepticism. Rejecting A is the neo-Moorean stance. Rejecting B is closure denial which would undercut the connection between A and C, as their inconsistency would need closure to be established.

Even if we won't be scrutinising the denial route here it is helpful for our purposes to rehearse the insight that lies behind it. Those who deny closure, such as Dretske (1970), Nozick (1981), and arguably Goldman (1976),[12] hold that counterexamples – such as Dretske's Zebra case – to closure can be found in ordinary circumstances. This means that it is possible to know a proposition H without corresponding knowledge of the denial of the sceptical hypothesis. This is because even if knowing H would imply ¬SK, H, and SK cannot in principle be evidentially or perceptually discriminated over the alternative. Thus, the possibility of SK is not epistemically relevant to our knowledge of H. This does not mean that competent deduction is entirely jettisoned. It merely allows for some propositions to escape the deductive operator, making knowing via competent deduction a non-fully penetrating operator (Dretske 1970:1007; 2005:31).

Dretske's main counterexample is the case of zebras in a zoo. You pass by a zoo and see zebras in the distance. You would reasonably claim to know this fact, but would you be willing at the same time to rule out that they're not cunningly disguised mules? By

closure, you should. If they're zebras, they're not mules. Dretske's idea, however, is that we do not execute the entailment to that conclusion. This is because for Dretske, we cannot conclude they're not mules from the mere experience of seeing zebras. If we retained closure, our zebra-evidence gets neutralised (1970:1016, 1981:368). If the deductive operator were fully penetrating i.e. closed, then the evidence that supports our knowledge of H would be neutralized vis-à-vis the non-discriminable alternative. However, if we reject the closure principle of competent deduction, we won't reach this conclusion. Our evidence and the knowledge it grounds cannot transmit to certain contrast consequences, *heavyweight implications* of our ordinary perceptual claims (1970:1017, 2005:30). Such are those implications of propositions that cannot be known via the same basis that granted us knowledge of the proposition they're entailed by.[13] The bottom line is that even if evidence could have among its implications some propositions that appear at first legitimate conclusions, "no evidence transmits to *all* the implications of what it is evidence for" (2005:35, cf. 1981:375).

The rejection of closure has divided epistemology mostly along internalist/externalist lines.[14] Endorses of closure call it 'implausible' (Feldman 1995:487) or ridiculous by analogy with Lewis Carroll's tortoise (Hawthorne 2004:39, 2005:46). Prominent externalists (Goldman 1976, Nozick 1981) have endorsed it.[15] Keith DeRose famously labelled it a gateway to 'abominable conjunctions' (1995:28). The question for us here is different. The goal is to defend the principle as being capable of establishing a sceptical problem and we move now to analyse specific contemporary objections to this very possibility. The inconsistent triad constituting the paradox-formulation of the closure-based argument will be crucial for our purposes because we will counter against such stances their neglect of A in the paradox. Additionally, they fail to show its question-begging character. By replying to such arguments it will become clearer which constraints are in required for a proper anti-sceptical strategy to function, and most importantly, what motivates the perceived strength of the sceptical problem.

2.2 Formal Objections to Closure

What we call here *formal* objections are named as such because they argue that the principle itself cannot lead to a sceptical argument. They, therefore, do not refute the

argument by showing that we possess genuine knowledge of H-propositions, nor do they argue that there is some unspecified assumption in the argument which leads it to fail.

The first of these arguments is due to Marian David and Ted Warfield (2008:154-5), and it is the less problematic of the two. They contend that if the closure argument is dutifully specified, then the corresponding sceptical argument must fail. This is because it would implicitly endorse something like: For every S, H, if S *believes* that H, then S knows that H entails ¬SK. They contend that it is implausible for ordinary human agents to subscribe to it despite its plausibility to epistemologists. Requiring that any perceptual belief of a layperson entails the denial of the sceptical hypothesis is to require too much. The argument cannot work because it relies on a too-sophisticated notion of epistemic deduction. Given that the sophisticated notion was provided to shield it from being implausible or too weak for sceptical purposes, the principle the argument exploits cannot be made less sophisticated without becoming useless for scepticism.

It does seem unsuitable for a mere *belief* to entail or to require knowledge of H→¬SK. However, it is not clear why the argument needs to assume even implicitly such a dubious entailment.[16] David and Warfield are targeting a different, more plausible idea: if one's perceptual belief that H is to be used as a knowledge-claim for S, then S has to know that H entails ¬SK. Now, is this principle so implausible? Perhaps on the surface, it might look again too demanding but imagine the following dialogue. You ask a relatively naïve subject whether they know that 'here is a hand.' They respond affirmatively. You then ask them whether they know there exist real, non-imaginary, non-dreamlike objects. It is not clear why the naïve subject couldn't just point to the very same hand you were both looking at a second ago. It may be an implicit belief, but surely if the naïve subject has enough command of *ordinary* epistemic concepts to endorse the belief 'here is a hand' as a knowledge-claim, they are *at least* in the position to conclude that there are external, hence non-virtual, objects. This is what CP* states. If the naïve subject were unable to make this deduction, we should question whether the belief 'here is a hand' they possess is worth anything concerning knowledge.

A more poignant formal objection to closure is due to Sherrilyn Roush. She targets the closure-based argument because she argues it relies on a false premise, which only

appears to us as true because of the sloppy way epistemic implications are treated. This is “the claim that the thing we seem obviously to know [H], implies the thing we seem on inspection obviously not to know [¬SK]” (2010:243).

Roush reasons that a subject could be a brain-in-a-vat while possessing hands. In this case, even if it were true for S that ‘here is a hand’ this wouldn’t imply ¬SK. Hence, this scenario would be trivially powerless to ascertain whether S is envatted, and the sceptic can agree (ibid:247). However, by allowing the implication between H and ¬SK to lapse in this case, Roush’s gambit is set in motion. The inconsistency between A and C of the paradoxical triad has disappeared without overt denial of closure. In this case, knowledge of an ordinary proposition [C] can be allowed without generating a contradiction with A, as this instance of knowledge would trivially fail to entail via competent deduction ¬SK (Avnur et al. 2011:439).

Roush argues that at this point, the sceptic has a choice. Either she allows knowledge of ‘here is a hand’ to the envatted-with-hands [H∧BIV] subject – which would contradict the sceptical contention that we have no such knowledge – or she specifies SK to express that one is a handless BIV [¬H∧BIV] so that the inconsistency of the paradox is restored. However, if the sceptic opts for this choice, now for the H∧BIV subject is trivial to know the denial of the sceptical hypothesis. She has hands, after all, and SK now specifically spells out ‘no hands allowed.’ Thus, it seems that one of the two propositions H or ¬SK must be granted to the subject, and both seem to imply a result inconsistent with scepticism. Only by specifying the scenario as [¬H∧BIV] would the closure argument be alive, but at the price of having won knowledge of an ordinary proposition H.

However, this result might be at first trivial. If you are an envatted brain with hands, then you are not a handless BIV. Have we made any properly anti-sceptical progress? Roush argues that it is so. Now we can repeat the same gambit for countless cases of purported knowledge (Roush 2010:251; Kraft 2015:277). Imagine a case where the envatted subject not only has hands but a whole human body. Additionally, while envatted, she has experiences of interacting with objects which also exist outside the vat, and she is physically interacting with them with her body while envatted. The dilemma is again before

the sceptic. Does the subject know all the propositions corresponding to what she's doing, unbeknownst to her, both in and outside the vat? After all, all of these propositions ceased to be strictly incompatible with SK. This would again amount to knowledge of ordinary propositions. The alternative for the sceptic is then to inflate the sceptical premises to keep the paradox alive in the same fashion presented above to keep the paradoxical triad alive (Roush 2010:248).

However, at this point, the sceptical hypothesis becomes a list of conjuncts of the form (¬H∧BIV), repeated for every possible case in which the subject knows something which could be compatible with the sceptical hypothesis. The list of disjunctions is of the form (¬H∧BIV)∨(¬H*∧BIV)∨(¬H**∧BIV)∨… with the iterations of H being all the conjunctions of propositions that could theoretically be compatible with SK. The sceptic must introduce them in the premises of her argument because, in virtue of this theoretical compatibility, they couldn't issue via closure the paradox.

With this result, Roush brings the fight to a close. These premises became so inflated with so many ordinary propositions that, if we know them – as the envatted-with-hands subject knew she had hands because outside the vat she had in fact hands –, then "there can be no surprise that we also know we are not *brains in vats*, for what is left for us to be systematically deceived about?" (2010:252). By inducing the sceptic to inflate the premises of SK with so many ordinary instances of knowledge, because otherwise, we could *know* them without knowing the denial of the sceptical hypothesis, the result is that the sceptical modus tollens route would close to useless "since there is no assumed obvious knowledge for it to undermine" anymore (ibid.).[17]

It would still be true to say that no amount of ordinary knowledge establishes ¬SK after Roush's inflation gambit has been carried out. After all, this was her initial contention that it does not make sense for what we obviously know to implicate what we obviously do not know. Nevertheless, to believe this to undercut her position misses the point of Roush's overall argument. The sceptic has a dilemma on her hands. Either close the implicational gap between H and ¬SK via premises inflated beyond meaningful sceptical use, *or* allow directly that countless ordinary instances of knowledge are not inconsistent with SK anymore because there is no actual entailment between H and ¬SK to exploit. In neither

cases closure is *denied*, only shown insufficient or even detrimental for sceptical purposes.

Closure on scepticism, then? Not quite. Roush's argument postulates the alternatives mentioned above. One where the closure entailment is broken and knowledge of ordinary propositions cannot establish ¬SK and the other where the entailment is kept alive but becomes useless for the sceptic, a reductio of the sceptical argument which attests that the entailment cannot be endorsed for sceptical purpose. The first route seems suspect on its own. Firstly, it seems that now, given that ordinary propositions are held compatible with SK, we can know for free countless ordinary propositions in virtue of this compatibility. Roush seems to have implicitly defended the denial of the closure principle, notwithstanding her intentions, and allowed for an easy knowledge mechanism.[18] Secondly, it is still unclear why knowledge that 'here is a hand' could not reach up to the denial of the sceptical hypothesis.

Roush will reply that her argument revealed the entailment between H and ¬SK as false, not that there is a legitimate entailment from H to ¬SK which escapes the deductive operator. But this is where more significant troubles lie when we consider the other horn of the dilemma for the sceptic, i.e., buying in Roush's gambit. The gambit works as a reductio of the sceptical argument and reveals that the entailment will fail even if kept on life-support by the sceptic. There might be some extraordinary propositions for which the entailment is still valid, but Roush explicitly says she's no neo-Moorean. Once we realize that the inflation is a reductio, all those ordinary propositions that ended up in the inflated sceptical hypothesis are useless to deliver an anti-sceptical conclusion (2010:256).[19]

However, isn't this already a victory for the sceptic? It is not clear where the motivation for the inflation move should come from. If, as Roush herself states, knowing that 'here is a hand' is perfectly useless to establish ¬SK, why should the sceptic rush to add specifications to her position that would merely make the argument implode? Shouldn't the sceptic merely register that no amount of empirical evidence or other ordinary reasons in support of everyday propositions will do the job, agreeing with Roush's assessment, and leave it at that?

This puzzling outcome is the result of a specifically vitiated understanding of closure-based scepticism. Roush's inflation argument relies on the idea that certain ordinary propositions can be true and compatible with sceptical scenarios. This is unobjectionable. However, instead of recognizing that this indicates how the truth of such propositions has no clear anti-sceptical weight, in her reductio argument, she allows *knowledge* of those very same propositions, which has obvious anti-sceptical weight. Roush seems to permit knowledge of 'here is a hand' to the envatted-with-hands subject just because it is compatible with her being envatted. But this is illicit. While she having hands is compatible with SK, *knowledge* of this fact surely is not. Roush conflates two different categories of epistemological discourse here by treating fact-stating talk and knowledge-claiming talk as the same. But for anti-sceptical purposes, they clearly differ. Even if the envatted-with-hands subject were to utter 'I have hands', this belief would fall short of knowledge. The evidence she is basing the belief on is not adequate for knowledge. It fails to justify that belief.

If this is so, then the sceptic should not give in to the inflationary pressure. She can accept that countless facts can be compatible with SK, but none of these propositions amount to a knowledge claim until the subject has established the denial of the sceptical hypothesis. The ignorance predicament needs to be ruled out if knowledge of any H is to be appropriately claimed, and simply stating that a proposition H happens to be true falls short of this task (cf. Avnur at al. 2011:446). In order to undermine the sceptical argument, KH should be granted, but the sceptic has no requirement to do so and cave to the inflationary pressure as long as some positive ground for the epistemic standing of the belief H has not been established. Roush has merely pointed out that the *proposition* might be true, but this leaves untouched how an envatted-with-hands subject could know this. She could appeal to merely *envatted* evidence, which cannot grant support for non-envatted knowledge.

Ultimately Roush's mistake is to neglect the ignorance clause expressed in the closure argument. This leads her to argue that the sceptic must endorse a reductio of the sceptical argument to keep the closure-entailment alive merely in virtue of the compatibility between the fact that H and the sceptical possibility. But the closure entailment remains

untouched even if the fact that H was true, as it pertains to *knowledge*, not the mere occurrence of the fact that H is true. It appears that Roush overlooks this aspect because she implicitly defends the idea that scepticism strictly hinges on the mere possibility of the belief that H is false. However, scepticism does not require the proposition that functions as the content of that belief to be false. It only needs that no adequate basis for the subject to ascertain its truth be available to the subject. An envatted-with-hands subject has trivially no adequate evidence for this task. Her belief about having hands is true, but it is merely a case of *veritic luck* (Pritchard 2005b:146; Kraft 2012:61), which is intuitively incompatible with knowledge.[20]

This verdict allows us to outline a decisive aspect concerning scepticism: it is mistaken to conceive it as based merely on error-possibilities.[21] Even if our beliefs are true unless we have some positive reason to consider the basis of our beliefs as epistemically adequate, we are still ignorant as to whether our beliefs can amount to knowledge. Therefore, it is mistaken to think that the sceptic must scramble to revise the details of the chosen scenario to amend the possible compatibility between the proposition believed and the scenario itself. Scepticism is effective even if many of our beliefs are all things considered true.[22]

Here seems to be an apt moment to introduce a conceptual categorisation of scepticism that will play a substantial role in chapters four and five and which will appear already in section four of this chapter. Scepticism does not really need error-scenarios to establish its point. The real strength of scepticism resides in attacking rational belief and detaching the connection not between belief and truth but between belief and its rational basis (Schaffer 2010:231). This is what the ignorance formulation expressed. As long as we do not know whether our faculties are in order, whether our environmental circumstances are adequate, or whether some other condition undercuts our beliefs' epistemic merit, we cannot lay claim to that proposition as something known. Scepticism instantiates a problem of ignorance concerning the rational support enjoyed by our beliefs in general. Widely adopted scenarios of error or deception are ways to make this point vivid, but the sceptical point does not hinge on the details of the scenario itself. Scepticism arises from a possible deficiency in how our beliefs originate (Winters 1981:30).

Understanding scepticism as not pivoting entirely or strictly on matters of truth does not involve any revisionary approach or radical shift in perspective. Descartes already endorsed this conception, who did not simply accept clear and distinct perception as the mark our judgments had to possess but sought a ground to properly guarantee such perceptions (AT VII:35, 39).[23] His distinction between *scientia* and mere *cognitio* is predicated precisely on this requirement of positive epistemic status. Sextus Empiricus, with the example of the dark room full of valuables (M VII.52), recognized that even if we stumbled upon a true proposition, as long as we remain in the dark, we have no rational basis to support our belief.[24]

Some objections on this matter are not hard to find. For example, it can be argued that what constitutes the sceptical condition as defective is that the scenario makes it *unlikely* that the belief is true. For example, in the case of dreaming, its status is problematic *because* dreams are often unveridical (Vogel 2004:437-8). Alternatively, sceptical scenarios, while not entailing necessarily the falsity of the belief H, have a content "according to which [the subject] is mistaken as to [H]" (Hetherington 2004:108). This might indicate that even if we are not focusing on matters of veridicality *of the belief,* we are still dealing with errors pertaining to what the subject does, namely basing her belief on an inadequate ground.[25]

Concerning the first objection, it misses the target because the real problem is not that the belief in the scenario is unveridical, but rather that it is the provenance of the belief as endorsed within a sceptical scenario that which undercuts its rational and epistemic standing. Therefore it cannot amount to knowledge.[26]

The second rejoinder is more apt, mainly because the very definition of *veritic* luck says that there is a modally close world where S has that same belief but is instead *false* (de Grefte 2018:3824). But this does not constitute a refutation of the perspective we are proposing. We are rejecting the idea that it is the *mere veridicality* of the belief what matters. Errors related to the subject's grounding a belief on an inappropriate basis are properly instances of the ignorance predicament. Due to the lack of positive reasons that would allow us to ascertain whether the belief was properly formed, we are forbidden from elevating that belief to knowledge, and we're mistaken if we do so nevertheless. What

misses the mark is our performance as epistemic agents. We unwarrantedly claim knowledge based on a belief which does not possess the required epistemic support or credentials. As long as we do not rescue ourselves from this status of ignorance, we have no discernible way of improving our epistemic performance.[27]

Therefore, what Roush has done is deny the implication between any H and ¬SK, but this is of no anti-sceptical consequence. For her argument to work, she should have denied the implication between KH and K¬SK, but this would simply mean denying closure, not showing that closure is constitutively incapable of sustaining a sceptical argument

2.3 Begging the Question

However, the above analysis and criticism might have exposed the sceptical argument to a different flanking attack, namely that the argument is ultimately question-begging against the very possibility of ordinary knowledge. This would be caused by assuming, in the premises of the sceptical argument, our ignorance of those same ordinary propositions that should be established as unknown only in the conclusion of the argument. Recent attempts on this score have been provided by Stephen Hetherington (2009) and Atkins & Nance (2014). We will focus on the former here for brevity, as the question-begging charge is expressed in both in essentially interchangeable terms, with the addition that Atkins&Nance rely substantially on Roush's argument we just objected to.[28]

While Hetherington endorses the error-based conception of scepticism we criticized, it does not seem that his argument overtly relies on it. It instead hinges upon what he calls the *Sceptical-Independence Presumption*. This is nothing else than the relation of epistemic dependence we identified between knowledge of H and knowledge of ¬SK established by closure. Until one knows ¬SK, one cannot count proposition H as among one's evidence or something that can be claimed as known (2009:101), but this is where the sceptical argument is refuted because revealed as question-begging. Hetherington argues that, if we take up the case of dreaming,[29] then the sceptic asks that, in order for S to know p at t, the following requirements be satisfied:

I) S must know that she is not merely dreaming that p at t or earlier

II) S must know, independently at t or earlier, that it is not the case that: she's experiencing p as only seemingly true, that she is merely dreaming p, and that p is not true (ibid:104)

The latter expresses that S must know independently that

$\neg$[(Seeming p as true]$\wedge$(dreaming that p)$\wedge$($\neg$p)]

But this formulation is redundant in Hetherington's eyes because the possibility of dreaming p is a threat to S's knowledge if and only if dreaming that p includes experiencing p as true and p is instead not true. Therefore, it becomes:

$\neg$[(seeming that p is true)$\wedge$($\neg$p)].

Which becomes via DeMorgan's law

[$\neg$(seeming that p)$\vee$(p)]

Hetherington argues that the first disjunct cannot be challenged because having an experience of something means experiencing something as true and is, therefore, a false disjunct.[30] However, this only leaves the disjunct that p is true. This means that the sceptic requires that S, in order to know p and that she is not merely dreaming that p, must independently know that p (ibid:105). This is obviously a question-begging requirement. The epistemic priority on which the sceptical argument relies makes it collapse.

We could simply reply that the formulation of the sceptic's requirements treads on something we already contested, namely that scepticism is effective only if a subject has a feeling that p is true and p is instead false. He seems to commit the same mistake as Roush. If I had a dream of p, which seems to me true in the dream, and after waking up, I found out that p is in fact the case, I wouldn't assign myself knowledge of p when I was dreaming. I would at most record the bizarre coincidence and not consider myself knowledgeable about p until I found out that p while awake. The sceptical argument does not need to rely on antecedent ignorance of any *particular* proposition to function. Its point is general (Kraft 2015:276).

Still, we can substantiate this argument by providing a counterexample that should stop this line of attack in its tracks:

> **Train Schedule:** Imagine you and a friend are at a train station in the middle of nowhere. You have to get back home and check the schedule. It lists three remaining trains for the day, at 6:15p, 7:15, and 8:15. The one you have to catch is at 7:15. Your friend must catch the last one. You form the belief that the train will arrive at 7:15. You also wonder reasonably whether the schedule is outdated. There is no information desk, and your phones have no signal. However, both 6:15 and 7:15 trains arrive as predicted. Your belief was true. When you part with your friend, she is worried that her train will not come as expected because you got no independent confirmation that the schedule was in fact correct. You reply to her in Hetheringtonian fashion, "If you doubt whether the schedule is correct, you require independent knowledge simultaneous negation of these two statements: 'it seems to us that the schedule is correct', and 'the schedule is not correct.' But this amounts to having independent knowledge either that it doesn't seem to us that the schedule is correct *or* that it is correct. The first disjunct is false. The schedule appears correct, doesn't it? Therefore, you require independent knowledge of the other disjunct, which is independent knowledge that the schedule is correct to know that the schedule is correct. This is question-begging. Don't worry, as the schedule was correct for me it will be for you as well".
>
> Unfortunately, it is the case that the schedule is incorrect. They changed arrival times the day before, and now only two trains arrive, one at 6 pm and the other at 7 pm. They both arrived at the times written on the outdated schedule because of a power issue on the line. You yourself did not know that the schedule was correct, and your belief that the train would arrive at 7:15 was merely lucky. Now the friend whose doubt you labelled following Hetherington as 'question-begging' will be waiting in vain for a train that won't come. Her worry was completely reasonable.

The epistemic dependence instituted within the closure argument is therefore not question-begging. It rather expresses a requirement to ascertain whether our beliefs enjoy actual rational support. Of course, this might not be easy vis-à-vis scepticism, and the sceptic knows this. It might be very well impossible to obtain. However, this is far from question-begging against the anti-sceptic. The sceptic is waiting to hear an argument as to how or why this task can be accomplished. Unless provided, we are left in a state of ignorance concerning the epistemic credentials enjoyed by our beliefs, and the closure-based argument can be legitimately run.

2.4 Begging the Question (Virtually)

We can take stock of what we have achieved so far. Neither lines of objection seem to work against closure scepticism. They both neglect or misunderstand the reasons behind the modus tollens route the sceptical argument undertakes. Roush focuses on the compatibility of ordinary propositions with the possibility of SK, missing out that what matters is *knowledge* of those ordinary propositions. As long as a reason to reject the ignorance premise hasn't been provided, there is no ground to argue that SK must be modified to keep the closure implication alive. Hetherington mistakenly believes that the ignorance requirement treads on ignorance of *particular* propositions, which would assume what the sceptical argument is presumed to establish. He also misunderstands that the ignorance problematic acts as a genuine request to defend the epistemic merit of our beliefs. Both approaches additionally implicitly endorse a conception of scepticism as treading strictly on the *falsity* of the beliefs we possess.

However, we might wonder at this point whether this analysis and the counter-objections we proposed haven't rendered the closure argument *useless*. It seems that scepticism has now become a problem of whether it is possible to defend the epistemic status of our beliefs in general, and that if this is something that cannot be done, then the only thing we can conclude is that we do not know the denial of the sceptical hypothesis. This seems scepticism enough. Why require an additional argument based on the closure principle?

This is the intuition behind Peter Klein's objection (1995; 2004) that the closure argument is *virtually* question-begging. This means that "[its conclusion] can be reached by employing only a sub-argument on behalf of one of the premises" (1995:226). In this case, it would be the argument for the minor premise $\neg K \neg SK$. We contend that this is mistaken: knowledge-closure has a prominent role in neutralising evidence we presumed to possess while employing a very intuitive and plausible principle of epistemic deduction. In this way, the intuitive pull of scepticism would also be explained. However, Klein's point is not to be rejected entirely, as we will agree with him that ultimately what motivates scepticism is not the closure argument per se. The problem is that Klein cannot claim this realization due to the idiosyncratic picture of evidential reasons he relies on to make his argument. Additionally, when he considers the possibility that the epistemic priority

relation embodied in the ignorance premise could be in effect independently of his proposed evidential picture, he neglects a situation in which the closure formulation is clearly at work.

Klein's strategy is developed as a choice proposed to the sceptic. Either the sceptic subscribes to the evidential picture that Klein defends, or the closure principle will succumb to Dretske's style counterexamples. The latter choice would undercut the sceptical argument based on closure, but if the sceptic goes along with Klein's evidential framework, then the minor premise of the argument will end up virtually begging the question (ibid:214).[31]

contends that this is mistaken. It glosses over that what justifies ¬SK is not E, but H itself (1981:30). Klein argues that E and H play distinctively different roles as bases for the beliefs they respectively justify. He endorses a distinction between *externally situated evidence* and *internally situated reasons*. The former is justifying evidence that comes from outside the circle of beliefs the subject already possesses. It could also be conceived as the kind of evidence one obtains through one's environment. The latter is when the beliefs one already has function as the basis for new beliefs (1995:216-9). Therefore, E justifies H as a matter of externally situated evidence, and H justifies ¬SK acting as an internally situated reason. Klein contends that this is the only way Dretske's style counterexamples to closure won't work. He agrees that the perceptual evidence grounding seeing 'here is a zebra' is insufficient to justify 'that is not a disguised mule'. If all we had as evidential reasons stopped at the level of external evidence, we'd be forced to deny closure (ibid:221). However, once we admit into the circle of our beliefs the evidence E, we can use the belief H we now possess thanks to E as an internally situated reason to conclude ¬SK. The basis of the two beliefs is different. E is the basis for H, but H itself only is the basis for ¬SK. This is the only way, says Klein, to keep the closure principle alive (ibid:223-5, cf. De Almeida 2019:161).[32]

However, Klein argues that this forced choice the sceptic has to take will lead to her closure-based argument being virtually question-begging. The epistemic dependence between H and ¬SK was predicated on sharing the same evidential ground, a picture Klein has now rejected. Without this presupposition in place, the epistemic priority relation

between H and ¬SK becomes non-univocal. Consequently, to Klein's picture of evidential relations, he argues that the sceptical argument can only be successful via a sub-argument for its minor premise ¬SK.

The question-begging charge takes place in all the various possibilities at our disposal that can capture the now non-univocal priority relations between H and ¬SK:

> 1) KH is epistemically prior and available as a reason R for K¬SK
>
> 2) They are epistemically on par, and there is a reason R prior to both that serves as a reason for either
>
> 3) K¬SK is epistemically prior and available as a reason R for KH (Klein 2004:172)[33]

Let us delve into the first possibility,[34] which Klein has in mind when talking about the argument being *virtually* question-begging. H is an internally situated reason available to S for ¬SK. The implication H→¬SK is upheld by the sceptical argument, but in this case where H is epistemically and explanatorily prior to ¬SK, the sceptic would consequently have to assume that no evidential reasons, externally situated, are available for H to begin with for the argument to work. However, this is what the argument is supposed to establish, making the closure-based formulation superfluous (ibid:173).[35] If the closure argument can go through, it would need a sub-argument for its minor premise, which shows that there are no adequate sources for justified beliefs. But this is scepticism from the start (1995:228). Klein's idea is that without an argument independent of the closure-based formulation, there is no reason to consider the entailment H→¬SK as unavailable. On his picture of reasons, E can justify H, and if H is thereby known, one can use this knowledge to rule out SK (Huemer 2000:404).

There are a few problems with this particular strategy and the overall evidential framework Klein endorses. How is it possible for evidence that 'here is a hand' not to support ¬SK as well? There is a clear epistemic relationship between evidence and both H and ¬SK, so Klein's distinction appears arbitrary. It seems prima facie that E, H, and ¬SK stand and fall together unless one denies closure.[36] Klein's argument that if one knows H, it could be used to infer ¬SK, seems to clash with the very content of SK itself. If the

possibility of SK is such that it threatens the very entailment through which we got H, i.e., E→H, this should at least make us reconsider if we actually possess H as *known* and as an available reason for ¬SK. To ignore this aspect would amount to conceding knowledge of H and consequently of ¬SK as again too easy.[37] Klein will maintain that this is the only way available not to deny closure, but to prevent ¬K¬SK from having no impact whatsoever on E seems to be just a roundabout way of establishing closure-denial (Brueckner 2000:144).[38]

However, it seems that Klein is tapping into a real insight here. If one argued conclusively for either K¬SK or ¬K¬SK then the game would be over. There is indeed a real pre-eminence of the minor premise in the sceptical argument for the establishment of a sceptical conclusion. Provided no closure denial is in place, if we are ignorant of whether SK, this is scepticism enough. What motivates scepticism, in general, appears to rely on the difficulty of finding something that could conclusively establish knowledge of ordinary propositions without simply ignoring the possibility that SK is true. Once this is recognized, this would also rehabilitate the closure principle as a genuine principle of epistemic deduction, whose sceptical use is then only due to a different argument, one to the extent that our attempts at establishing ¬SK fail.

Unfortunately, Klein himself is forbidden from claiming this result, which *could* support the virtually question-begging charge. His distinction between external evidence and internal reasons has inexplicably made experiential evidence and the radical sceptical problem only indirectly related. But the sceptical insight that motivates the minor-premise in the closure-based argument targets precisely the epistemic merit of that evidence, and this might not need an overt appeal to closure principles. Klein cannot claim this as showing that the closure-based argument is virtually question-begging because, via his distinction, it seems that now not knowing ¬SK will affect H only as an internally situated reason. However, it will not undercut H conceived as the consequence of the E→H entailment, which is a matter of externally situated evidence. Not only is it now puzzling how ¬K¬SK could be concluded as a bona fide sceptical sub-argument given the continued availability of the external evidence, but this seems plainly a case of externalist closure denial. We have no internal reasons to deny SK. Nevertheless, external evidence provides us with

knowledge of H.[39] If Klein were to reply that his picture is not externalist because it allows for H to be available for the internal entailment to ¬SK, then this would simply be a refutation of the sceptical argument, not an argument that shows it to be question-begging in the *virtual* sense.[40]

Maybe then it is true that closure is dispensable to some extent. This is where Klein's third route appears to be of particular interest to us because not only does it establish the epistemic priority relation that concerns the possibility of having E available for H, but it appears that Klein does not motivate it on his picture of evidential reasons.[41] Klein argues that if K¬SK enjoys epistemic priority over KH, the closure-based argument would beg the question: why should it be required to have evidence against SK as part of our reasons for believing H? "In general, when must we have evidence against a contrary of a proposition as part of our evidence for believing that proposition" (2004:174). If this were required, there would be, in principle, no evidence to establish ¬SK because SK itself would rule it out.[42]

Again, it is not entirely clear how this is an instance of begging the question. It could be understood reasonably as scepticism being irrefutable. However, if we grant some leeway to Klein's reasoning, we can envision in this specific case a proper sceptical employment of the closure principle, thereby refuting Klein's charges that the closure-based argument is superfluous and that the sceptic is begging the question by asking K¬SK before KH.

If we jettisoned the requirement to know ¬SK because question-begging, we could claim knowledge of H due to the available evidence. However, *via closure*, which Klein never denies, we could argue that we know ¬SK. This is again the problem of winning the denial of SK in a way too easy manner. When we realize that legitimate employment of closure delivers this result, this ought to generate doubt on whether we know both ¬SK *and* H (cf. DeRose 1995:40). And at this point, we fall again into the problem of getting knowledge of the denial of the sceptical hypothesis in a too easy way. We'll analyse the problem of easy knowledge starting from the next chapter. Still, for now, this result does seem to motivate a reason for having a check on whether that evidence is indeed appropriate and available to the subject. It motivates a reason to check whether we know H in the first place *because* we haven't taken SK into consideration. This is a motivation brought on

the scene by closure. If one knows H, then one should indeed be able to know the denial of SK, but through this positive claim, sceptical considerations are decidedly brought into play and lead us to reconsider our knowledge of H as long as we haven't established knowledge of ¬SK.[43] But this is precisely the employment of the closure principle in both the sceptical argument and in Dretske's-style counterexamples.[44] To continue arguing that no requirement concerning ¬SK is to be heeded while claiming knowledge of H implies dabbling into some very 'mysterious sort of evidence-generation' (Brueckner 2011a:79; 2000:146; Dodd 2007:641). This should show that there is a motivation available for requiring knowledge of ¬SK, and the threat of begging the question is averted.[45]

Klein's argument did not manage to prove that the closure-based sceptical argument is either question-begging or that the closure principle is useless to establish scepticism. However, the insight we rescued from Klein's analysis, that there is indeed a prominence of ¬SK in this whole problem is valid, and it will become a crucial component of our analysis from chapter four and five onwards. Now we have to entertain one last accusation against closure scepticism, one that argues that it endorses an illicit conception of perceptual reasons.

2.5 Closure and Perceptual Reasons

Much of what we relied on to defend the closure principle as capable of establishing a legitimate sceptical doubt hinges on the ignorance formulation. But maybe the possibility of relying on this insight is an artefact of an illegitimate conception of perceptual reasons that the closure-based argument has no warrant to adopt. This is the strategy pursued recently by Genia Schönbaumsfeld (2016, 2017), who argues that the trouble with the argument is the mistaken conception of perceptual reasons it endorses and not any formal issue with the principle itself. (2017:116).

Schönbaumsfeld's argument starts from Dretske's contention that perception can't transmit to heavyweight implication. She argues this is a presupposition of the position and not a conclusion adopted due to the encounter with scepticism. This might be arguably why he views zebra-cases as *counterexamples* to closure and not as

establishing a sceptical conclusion. Dretske presupposes that perceiving that things are thus-and-so is no reason at all, and can never be, to believe that those things are actually thus-and-so over their relevant sceptical alternative (ibid:119, 123). But why should we allow the experiences we might indeed have in the bad case to undermine the good case as well? If we are indeed in the good case, then what we've been perceiving is actually how things really are. Only if we were in the bad case, we should avoid endorsing the entailment to the heavyweight implication. The cases are not symmetrical, as in the two scenarios we are presented with different perceptual warrants. When we overlook this aspect, we are led to believe that closure-entailments generate sceptical conclusions or that we're barred from endorsing closure to certain otherwise legitimate implications (ibid:120).

Schönbaumsfeld argues that perceptual reasons are instead *factive*. When we are in the good case, they afford us with adequate reasons up to the corresponding heavyweight implications. This stance is borrowed from a distinctively disjunctivist manoeuvre, called the rejection of the Highest Common Factor conception (McDowell 1983, 1995) or the Sameness of Evidence Lemma (Williamson 2000). We won't be able here to engage specifically with these positions, but much of the issues we'll deal with in chapters five and six should be held to count against such asymmetry arguments as well.[46] The thesis Schönbaumsfeld endorses expresses that, albeit appearances could be reflectively indistinguishable in both cases, this doesn't entail a conclusion that no difference is present between the two in terms of reasons actually available to the subject (McDowell 1983:475). Schönbaumsfeld argues that Dretske's mistake is to see phenomenological indistinguishability as implying non-distinctness of cases (Schönbaumsfeld 2017:121). This amounts to endorsing the *Reasons Identity Thesis*, holding that the reasons available will always be the same in both cases. This is what forbids the entailment to heavyweight implication in Dretske-cases. If, however, we reject this thesis, it could allow in principle for the possibility of ordinary knowledge propositions to be had and deny SK. The closure sceptic rests on the presumption that perception cannot bring us out of our ignorance condition. Schönbaumsfeld contests this unwarranted idea.

The problem is that this reading of closure-scepticism is mistaken.[47] It misunderstands what the sceptic must assume for her argument to work. The ignorance condition should not be equated with subjective or phenomenological indistinguishability as Schönbaumsfeld implicitly does. She mistakes closure scepticism as requiring a kind of commitment to a necessity thesis, which holds that adequate perceptual reasons are unavailable *in principle*. But the sceptic can perfectly remain agnostic and uncommitted on this score, and simply register that as long as no positive argument is provided as to why our perceptual reasons are capable of establishing how things are, one is prima facie allowed to suspend judgment and run the modus tollens argument. If we could bring us out of our status of epistemic ignorance concerning the credentials of perceptual reasons, if we could attest to the merit of what we claim as evidence, the sceptic would agree that we could then run all the relevant epistemic deductions. In a zebra-case, this might be as easy as checking reviews online about whether the zookeepers are honest or learn to identify characteristics that unequivocally discriminate zebras from mules. However, this would be an ordinary case of perceptual deduction. With scepticism, the question differs. It becomes a question of the epistemic credentials enjoyed by our beliefs.

We can substantiate this claim of agnosticism with the following example:

> **Art Exhibition**: you are at an art exhibition. Each painting has a tag which in ordinary situations, assigns the proper artist to the artwork. You form the following principle of competent deduction
>
> > **D)** If the tag under the painting reports the name X, then the painting has been done by X
>
> When you then see one of the paintings, you run implicitly the following reasoning:
>
> > **1)** If the tag reports the name X, the painting has been made by X [D]
> >
> > **2)** The tag reports the name X
> >
> > **3)** The painting has been made by X
>
> This is an example of a closed operator. It should be valid for every painting in the exhibition. However, you then wander into the area where works by Italian artist Amedeo Modigliani are exhibited. You know that some years ago, several fake Modiglianis flooded the market, fooling most art experts. You have no reasons to believe that those who curated the exhibition

> weren't fooled as well. You're no expert yourself. You run the 1-2-3 argument above and this should tell you 'this painting has been made by Modigliani', but you then go through the following reasoning
>
> > **IM)** If you know that this work is a Modigliani, then you know that it hasn't been painted by an impostor [consequence of the 1-2-3 argument plus closure principle]
> >
> > **IIM)** But you don't know whether the work has been made by an impostor [ignorance premise]
> >
> > **CM)** Therefore, you don't know that this painting is a Modigliani as the tag reports [IM, IIM, modus tollens][48]

In this case, we see that the perceptual evidence you can claim can't defeat the possibility of the works being fake. Via closure, you are committed to saying you do not know whether they are fakes. This local scenario is an instance of a closure argument and doesn't work as a general counterexample to closure. You dutifully follow closure in suspending judgment on whether this work is authentic or fake. But this suspension is simply a statement that you don't know on the basis of your perceptual reasons.

Most importantly, no Reasons Identity Thesis is necessary. There is no endorsement of the thesis that in both cases, discriminating reasons would necessarily be lacking. The outcome is due to your current situation and relative lack of expertise. What perception is affording you right now can't function as adequate evidence to conclude that those artworks are not fake. What perception provides you has on its own no epistemic merit to support your belief. Subjective indistinguishability is a consequence of your epistemic standing; not an assumption inflated up to a metaphysical thesis about necessarily unavailable reasons. The example doesn't state that we can never pull ourselves out of this state of ignorance, only that this hasn't happened yet. Someone better placed than you might recognise something that allows the required discrimination, or you could discover that the exhibition curators are those who uncovered the fakes in the first place, and this could exclude their being fooled. But as long as you can't establish such grounds, and in a way that is not a blatant arbitrary assumption, you are insensitive to perceptual reasons, which might be, after all, be present.

Schönbaumsfeld would respond that this counterexample can't work because it mixes up global and local levels of envatment: the possibility of our being wrong occasionally does

not imply the possibility of a deceptive global scenario; it actually precludes it (Schönbaumsfeld 2016:30). Local possibilities of error are only possible on a background of reliable interaction with the environment is already in place. Hence we can't move from the local to the global level of deception (ibid:31). But this is to miss the point of the example and, once again, of the ignorance clause that closure-scepticism exploits. In both this case and zebra cases, we could do a lot of things to actually ascertain the goodness of our perceptual reasons, and on this Schönbaumsfeld agrees (ibid:41-3). However, to see scepticism only as a matter of a transition from local instances of error to global deception is to endorse a mistaken idea of what motivates scepticism. While we do indeed have the ability to pull us out of such ignorance conditions in local cases, the radical hypothesis generalises this to the basic constitutive ways we engage with the world. As long as we can't vindicate that our reasons, faculties, intentions, etc., can actually provide us with the required warrant, we are not in the condition to consider our beliefs as legitimately grounded (cf. Kraft 2013:65).[49] It is not a transition from local cases to general ones, but it concerns instead the very character of radical scepticism. In the same way we saw in chapter one that in order to engender actual scepticism, Descartes did not simply generalize arguments from illusion, error, or lunacy, but endorsed a radically different kind of sceptical reasoning.

A further possible objection might contest that in the Modigliani case, we have antecedent reasons for disbelief due to our knowledge of the Modigliani-hoaxes, but the argument can be simply reformulated in general terms

> **1G)** If I know that the name on the tags is the artist's name who produced the artwork [via D]. then I know that hoaxes haven't fooled the curators
> **2G)** But I don't know whether hoaxes have fooled them
> **3G)** Therefore, I do not know who produced the artworks

The objection might work at best as a kind of contextualist reply to the counterexample here presented, by casting the Modigliani case as a context in which antecedent doubts would be legitimate, but this would be to miss again what the sceptic requires us to provide, i.e. positive reasons in support of our beliefs. In addition, even in such a

contextualist declination of the argument there doesn't seem to be any illicit or unreflective endorsement of the Reasons Identity Thesis.

Ultimately, Schönbaumsfeld's argument seems to rely on the thesis that perception on its own is generally capable of redeeming us of our state of ignorance, notwithstanding any misfortunate environmental condition we might be in, including the possibility of actual full-blown sceptical hypotheses.[50] This is a thesis that has to be defended and cannot simply be assumed as unproblematic. We will engage with it thoroughly in chapter four and five.[51] For now, we can stop here by observing that Schönbaumsfeld's attack against Closure-based scepticism doesn't go through, at least if left at this stage. Endorsing the rationale of Dretske-cases does not commit the sceptic to endorse unwarrantable or illicit these on the nature of perceptual reasons. The target of Schönbaumsfeld's criticism would be better impersonated by a kind of scepticism relying entirely on an appearance/reality distinction, in which the only working principle is an a priori impossibility of distinguishing the case that P from the mere appearance that P.[52] But this is an understanding of scepticism we'll be rejecting throughout the research. It involves a kind of *scepticism on the cheap* (Brueckner 2011a:86), a kind of doubt with unrealistic assumptions, of either a metaphysical or infallibilist nature,[53] which would simply collapse into negative dogmatism, and would very well make reasonable the idea of dispensing engaging with it altogether.

It might be replied that the problem which dominated our discussion here, the ignorance condition, our inability of providing support for what adequately constitutes the rational warrant we presume to obtain from our faculties, could only be predicated on the basis of alternative scenarios of massive deception and that our faculties should enjoy epistemic standing by default. This is a legitimate possibility, and we'll be engaging this idea from the next chapter onwards.

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1 Cf. Briesen 2010:225 on this choice.

2 Cf. Kvanvig 2008:67, Klein 1995:215.

3 For other formulations see Pritchard 2015:22, who specifies a requirement for rationally grounded knowledge of p and q, and Alspector-Kelly (2019:11) who understands S's knowledge of q as something that S merely comes to recognize and is not a new item of knowledge she obtains. For a detailed exposition of all possible declinations of the principle see David & Warfield 2008:143-162.

[4] For this idea see among others Williamson 2000:117; Klein 1995:219. Alspector-Kelly remarks (2019:3) that while the principle is considered mundane, it is however of an unusually complex character and this might provide prima facie reason for rejecting it. For a criticism that the case for closure is decisive see Kvanvig 2008:474-5. Stephen Hetherington (2004:105) explains its importance for scepticism by tying it to regress considerations. While this might detach the principle from ordinary epistemic practice, it would explain its cogency for sceptical arguments. For an analysis of the role the principle plays in sceptical scenarios that does not aim at separating it from our ordinary epistemic endeavours, see Stroud 1984:23-4.

[5] This is simply because no reputable sceptic would ever attest to knowledge of any proposition that entails SK. It would simply defeat her point that we have no knowledge.

[6] Two neo-Moorean stances exist. Internalist neo-Mooreanism is the one we'll engage with. Externalist neo-Mooreanism, the so-called *safety* approach (Sosa 1999, Williamson 2000), is a modal approach born out of the 'ashes' of the sensitivity modal condition of knowledge which denied closure. While safety approaches preserve closure, they seem to avoid an engagement with the sceptical problematic as developed in this research. For assessments of the anti-sceptical fortunes of safety, cf. Pritchard 2005b:206, 2008:453; Vahid 2009:58-63, Sosa 2007:16.

[7] The additional relation $\neg KH$ as necessary for $\neg(K\neg SK)$ seems at this point trivial.

[8] Many contemporary analyses of radical scepticism select this formulation over the 1C-3C we presented earlier, see DeRose 1995:1; Leite 2004a:336; 2010:40; Pritchard 2002a:130; 2005a:37; Sosa 1999:143; Kraft 2012:51; Brewer 1999:47.

[9] A similar line of reasoning is offered by Barry Stroud (1984:19ff). One of the reasons why the ignorance premise has intuitive pull is because denying it amounts directly to refuting scepticism. We'd need some positive argument for this feat. The assumption of the ignorance premise *is* problematic *but* is intuitive (ibid:30-1).

[10] The anti-sceptical idea of Sosa's attempt seems to be that the argument can only work with a suitable epistemic priority claim for the ignorance premise (cf. Leite 2010:47). The unwarranted status of epistemic priority is a crucial element in Michael Williams' anti-scepticism (1996:43-52). Chapter four and five will provide support for the premise. For now, we can just observe that Sosa then modifies the argument (1988:157), allowing C2 to lapse, and relying crucially on C4, which for our purposes should suffice. The discussion in this chapter of Klein's objection should also illuminate this issue more.

[11] Cf. Pritchard 2002b:21, 2015:15, 2016:204, Cohen 1988:93-4, DeRose 1995:39, Hannon 2020:196.

[12] Goldman does not make his denial explicit, especially considering that he professes neutrality concerning scepticism (1976:778). However, it is widely held that the position he proposes there (see in particular pp.774-5) is a very close cognate to Dretske's *Relevant Alternatives* approach, and an anticipation of Nozick's sensitivity requirement (Baumann 2012:12) both of which effectively deny closure. For the idea that classically reliabilist stances are bound to reject closure, at least concerning justification, see Williams 1996:318-9.

[13] Hawthorne defines them as those propositions which cannot be known via the exercise of reason or sensory faculties (2004:42).

[14] Common arguments against this strategy are that it fails to address instances of global scepticism such as dreaming, that it is an implausible proposal that leads to untenable stances, or that it is too revisionary not to be a conditional surrender to scepticism (Pritchard 2002a:156).

[15] Cf. Brueckner 1984:282 for an argument maintaining that closure-denial won't improve our situations against all varieties of scepticism, such as dreaming.

[16] For an attempt to meet at meeting the objection head-on see Brueckner 2010:10.

[17] For a similar strategy exploiting the inconsistency between SK and the propositions claimed as known see Leite 2004a:345-7.

[18] This is one of the consequences of the problem of easy knowledge (Cohen 2002, 2005). Chapter three and four analyse this problem in connection with scepticism.

[19] There is reason to suspect that Roush is offering something like a 'curtailed' closure principle, valid in an anti-sceptical sense only for very extraordinary propositions. But this is counterintuitive. We'd want closure to apply to our ordinary propositions, and we would be willing to entertain its denial only for very extraordinary propositions, see for example Avnur's proposal on this score (2012:5-6).

[20] Luck as being incompatible with knowledge is usually considered a funding pillar of contemporary epistemology (Reed 2009:102). Cf. Foley 1990:78 for a dissenting opinion.

[21] For a specific reading of Roush's analysis as endorsing this characterization of scepticism see Kraft 2015:273.

[22] Dreaming scepticism for example fits this bill quite clearly, see Stroud 1984:25.

[23] See on this point Broughton 2002:68, who refers to Winters 1981.

[24] Thanks to Modesto Gòmez-Alonso for pointing out to me this similarity.

[25] I owe this objection to Hans-Johann Glock.

[26] For a similar suggestion cf. Wright 1991:89. The provenance of the belief is in fact incapable of determining whether the belief itself is true, as Descartes' remarks on dreaming true mathematical propositions (AT VII:20, VI:39). Hetherington (2004:116, fn.14) suggested that Descartes endorsed instead a conception based on the 'content of the possibility'.

[27] On this score we are in agreement with Sosa (2016:246-7), who however traces the distinction as being between agential error and *falsity* of the belief. We see the ignorance/error distinction, – borrowed mainly from Kraft 2013, 2015 – as being more accurate in a discussion of closure scepticism, given the role of the minor premise and the formulation of the Argument from Ignorance.

[28] While they attempt to refine Roush's argument, they still subscribe to the same idea we attacked (2014:37). Although they take into account the ignorance predicament (ibid:41) they do so only after accepting Roush's point about incompatibility. Their objection is explicitly aimed at closure-based arguments, while Hetherington hints a wider point, but his own argument accepts closure as being 'at the heart of the sceptical effort' (2009:103).

[29] Hetherington identifies this as a *direct* sceptical possibility, which is the possibility that what is claimed as known be false. Indirect sceptical possibilities are those possibilities where the belief is nevertheless true. This would make it different from our understanding, but our analysis in the previous section should have made it clear that this requirement is not needed for scepticism. For Hetherington, in any case, the problem stems in both typologies from the independence requirement. He also maintains that the sceptical strength of indirect possibilities is parasitic on the direct case.

[30] Even though this can be contested if scepticism about the *a priori* is considered possible, see Beebe 2010:456.

[31] Klein couches his discussion in terms of justified belief, assuming it behaves like knowledge under closure. The proviso established at the beginning of section two should suffice for applying the considerations we developed so far concerning knowledge to his discussion.

[32] Klein also references that this understanding explains why externalists have been much more inclined than internalists to deny closure, as of course for pure externalists, the belief one has does not make much of a difference concerning knowledge possessed.

[33] It must be noticed that we are offering an exposition of Klein's argument which unifies his 1995 and 2004 perspectives. In the former he exploits the distinction between evidential reasons, but considers only the first route, which is the one he properly takes to be *virtually question-begging*. In his 2004 he doesn't mention the evidential distinction, but he implicitly adopts it to offer the three alternatives (see p.169).

[34] Due to space constraints we will ignore the second alternative as it can be subsumed under the strategy exemplified in the first.

[35] See Alspector-Kelly (2019:46) for a similar take, predicated not on ignorance of the basis of the belief as rational, but on a matter of indistinguishability. The next section should give some clue that indistinguishability is unapt for scepticism. Recall that Alspector-Kelly *denies* closure.

[36] See for suggestions on this Brueckner 2000:144; 2011a:78; White 1991:410-2.

[37] White (1991:420) argues that his reasoning would license ignoring defeating alternatives even in cases where the possibility of their being true is substantial. Hetherington (2009:102) remarks that the sceptic will simply reject Klein's idea. Dretske famously called Klein's argument 'hocus pocus' (2005:38).

[38] Brueckner (2000:148) also famously objects that if the closure-based argument is question-begging then every argument that uses modus tollens is as well. Klein pleads in one place (1987:274) not to be read this way, but this plea on its own won't accomplish much. Klein seems at times to treat scepticism as a kind of negative dogmatism (1995:227, cf. Huemer 2000:402-3). See Coffman 2006:267-9 for a rejoinder to Brueckner.

[39] Klein is quite explicit in saying that saving closure must be done on *internalist* grounds. But what he presents seems just in agreement with its externalist denial.

[40] It would be a refutation predicated on the endorsement of evidential externalism, because in order not to beg the question *against scepticism* it should defend a conception of evidence that excludes the possibility of SK. One example on this score is Williamson 2000.

[41] He seems willing to admit the traditional $E \rightarrow H \rightarrow \neg SK$ chain for this possibility, see 2004:175-6.

[42] This formulation betrays Klein's understanding of scepticism as a kind of negative dogmatism.

[43] For this line of reasoning, see DeRose 1995:11, Pritchard 2001:328; 2005a:45.

[44] Which might not be counterexamples at all in the sense of showing closure to *fail*. They might merely amount to genuine sceptical cases. See Vogel 1990 for this idea and Brueckner 2000:149.

[45] It should also allay Sosa's remark about the possible illegitimate character of the relation of necessity between $K\neg SK$ and KH.

[46] Our idea is that the sceptical problem ultimately concerns the merit of epistemic evidence in general, the *quid iuris* that constitutes something as offering genuine support for our beliefs. This is the broadly semantic point of *Kantian* scepticism. While McDowell 1996 is an explicit engagement with this problematic, those disjunctivist positions that rely mostly on his 1983 and 1995 – for example Pritchard 2012 – cannot address this issue properly. For an analysis of the fortunes of asymmetry arguments, see Marušić 2016. He argues that while these arguments might be effective for specific scenarios such as dreaming they fall short of addressing the general sceptical problematic.

[47] The objection presented targets Schönbaumsfeld's position specifically, and not general disjunctivist positions. Schönbaumsfeld herself has a loose affiliation with disjunctivism (cf. her 2013 criticism of McDowell). For a thorough critical analysis of Schönbaumsfeld's position precisely on the score of perceptual reasons cf. Ranalli 2021. The most recent anti-sceptical employment of disjunctivism available, Pritchard 2015, holds it as ineffective against closure scepticism, because even though it implies the possibility of knowing $\neg SK$, it fails to entail it (ibid:162)

[48] Vogel has proposed a similar line of examples, involving Van Eyck (1993:245) and Rembrandt (2004:426-7). Ours references a real life event.

[49] Descartes recognized how radical scepticism ultimately issued an attack on the rational credentials of any belief we can enjoy, see for example the transition from the Evil Demon scenario to the *flawed* nature argument attacking our cognitive faculties in the Third Meditation (AT VII:36).

[50] Schönbaumsfeld (2016:53) argues that without the Reasons Identity Thesis, the sceptical idea that perception affords us knowledge of how things appears and not of how they are,

vanishes, and radical scepticism cannot be generated anymore. However, it is mistaken to conceive the motivating factor of scepticism to reside in a mere appearance/reality distinction, and chapters four and five should be able to make a case for a deeper problem at work in the sceptical argument.

[51] In fact, Schönbaumsfeld seems at times to tread on territory quite close to neo-Mooreanism, notwithstanding her self-professed distance from it (2013, 2016:55, 111). In chapter four section two we'll see a crucial point where they intersect.

[52] For such an attempt see Mizrahi 2015.

[53] On the connection between indistinguishability and infallibilism in the claim that we are constitutively unable to distinguish incompatible alternatives, cf. Feldman 1981:269-270.

Chapter 3

Neo-Moorean Dogmatism

This chapter aims to consider the anti-sceptical strategy that runs counter to the route we followed in the previous chapter. It might be contested that all the problems and counter-objections we raised pertain to *doxastic* justification, i.e. the status according to which a belief is justified insofar as it is grounded on an appropriate basis. In both Roush and Schönbaumsfeld's objections, the problem was being forbidden from running the modus ponens in the closure entailment because the relevant belief couldn't be established as based on adequate evidence. This meant that one couldn't lay claim to knowledge of ¬SK; what would have allowed us knowledge was not available as a justified belief to begin with.

However, if the doxastic component of justification – which we're assuming as a necessary, if insufficient requirement on knowledge – appears to create such problems, this leaves open the possibility that justification might be available on the *propositional* level. Propositional justification can be understood as the justification that pertains to the proposition that constitutes the doxastic state's content. If I see a red ball in front of me in ordinary visual conditions and there actually is a red ball, the proposition "Here is a red ball" is justified. I might be unable to form a belief based on that experience, or I might end up with the same belief but formed in a wholly irrational and unrelated fashion. Still, I would merely lack doxastic justification in such cases, which is usually considered propositional justification plus proper basing. This wouldn't change that the proposition "here is a red ball" would still be justified. If this kind of justification could be won, it might be enough to reject at least prima facie that we don't know ¬SK, and we could have a defeasible reason to run the argument with the modus ponens instead.

Therefore, this chapter will focus on the neo-Moorean attempt on this score, of the specific internalist variety, as it offers an anti-sceptical strategy that appears, at first sight, both intuitive and natural, relatively free from substantial theoretical or metaphysical commitments. This chapter is engaged in quite a bit of stage-setting, as the dogmatist position will remain with us for a while due to its alleged intuitive resistance to scepticism.

After introducing its features, we will focus on its anti-sceptical proposals, specifically on the *refusal* to engage in the sceptical dialectic. We will try to argue that this attempt fails. Contemporary neo-Mooreanism is fundamentally entwined with the liberalism/conservatism distinction on perceptual reasons, and the analysis of its anti-scepticism will also go through this aspect. Crucially, it will allow us to introduce the problem of Easy Knowledge as a critical sceptical problem for neo-Mooreanism, which will be carried over significantly in chapter four due to its connection to the sceptical Problem of the Criterion.

3.1 Epistemological Dogmatism, or Phenomenal Conservatism

In general, neo-Moorean stances are all those perspectives that allow the subject to unproblematically endorse the modus ponens route, from knowing that here is a hand to the denial of the sceptical hypothesis. The focus on internalist varieties of such stances is because they are usually proposed explicitly with an anti-sceptical intent and require endorsing less revisionary epistemic proposals.[1] Internalism is the stance that understands justification as having its source in the subject's mental life, either as requiring reflective access (accessibilism) to some belief or proposition or as something that supervenes on the doxastic states of the subject (mentalism). Classical internalist stances, such as acquaintance foundationalism, are held liable to a dilemma, which in contemporary epistemology has taken the name of Bergmann's Dilemma (Bergmann 2006:ch.1). While the problem is much older, Bergmann's formulation presents the issue in a relatively concise and perspicuous manner. One of the motivations for internalism is that it considers how for a belief to be justified, it must be recognised as such by the subject who's having the belief. Cases like Norman the Clairvoyant (Bonjour 1985:40-5) or Truetemp (Lehrer 1990:163-4) purportedly show that beliefs that are not consciously entertained by the subject cannot amount to knowledge. This is supposed to object to externalist theories such as reliabilism, who deny the internal requirement and argue that what constitutes justification for a belief is mere its aetiology or causal history, i.e. how it was cognitively produced. Internalism objects that such adventitious beliefs for the subject cannot be justified because they are arbitrary from the subject's own perspective [SPO]. They would amount to mere lucky guesses even if they were right. The dilemma for the

internalist has the following horns: either this access to the belief is weak, but then the belief will still be arbitrary and nothing more than lucky if true, *or* it is strong, but an infinite regress will ensue as every state of reflective access will need to be accessed in turn so that it won't be arbitrary. Internalist theories of justification are seemingly in no better position than externalist theories are. They possibly are now even worse because at least externalist theories view justification as truth-conducive, while internalist theories conceive it as a deontological status, something the subject is responsible and reflectively entitled to, which now cannot seemingly be ever achieved.

Neo-Moorean dogmatism is a form of internalism that claims not only to provide an answer to scepticism but also to resist Bergmann's Dilemma.[2] This is because it offers a variety of weak access internalism purporting that ordinary experience provides immediate access to phenomenological presentations experienced as veridical by the subject herself, satisfying the Subject's Perspective Objection. This allows prima facie, defeasible propositional justification, which doesn't require any mediation or support by inferences, background beliefs, other doxastic states or concepts. Experience discloses facts to the subject which are immediately felt as true.

The stance, called Epistemological Dogmatism or Phenomenal Conservatism, has been mainly developed and defended in recent years by Michael Huemer and James Pryor.[3] They hold the theory as endorsing the following principle

> **PC)** If it seems to you that p, then in absence of relevant defeaters, you have at least some degree of justification for believing that p (Huemer 2007:30; 2006:148)[4]

Merely undergoing an experience that p is enough to grant you some degree of justification without presupposing anything else as justified. It is in virtue of that experience alone that any subject can consider themselves justified in believing that p. This is a *prima facie*, defeasible justification arising immediately out of one's own experiences (Pryor 2000:519, 532; 2005:205). It can be overridden by relevant defeaters if made available, but until they become so, experiences can grant justification even on a relatively modest standard. The position endorses fallibilism and does not require the occurrent availability of any background belief for having justification. Entertaining other beliefs might be required, but they do not constitute the *source* of the justification. Only

experience does (2000:520, 539). There are no required antecedent beliefs about the reliability of one's own faculties. What experience presents to the subject enjoys doxastic innocence by default. All we have to do is heed our ordinary doxastic practice and ground our beliefs on how things seem us to be (Huemer 2007:39).

In having an experience, the subject stands in relation to an object that exists. In this relation, there is the apprehension of a presentation that contains a kind of assertiveness regarding the truth of its content that can't be merely accidental (2001:51-5, 79-80). This is not a judgment, nor belief, or a disposition to believe. Experience is grasped immediately in its distinctive content, "the way that thing[s] *thereby* appear to you to be (ibid:71), and offers propositional presentations of how things purportedly are (ibid:72-3). Even if we experience illusions, when we have a perceptual experience presenting us things to be thus-and-thus, there is a distinctive *forcefulness* entailed by experiencing a real object (ibid:66, 77).[5] This is a feeling of *felt veridicality* due to the phenomenological character of the experience that p, making it reasonable for the subject to possess the corresponding belief that p (Pryor 2000:536; Moretti&Piazza 2015:1272). This distinctive phenomenology is constituted by a "feeling of seeming to *ascertain* that a given proposition is true" (Pryor 2004:357).

This phenomenological character is called a *seeming* and is what makes manifest the truth of the experiential appearance (Tucker 2010:530; 2013:5). These seemings possess the feeling of truth, of revealing how things are, a kind of givenness which allows us to believe things to be as they seem. At the same time, we apprehend the formation of the belief as being epistemically proper (Tolhurst 1998:229).[6] They are a propositional attitude distinct from beliefs, and compatible with disbelieving what they entail on further reflection (Huemer 2007:30; 2001:99; Tooley 2013:317).[7] They engender this attitude passively. The resulting beliefs *just happen*. They can therefore play the role of basic, foundational sources of justification sought by an internalist account. Propositional seemings are manifest to the subject, allowing the belief they cause to be 'epistemically worthy' from the perspective of the subject having them. The belief is held because things look that way (Moretti 2015:297)[8]. The resulting stance is an epistemically realist one, as

seemings disclose external reality itself without backing up from any other epistemic source.[9]

It is not a standard form of internalism, as it borrows from both accessibilism and mentalism.[10] Justification supervenes on the subject's mental states, i.e. the relevant seemings, which can be accessed by the subject. Still, there's no awareness requirement on this access for the prima facie justification to arise. Beliefs held on seemings are considered basic, provided that they are unobstructed by other prima facie rationally held beliefs, as this would provide a defeater to the subject (Pryor 2004:364). The additional non-standard aspect is that this prima facie justification does not transmit to higher-levels of epistemological reasoning: "What makes you justified in believing *P* is one thing; what makes you justified in believing *you have justification* for believing *P* is something … more sophisticated" (2000:535).

In this way, what is provided is merely *propositional* justification for the arguments of the beliefs, which is deemed enough for claiming knowledge accordingly. While doxastic justification requires some form of active engagement on behalf of the subject, such as a reflective awareness to ground the belief that p on the available evidence, this differs from the mere status of having justification for p. What constitutes justification for a proposition, and what makes the corresponding belief *well-founded* are two different matters (2000:521). The dogmatist's focus is on *justification-makers*, that which makes it appropriate to believe a certain proposition. This is understood in contrast with talks of reason and evidence, as this is already a higher-order domain that fails to capture the basic character of seemings-based justification (2005:514).

The proposal, therefore, claims to steer clear of Bergmann's dilemma, by avoiding strong-awareness clauses that would generate regresses, and by allowing basic beliefs to arise from phenomenological seemings, purportedly circumvents the risk of the SPO as well. The seeming is assertive in a way that the subject recognises it as her own belief.[11] The dogmatist can also claim that the dilemma only really concerns theories of doxastic justification. After all, it is possible to have propositional justification on its own. Huemer's answer to the dilemma endorses this thought. He argues that the non-accidentality demand of the SPO should only be understood as a negative requirement on justification.

If one has reasons to believe one's seeming-based belief to be arbitrary, this makes available a possible defeater (2013:337). These considerations might make us wonder why the position ought to be restricted to a variety of internalism, as most of its theses are amenable to a basic reliabilist stance, with the only exception that seemings are a part of the mental life of the subject. However, the question for us is a different one: how can this overall modest and quite bare-bone proposal possess anti-sceptical punch on its own? Apart from the intuitive and natural character of the position, it doesn't seem so far to provide anything particularly incisive on the anti-sceptical front. To understand its import on this front, we have to analyse the anti-sceptical strategy of the forefather of the position, G. E. Moore.

3.2 Anti-Sceptical Strategies

Moore's proof calls for rehearsing, via the usual triad

1M) Here is a hand [H]

2M) If H, then ¬SK

3M) ¬SK (Moore 1939:166)

For Moore, this argument concerned the possibility of encountering objects in external space, and this did not cover experiences such as pains or illusions (ibid:150-4). For objects Moore intended, in general, anything whose existence was independent of our perception of them (ibid:159-60; Coliva 2018:468). If the existence of an object is proven, this entails the existence of the external world automatically as our perceptions report us to be. Although it is an internal cognitive faculty, perceptual reports present how things are independently of the reports themselves. Moore argues that the above proof is sound; it does not assume the conclusion in its premises, and we would consider it conclusive and effective in an ordinary setting. Therefore, we shouldn't doubt it while doing philosophy either (1939:167).

Moore's proof is infamous for the lack of persuasion it commands within philosophical circles. Some have interpreted it to improve it under this aspect,[12] for example, by arguing that Moore's argument concerns how we use concepts, and it's not an empirical argument for the existence of external things. Otherwise, it couldn't be considered a cogent

refutation of scepticism (Ambrose 1942.399; cf. Stroud 1984:95). Moore himself however contested this reading, reiterating that his aim was indeed to prove the existence of external things, not give a mere dissolution based on our concept use.[13] The problem with Moore's own presentation of the proof is that it establishes it as torn between a philosophical and an ordinary understanding of knowledge,[14] and it does seem intuitively implausible to appeal to our ordinary knowledge of things to demonstrate the possibility of knowledge itself (ibid:108).[15]

To substantiate the argument as properly anti-sceptical, we must identify those features that make it a genuine proof. Not casually, those are the aspects that epistemological dogmatism has endorsed. The first concerns the character of sensible experience. Moore conceived the proof to answer the *idealist* who doubted the existence of mind-independent reality, not the sceptic,[16] and therefore it relies on Moore's conception of sensation and sense-data. For Moore, having a sensation already points towards an object, making it senseless to ask how can one get out of their inner mental life, as it is already to know something which is "truly and really not a part of my experience" (1903:42). Sense-data are directly about external objects and allow for direct, immediate justification to believe the existence of external objects, with the only alternative to this being scepticism. "I am as directly aware of the existence of material things in space as of my own sensations; and *what* I am aware of with regard to each is exactly the same" (ibid:44).

The second aspect concerns Moore's engagement with scepticism, specifically Hume's (Moore 1910:63). He considers the Humean possibility that sense-data are merely signs of the objects from which we draw inferences, which quickly leads to scepticism. But for Moore, the idea proposed acts like a *reductio*, as it contradicts common-sense (ibid:66-72). Notwithstanding the pull of the sceptical reasoning, Moore argues that we just *know* external objects to exist (1939:166-7). This is where the proof becomes contentious, as it assumes what scepticism is trying to question. Moore recognises that he can't offer further reasons for this, as they would set off a regress (1910:75), but there is no need to offer such additional reasons as sense-data offer us immediate knowledge. We might have some lingering dissatisfaction with this perspective because we implicitly demand a

general method capable of demonstrating such world-involving propositions. However, for Moore, being unable to prove them doesn't entail their being unknown, nor that conclusive evidence supporting them is lacking (1939:169). This is a wholesale rejection of the sceptic's dialectical demand to prove how one can know external-world facts. It entails that although such proof is unavailable, reasons in support of its conclusion are available (Sosa 2009:13).

Therefore, the two anti-sceptical Moorean insights are immediate experiential justification for how things are and refusing to partake in the sceptical dialectic. Huemer has followed chiefly the first insight for his anti-sceptical strategy, arguing that the epistemic priority and immediacy of seemings entails that every stance objecting to PC will be self-defeating. This is because whatever alternative perspective is proposed, it must presuppose the truth of PC, as any explanation is based on how things seem to one (2001:105).[17] The self-evident character of dogmatism is conceived as underlying judgment in general, and any opponent to PC must argue by unwillingly appealing to it, thereby confirming the principle (2007:39). This is so even if the principle is openly disbelieved. Not even sceptics can escape. If scepticism requires defeaters against seeming-based justification, these will be motivated by how things seem to be to the sceptic. Otherwise, only an empty logical possibility will support scepticism's alternative scenarios (2001:183). Alternatively, the sceptic must reject seemings as providing justification altogether, but this will commit the sceptic to argue that every judgment based on how things seem to one, which for Huemer covers all beliefs, is irrational, which is implausible.

However, it is not clear why Huemer thinks that by denouncing seemings as inadequate or insufficient for justification, the sceptic is also committed to the claim that every judgment is irrational. Apart from a reductive conception of how judgments can be motivated, this ignores the reflective and self-critical function of philosophical and sceptical inquiry, whose task is precisely to question and investigate criteria and their soundness. The sceptic has no commitments on this score, and she's not bound to deem every judgment as irrational just on such grounds. Huemer seems to be raising something similar to the ancient *elenctic* refutation of scepticism, that claimed philosophical doubt to

collapse under its own weight. It was an argument already endorsed by Aristotle,[18] which Sextus considers more than once (PH II.130-3; III.19). The charge can be easily avoided by remembering how the sceptical methodology is fundamentally sound, even if merely *dialectic* or *ad hominem*. The sceptic is extracting logical consequences of principles of reasoning accepted and endorsed by the dogmatist (Bailey 1990:43). Beyond this dialectical concession, the sceptic need not endorse those arguments as valid nor as true.[19] There is no reason why a sceptic should be troubled by the fact that showing a certain principle to be incorrect and undermining beliefs in general would ultimately remove scepticism itself. Sextus straight up endorsed the self-eliminating character of scepticism with the famous metaphor of the ladder; by removing itself along with the dogmatist position, scepticism paves the way to ataraxia (PH I.188, M VIII.480-1; cf. Lammenranta 2008:11). If the outcome of the sceptical arguments is that those principles considered as underlying every rational judgment are inconsistent or incapable of providing the required support, this is a problem for the dogmatist, but not specifically for the sceptic. This ultimately only adverts to the paradoxical nature of sceptical doubt, but not to any contradictoriness or inconsistency in the position (Williams 2001:66, Hankinson 1995:208). Huemer's contentious understanding of scepticism is also joined by the fact that to hold that PC and seemings, in general, are necessary conditions for every justificatory stance seems not obvious at all.[20] Different internalist stances have raised similar arguments in defence of their own proposals and against the idea that PC or seemings uphold the whole of our beliefs (cf. Mizrahi 2014). In addition, PC as a principle cannot rule out that beliefs be ultimately based on *other* sources of justification; for example, it might seem to the subject that the belief has been reliably produced, and in this way, seemings would cease to be the cornerstone of the whole edifice.[21]

We will examine Huemer's conception of seemings and their role in an anti-sceptical dialectic in the next chapter. For now we turn to the other Moorean insight, the idea that knowing propositions does not require proving them, which has been taken in earnest by Pryor (2000:519), whose anti-sceptical strategy hinges on this approach. Pryor allows to the sceptic the premise that either one does not know $\neg$SK or, if one does, this knowledge rests at least in part on propositions known via perception. He also recognises that defending the Moorean position by relying on premises that lack justification can be

understood as fundamentally question-begging (ibid:524-6). However, reaching this outcome requires conflating the activity of giving reasons with the "epistemic *status* of having justification" (ibid:535). The latter requires motivating the premises of an argument. However, if seeming-based experiences grant one with propositional justification about the external world, and do not prima facie support in the same fashion the sceptical hypothesis, then dogmatism does make available reasons to stick to one's own anti-sceptical claim which are in need of no additional defence. After all, experience is defeasibly telling us something incompatible with the sceptical alternative. Pryor is adamant that even if this is a variety of dogmatism, the Moorea proof itself is *non-dogmatic* and perfectly cogent (ibid:538). While it is true that it fails to offer an argument-based refutation of scepticism, as the sceptic would demand it as she won't accept the implicit premise that seemings-based experiences provide propositional justification, this merely shows that scepticism is nothing more than an epistemological *disease* some of us catch. However, we are not required to heed its call as it does not express the truth about us (ibid:541; 2004:368).

This argument might be contested straight-away on various grounds. The implicit claims in the stance are not as light-weight as dogmatists are claiming them to be and we'll touch on this in the next chapter. There seems to be some form of petitio principia here at work because holding that experiences are direct presentations of objects trivially implies $\neg$SK. In addition, it's not quite clear how internalist the position really is, as it proposes a kind of propositional justification quite close to the 'doxastic' justification externalists purport to offer.[22] However, we can offer some leeway here to dogmatists because, at least in Pryor's stance, they zero-in a crucial question for this research that deserves adequate scrutiny: why should we pay attention to scepticism?

3.3 Perceptual Warrant and Dialectical Effectiveness

To better investigate the proposal, we have to place dogmatism within the debate about perceptual reasons or warrant that it has been developed in, because it is tightly connected to its anti-sceptical project. The debate is traced along the *Liberalism/Conservatism* distinction on experiential reasons. Liberalism, endorsed by the neo-Moorean, holds that experiences can grant justification for beliefs independently from

the possession of antecedent justification to reject the relevant sceptical hypothesis. The chosen principle is not motivated on further beliefs, but on the grounds of its plausibility and capacity of offering an accurate description of our ordinary doxastic practices, as we've seen with PC, allowing the Liberal position modest anti-sceptical pull.[23] One might contest that something like PC's purported naturalness and relatively reflection-free nature is actually close to ordinary epistemic practices. It could be said, for example, that in everyday endeavours, we implicitly deal with background assumptions concerning what is possible and plausible and what is not. This would suggest that our ordinary beliefs do not arise in an entirely passive manner.[24] If we momentarily cast aside such issues, however, Liberalism might appear quite close to how we'd understand our visual perception outside of a philosophical context.

Conservatism is the denial of Liberalism's assumptions. A classically conservative position in the debate is Crispin Wright's, who presents his position directly in connection with the perceived faults of Moorean proofs. Their failure is a failure of warrant transmission.[25] Transmission of warrant is not simply closure applied to justification. It expresses the idea that "to acquire a warrant for the premises of a valid argument and to recognise its validity is thereby to acquire – perhaps for the first time – a warrant to accept the conclusion" (Wright 2002:332). If the premises of an argument have epistemic warrant for them to be properly believed, this warrant should transmit to the conclusion of the same argument if the argument is to be cogent. Failure of transmission does not entail closure failure.[26] In addition to the notion of transmission of warrant, Wright's conservatism endorses the idea of Information-Dependent Warrant, which expresses that a body of evidence E provides information-dependent warrant for P, if regarding E as warranting P rationally requires having some collateral information I (ibid:335).

How do these concepts apply to Moorean proofs? Wright accepts its logical validity and doesn't simply assume that having unproven premises is unacceptable. The problem is that the proof fails to be *cogent* (ibid:331).[27] Wright shows this via the following template

HANDS

IH) My experience presents me what appears to be a hand

IIH) Here is a hand

IIIH) This hand is a real object within a material world (1985:434; 2002:337; 2004:170)

For the dogmatist, experience delivers a defeasible warrant expressed by IH, which supports the belief in the proposition IIH, which is then inferentially transmitted to IIIH in the Moorean proof that there is an external world. Wright identifies the problem as being that the warrant recorded by IH, for it to be valid for IIH, is information-dependent on antecedent warrant in the conclusion IIIH. This is why Moore's proof exhibits failure of transmission of warrant. My experience that here is a hand manages to support IIH only if the specific information provided by IIIH is already in place. The relevant information allowing the experience of perceiving a hand to transmit warrant to the belief that here is a hand is the proposition that this is a real hand in a material world (2002:336-7, 2007a:27). The capacity of IH to be valid as evidence in support of IIH is hence only admissible when the information attested in IIIH is already established. Therefore, it is epistemically improper to reach IIIH via warrant transmitted from IH to IIH because that warrant, to be available as perceptual warrant and capable of supporting IIH-belief, needs antecedent establishment of IIIH. But this is precisely what the proof was supposed to prove. Lacking suitable *a priori* grounds for its cogency:

> the upshot is that our entire "language game" of talk concerning the material world turns out to be based upon an assumption for which we have no ground whatever, can in principle get no ground whatever, and which could – for all we know – be false" (2002:340)

Given that certain fundamental but seemingly unproven assumptions determine even our ordinary talk about reality, the sceptic can very easily raise a question about the presumption of innocence these assumptions enjoy, and the legitimacy of our claiming these assumptions as valid.[28] Lacking independent positive reasons for their epistemic status and worth, our beliefs about the external world are revealed to depend on the very thing they are supposed to establish. This is a general feature of sceptical arguments we will deal with from this point onwards. It concerns both internalist attempts and traditional externalist perspectives such as reliabilism.[29] Moorean arguments of whatever stripe rely on presuppositions that would make the proof itself redundant if they could be shown as already valid. However, as long as positive reasons for their validity are missing, it's unclear how a legitimate epistemological argument can be based on them.

Pryor has objected to this transmission-failure charge by offering a taxonomy of the relations of epistemic dependence which instantiate it. He maintains that there are two types of dependence between premises and conclusion which concern Moorean proofs:[30]

> **Type-4)** The conclusion is such that evidence against it would undermine to some degree the justification one has for the premises
>
> **Type-5)** Having justification to believe the conclusion is among the conditions that make one have the justification one purports to possess for the premises (Pryor 2004:359)

Type-5 is clearly vicious, and in Wright's eyes this is the dependence Moorean proofs endorse. Pryor objects however that Moorean proofs only suffer from Type-4 dependence, and that is not vicious, given that Liberalism admits evidence against the conclusion can defeat the prima facie justification for the premises (ibid:354). Type-5 dependence expresses a kind of foundational dependence which "looks backward to the source of justification", while Type-4 shows merely that "one's justification for believing a type-II proposition is *negatively dependent"* on justification pertaining to belief in the conclusion (Vahid 2009:141). Cases that exhibit Type-5 dependence are like Dretske's zebra-cases, but Moorean proofs endorse nothing more than Type-4 dependence. Only Type-5 would give rise to actual transmission failure. The dogmatist accepts that evidence against the conclusion would undermine the warrant IIH obtains from IH-experiences but rejects that only antecedent conclusive warrant for the conclusion would support transmission of warrant (Davies 2004:218).[31] This is because by endorsing Liberalism about perceptual warrant, its transmission occurs seamlessly from the experience of seeing a hand to the conclusion that there is an external world, and only genuine evidence against the conclusion could afford one reasons to doubt the default warrant such perceptual experiences enjoy. There is, therefore, a seemingly unassailable presumption of immediate perceptual warrant due to seemings.

A deep disagreement is here at hand. One need not be a sceptic – Wright certainly isn't one,[32] to find Moorean proofs wanting and to see a requirement in antecedent justification for the premises as something reasonable. Pryor's stance is radical in arguing that non-evidentially supported doubt in the truth of the argument's conclusion is unwarranted, and

doesn't detract from the justificatory strength of the proof itself (2004:365). If scepticism or a sceptically-minded approach to epistemological questions is indeed a disease some catch, then the proof being incapable of convincing them that things are otherwise shouldn't count against the proof itself as epistemically ineffective. The problem is merely its dialectical power,[33] its persuasive strength, but the justificatory-structure it displays is nevertheless valid. This only adverts that Moorean proofs are weak as *arguments*, not as proofs:

> Arguments are dialectical creatures, in a way that proofs … are not. Arguing involves offering pieces of reasoning to audiences … [it] succeeds for a given audience to the extent that it presents the audience with a piece of reasoning they can rationally accept … Clearly Moore's argument is not very dialectically effective against that sceptic. But it should be clear by now why that's so. The sceptic has doubts that prevent Moore's argument from rationally persuading him (ibid:369)

The proof won't convince the sceptic, but she is merely being unreasonable in endorsing unreasonable doubts. This won't make a dent in the epistemic soundness of the proof. What we are required to do then is *not to take part* in the sceptical dialectic. Scepticism is implausible,[34] and can be left behind without further worries. Any lingering feeling that something might be iffy in this understanding of perceptual warrant is tied to the common mistake of conflating dialectical reasons that pertain to the activity of justifying one's own beliefs and genuine epistemic justification-makers (2005:214-5). This is again the distinction between propositional and doxastic justification.

The rest of this chapter is devoted to analysing this dialectical/epistemic divide, whether the proof can be salvaged as merely incapable of commanding persuasion *or* if there's anything epistemically problematic in what it proposes. We'll be arguing that ultimately the dogmatist cannot manage to escape from the sceptical dialectic because of her own stance. This latter verdict will also occupy much of the following two chapters.

3.4 Humean Questions

Those who usually side with Wright charge the proof as question-begging, as it assumes what it sets out to prove. Those who oppose this reading are adamant that no assumption is made, nor any reason is illicitly snuck in from the back-door and that the proof is epistemologically pristine. Conservatives would be advised to undermine the

proof/argument distinction Pryor adopts. A possibility on this score is arguing that, given that justification is a normative notion, begging the question cannot be completely detached from justification even at a propositional level. What constitutes a premise as question-begging depends on whether one can adequately entitle herself to that premise. This means that it will be a measure of both the epistemic content of the proof *and* of the context in which it is proposed (Sinnott-Armstrong 1999:175; Sgaravatti 2013:751). This contextual aspect is required; otherwise, we'd have to explain why the proof feels less suspicious in ordinary contexts.

Begging the question can be considered from either the standpoint of the arguer or of her audience. We can focus on the former, as this is what the sceptic will want to ascertain, whether the proof is flawed from one's own perspective. In the epistemological setting, the neo-Moorean is adamant that the proof is adequate because it shows her reasons to believe propositions about the external world. This is independent of providing any antecedent reason for its premises (Sinnott-Armstrong 1999:181-5). However, the sceptic will reply as follows: all that the neo-Moorean manages to establish is that she has a certain phenomenological presentation of something she understands to be a hand. But this on its own does not entail the transmission to the belief "here is a real hand", not without appealing to some further argument or reason-based support. Claiming to possess warrant solely in virtue of receiving a particular phenomenological seeming – propositional due to its felt veridicality but nevertheless non-doxastic – cannot discharge *on its own* the commitment to this presentation being sufficient to justifiedly belief "here is a hand" (ibid:190). These are considerations that do not pertain to convincing an audience. They concern the authority of the transition from the seeming to the belief, even if this transition issues only a modest, defeasible belief.

The dogmatist will foreseeably reply that to assume that this entitlement to immediate perceptual warrant has to be somehow discharged is to commit a level-confusion (Alston 1983:84). If seemings reveal *directly* how things are, the transition from IH to IIH is already available at the propositional level. A requirement of discharging this as a *commitment* introduces a doxastic element that neo-Mooreans do not concern themselves with. If conservatives have reasons to doubt the propositional availability of seeming-based

warrant, they must be careful not to appeal to sceptical considerations implicitly. To simply raise ad hoc doubts about perceptual warrant would mean begging the question against the dogmatist, without arguing why we should doubt perceptual warrant (ibid:87). For the dogmatist, thinking that there is a commitment to discharge on such matters is fundamentally mistaken because this pertains only to arguments and not to proofs, and only the latter are the proper object of epistemic evaluation. Being unable to discharge a commitment would show again only dialectical flaws (Hazlett 2006:345).

The two stances are trapped in a deep disagreement, and additionally, both sides claim to come away from the encounter with a victory in their hands. The sceptic/conservative will claim that dogmatism cannot explain why Moorean proofs are considered ineffective in epistemology. They fail to provide reason in support of the cogency of the proof itself and its basic elements. Seemings are bare phenomenological presentations, yet they're so powerful that they manage to provide warrant for propositions like "There is an external world", *and* they also allegedly dispel the possibility of luck or arbitrariness.[35] The dogmatist instead will retort with a relative novelty. It is usually considered to be a sceptic's victory if only a tie is achieved. But scepticism has seemingly failed in their eyes to show that antecedent warrant in the conclusion of the proof is required on more than the dialectical level. They can therefore maintain that this dialectical ineffectiveness signals no epistemic flaws. If there's a tie, victory belongs to the dogmatist.

However, if the opponents here were simply to talk past each other however, this might be a problem for the dogmatist, because one of the attractive features of the position is the combination of a modest, common-sense picture of perceptual warrant together with a genuine anti-sceptical conclusion. If the anti-sceptical conclusion failed to command the authority that it allegedly possesses, this might be used as a reason for seeing other, more ambitious proposals as more desirable. Ultimately ending with a deep disagreement would also entail that the engagement with both scepticism and dogmatism hasn't borne much progress for epistemology.

Breaking the tie requires finding some crucial mistake that one of the two sides is committing. The suggestion we want to propose on this score starts from the dogmatist idea that scepticism is merely *scenario-based*. Neo-Mooreans implicitly hold that sceptical

scenarios are implausible, and only if adequately motivated as possible would they be required to engage with them. But how could a sceptic make plausible an actual occurrence of a scenario? After all, that would be a claim the sceptic herself ought to doubt. This is an inaccurate picture.[36] As we've mentioned already in the previous two chapters, scepticism does not get its intuitive strength from mere possibility of error. It is best understood as raising a genuine philosophical challenge about living up to our own epistemic and rational goals. If we endorse specific criteria as required for the establishment of justification and knowledge, the sceptic admonishes us to check that our beliefs and methods really are as valid and authoritative for us as we claim them to be. The sceptic is better regarded as a philosophical agnostic (Coliva 2008:237), which puts the ball in the epistemologists' field, asking them to be rationally persuaded by what they offer.

Opponents of neo-Mooreanism have in fact been explicit in viewing the dispute as revolving around the following issue. If evidence for a proposition is to be obtained via an experiential procedure, then the grounds provided by this evidence cannot be regarded as rationally stronger than the grounds for believing that the procedure itself has been carried out correctly or adequately (Wright 2004:168). This is where the requirement for antecedent warrant in the IH-IIH transition originates, but this merely establishes the lack of possession of that warrant when the problem is posed, not that it *cannot* be obtained tout court. This question is supplied by the Humean insight (1975:152-3, 1978:172-8) that any attempt at showing the rationality of our epistemic procedures is in danger of being merely circular, with the consequent incapability of establishing the appropriate connection between the rational basis of our beliefs and what these beliefs are supposed to be about. By neglecting to address this insight, which the sceptic employs but is not merely sceptical in its nature, the neo-Moorean presents a seemingly insufficient and incomplete perspective.

Once the problem is seen in this light, then what needs to be addressed is not merely whether one does indeed receive perceptual warrant from seemings all things considered, but it constitutes the issue of what epistemic right we possess to *claim* that we have that perceptual warrant (Coliva 2008:239). It's a matter of what authorises us to

entitle ourselves to have experiences of a certain kind that license corresponding beliefs about the external world.[37] If one takes herself to be ordinarily warranted in believing propositions such as “here is a hand”, the sceptic will ask how she can *redeem* that warrant in an epistemologically respectable fashion, in order to be able to properly claim it. Otherwise, one’s own assurances to this fact will amount to arbitrary claims (ibid:240, 2015:38).[38]

> The crucial consequence of Humean (and Cartesian) scepticism is not so much that our ordinary empirical propositions would not be evidentially (perceptually) justified … Rather, the crucial consequence … is precisely that the assumptions on which ordinary perceptual warrant depend are not epistemically grounded. This seems to entail both that our knowledge and justifications, such as they are, do not rest on a secure base, and that those assumptions might have been other than what they actually are (ibid:127-8)

If such concerns remain unacknowledged, then the dogmatist position won’t be anti-sceptical anymore because it will fail to be relevant to what scepticism actually establishes as a question (2008:242). It would cease to be a refusal to engage with scepticism on the grounds of its implausibility, and it would simply become a stance that has nothing to offer on this fundamental problem. However, if this issue is recognised, then the very *epistemic* strength of the position ought to be reassessed before granting the claim that neo-Mooreanism is merely dialectically ineffective.

The conservative position is that dogmatism is unable to meet this challenge because it can’t answer the requirement constituting the sceptical problem. The problem conceived along Humean lines requires a specific kind of answer. Whatever condition confers warrant for accepting IIH-propositions as epistemically meritorious, for the subject to be in a position to claim warrant for IIH she should at least be in a position to claim that the condition is met (Wright 2007a:33). Therefore, to solve the Humean problem and for S to claim IIH she should at least have the possibility to claim that those conditions obtain. To meet this requirement, the dogmatist ought to defend the idea that the phenomenological seeming of an object adequately entails the existence of the object as experienced – the condition – and that the subject be in such a position to entitle herself to believing this condition when she claims knowledge of a proposition like “here is a hand”.

However, this is not as trivial as the dogmatist would want to portray it, and the straight neo-Moorean answer seems ill-equipped for this task. Given the distinction exercised by the Dogmatist between the plain epistemic status of having justification, and the activity of justifying the belief based on this status it seems that the dogmatist is now committed to the following puzzling situation. When asked why she has the belief that p, she is committed to say that she just has no reason to question the validity of the perceptual warrant the belief is based on. However, if pressed on to the question as to whether the obtained warrant is actually valid, she must retreat endorsement of the warrant as having positive epistemic status (Wright 2007a:35). This is because neo-Moorean dogmatism claims that for one to have a justified belief or knowledge of p, no knowledge or justified belief in any condition that would warrant p is necessary. To actually answer the question would mean to take part into the sceptical dialectic. However, to hold on to the original belief in spite of this outspoken suspension of judgment seems arbitrary. When faced with ignorance concerning whether the conditions that warrant the justified belief, one should be able to say something as to why that belief is indeed justified. If no positive reason is provided it seems a contradictoriness of sort to just stick to the previously held belief.[39] It would amount in fact to an a priori exclusion of a possible undercutting defeater of the original belief. If one sticks to their guns notwithstanding awareness of one's own suspension of judgment about what warrants that belief, one seems to be entitled to do the same notwithstanding whatever defeater against the belief that they will encounter.[40] This contradicts the dogmatist contention that the justification obtained is prima facie *and defeasible*. Seemings do not seem capable of sustaining this epistemic weight, and if they are, the position becomes much less modest and natural than advertised. In addition, now, simply mentioning the implausibility of the sceptical scenarios or that antecedent doubt is a disease won't cut it anymore. The request seems to be grounded on a requirement against the arbitrariness of the proposal, which is something even dogmatists should heed. This will be a central aspect of the neo-Moorean/sceptic dialectic from the next chapter onwards.

Fellow dogmatists have, in fact, recognised the problematic nature of this Humean request. Luca Moretti has argued that even if seemings provide prima facie defeasible justification on an experiential level, to properly answer either scepticism or conservatism,

one has to endorse a reflective stance on the epistemic status of the seemings. But this will immediately make the seemings lose their justificatory powers (2018:271). This is because this requirement shows how propositional justification on its own has no anti-sceptical power; it is an empty concept if completely detached from a reflective assessment of its status. An undercutting defeater is immediately made available to the subject by assuming the reflective stance.[41] Therefore, prima facie justification is *elusive*: the subject "will realise that her seeming that p is a state that can possibly be produced by various sets of circumstances that make p false" (ibid:272).[42] The Humean problem here outlined requires a kind of reflective justification that compromises the anti-sceptical strength of dogmatism.

Is this admission of guilt enough to stop the dogmatist in her tracks? Notice how for something to vanish it has to be there at all at some point. So even if by mere reflection we lose seeming-based justification, there might have been some there initially. The sceptic would have to endorse the thesis that justification was never there at all, which is not a thesis that the sceptic can simply assume. Couldn't it be possible to have access to all sorts of warrant while being unable to claim one's own entitlement to them because of what one thinks is necessary for knowledge and justification to be had? A conservative would be an example of such a subject, forbidden from claiming what she has access to because of her epistemological stance (cf. Butzer 2018:553-8).

However, apart from its being unclear whether at this point this would amount to an anti-sceptical stance at all, the sceptic can simply reply that she's not assuming the unavailability of justification-conferring seemings at the propositional level, but that it is the dogmatist the one who has to establish that there is, and this will require assuming a general reflective stance. If a reflective stance is enough in the individual case to forbid one to claim justification for seeming-based beliefs, how could one reasonably claim knowledge of seeming being justification-conferring in general?[43] Scepticism is asking the dogmatist to provide a reason to be trusted. It is the dogmatist who's providing a justificatory theory, and it can't be reasonably expected that we unreflectively trust what they recommend.

3.5 Easy Knowledge

A different strategy is to accept the existence of this problem but double down on the claim that the kind of epistemic project the sceptic is trying to drag the dogmatist in is not the necessary one to salvage a theory of justification. This would mean that the Humean problem is sound, but it only belongs to a supererogatory epistemic enterprise that has no right claiming centre-stage, as it differs in scope and aims from the one that outlines the *structure* of justification. This is Martin Davies' attempt, which recasts Pryor's epistemic/dialectical effectiveness distinction in terms of distinctive epistemic projects.

Davies borrows from Frank Jackson two distinct purposes of arguing: *teasing-out* and *convincing*. He then connects them to the different epistemic projects of *deciding what to believe* and *settling the question*. The latter is the epistemic project which belongs to the Humean problem and in which Moorean stances are found flawed because it is conditioned by 'suppositional doubt' (Davies 2004:240, 2009:365). In this project, one is open to the possibility that "it is as likely as not that the [conclusion] is false" (ibid:369), and it is where the feeling of ineffectiveness properly strikes us. The alternative project of *deciding what to believe* assumes the mantle of the teasing-out property of arguments. This project allows one to structure a net of beliefs in compliance with those entailments that are already established in place (ibid:361). In this endeavour, one ought to believe what is unproblematically entailed by the propositions one has access to. Concerning Moorean proofs, warrant is transmitted because the whole project is not conditioned by suppositional doubt (2004:242). They function as arguments whose inferential structure articulates warrant for their conclusion. Given the absence of antecedent doubt, the argument will be furthermore non-circular. After all, the Moorean proof is simply the modus ponens of the closure-based argument scepticism relies on. Its structure is inferentially valid, allowing one to arrive via Moorean proofs "at a warranted belief that the argument's conclusion is true" (2004:363-4).[44]

Can this projects-separation be maintained? Is it possible for Moorean proofs to carve themselves out a niche in which their structure cannot be touched by scepticism while at the same time recognising that they would be out of place if their conclusion were to be in dispute? To answer this question, we need to introduce the specific problem that

motivated Davies' distinction between projects, and that also spurred Pryor to make explicit the epistemic/dialectical divide. This is the problem of *Easy Knowledge* [EK], proposed by Stewart Cohen as a general problem against internalist stances such as dogmatism.[45] The problem starts from the dogmatist's rejection of the following principle

> **KR)** A potential source of knowledge K can yield knowledge for S only if S knows K is reliable (Cohen 2002:310)

This principle can be formulated in terms of justification without any significant issue. KR is an expression of conservatism concerning knowledge and justification. For Cohen, rejecting KR is something dogmatist theories will be inclined to do to not fall into the Problem of the Criterion. We'll see in the next chapter that this is a mistaken verdict. For now, we limit ourselves to register that rejecting KR entails adopting some kind of basic knowledge or justification. These theories will then be capable of endorsing what Cohen calls a *Basic Knowledge Structure* (2002:311). Starting from individual instances of basic knowledge or justification, obtained arguably via perceptual seemings, one could then claim that those very sources provide reliable, albeit defeasible beliefs, and many additional beliefs. BKS generates two related problems, which can be made visible via the following example:

> **1T)** The table seems red
>
> **2T)** The table is red
>
> **3T)** If the table is red then it is not white but illuminated by red lights
>
> **4T)** The table is not white but redly-illuminated (Cohen 2005:418)

This example doesn't differ in structure from Dretske's cases nor Moorean proofs. When its closure-related aspect[46] is considered, Cohen observes that the way the table looks allows one to get basic knowledge before knowing that perceptual seemings are reliable – which is a case of *bootstrapping – and* to obtain knowledge of propositions such as 4T. But this is problematic: we got knowledge of those propositions in a way too easy manner. Cohen imagines his son asking him how does he know that the table is not white-but-redly-illuminated, and going by the BKS, Cohen answers, "don't worry, it looks red, so it's not white-but redly-illuminated". Of course, this answer seems to miss the point of the question. Once one knows that 'the table is red', then it is a trivial inference to 'the table

is not white-and-redly-illuminated". Any alternative incompatible with the table being red can be trivially inferred as false from that single proposition by simple application of closure or by simple use of disjunctive addition (ibid:314). To use a Wittgensteinian turn of phrase, if you know the table is red, we'll grant you all the rest.

However, if this is precisely what a theory endorsing BKS such as dogmatism recommends, the outcome is that one should be able via trivial inference to conclude that ¬SK, and that our faculties are reliable (ibid:315). BKS allows both for knowledge of very substantial propositions as well as to bootstrap oneself to reliability knowledge in an automatic manner. Once basic knowledge or justification that P is granted, simple reflection on P can produce all sorts of different propositions as warranted for the subject. But this is patently untenable and would make dogmatism not only offer a dogmatic stance but even a dogmatic argument with a completely implausible epistemic structure, which was what Pryor wanted to avoid at all costs. In addition, dogmatism allegedly rejected KR to avoid problems of circular reasoning in establishing the source of one's knowledge. On this score, it has simply traded one circularity for another.[47]

Both Pryor and Davies' proposals have been raised with the EK problem in mind. In both cases, they don't deny that knowledge or justification can be obtained rather easily. They contest that in this easiness, there is an actual as opposed to perceived inappropriateness. Pryor admits that Cohen's answer to his son is suspect, but again only because of its unpersuasiveness (2004:362). Davies recognises that Cohen's answer would do nothing to settle the question, but it would say something about deciding what to believe (2004:242). They both hold that in cases that elicit EK-intuitions, we are in a context where antecedent or suppositional doubts are in place, forcing the justificatory structure of the arguments to seem question-begging. Additionally, Peter Markie has noticed that the argument would be question-begging even if inductive evidence about the reliability of perception was available, because of the sceptical nature of the context the table case is placed in. However, this does not taint the epistemic legitimacy of extending one's knowledge via such closure-based inferences (2005a:411).

This response seems to simply ignore the real problem, and Cohen has proposed a variation of the case that explicitly avoids relying on suppositional doubts. He accepts that

his son is not worried about possible deception. He just wants to know how Cohen knows that the table is red-and-not-white-but-redly-illuminated, what the basis for his belief is. Simply responding that Cohen just knows it because it looks red won't be much of a reply. This is the same kind of issue we identified with the Humean problem, which was active also in the cases of the previous chapter. We want to know how one can entitle oneself to claim a justified belief. Notice a crucial aspect: the dogmatist might reply that the curiosity of Cohen's son switches between the two projects. But the settling the question project was defined by the dogmatist as established by suppositional doubt. Here there is none. Instead, there is a legitimate philosophical question about what constitutes the basis for Cohen's knowledge that the table is red. This indicates that what ought to make us doubt of theories endorsing BKS is a legitimate epistemological question (Cohen 2005:420), which the sceptic is now free to exploit. This is the topic we'll be covering at length in the next chapter. We can observe that the complete separation between the two epistemic projects or between epistemic and dialectical effectiveness seems now quite artificial.

One last strategy can be analysed to argue that notwithstanding the possibility the two projects are entwined, this doesn't by itself erase the kind of justification granted in the deciding-to-believe project, as long as we don't recognise the settling-the-question project as fundamental. Luca Moretti's recent answer to EK hinges on his previously introduced distinction between seeming-based awareness and reflective awareness. If seeming-based justification is conceived as properly belonging to the deciding project, with reflective justification pertaining to the settling-project, it is not necessary that by possessing seeming-based justification one has to at the same time possess a claim to have them. The two can be kept separate, although by a movable and defeasible line.

Moretti reasoning starts from this form of the EK inference:

I) The Table is red [R]

II) If the table is red then it is not white but illuminated by red lights [$R \rightarrow \neg SH$]

C) The Table is not white but illuminated by red lights [$\neg SH$]

If seeming-based and reflective endeavours are considered apart, Moretti (2020:83) argues that justification for $\neg SH$, based on the seemings R and $R \rightarrow \neg SH$, doesn't

necessarily vanish once the conclusion is achieved. Reaching ¬SH need not make one reflectively aware of the initial R-seeming. This is because he argues, following Cohen on the bootstrapping inference, ¬SH is equivalent to the disjunction A∨B, with A being "the table is not white" and B as "the table is not red, but white-and-redly-illuminated". Furthermore, it is true that R→(A∨B), given that R→¬SH, but this is only in virtue of R→A. B is merely a placeholder. So, there might be the possibility that when one deduces ¬SH in virtue of A, one is not bound to be aware of R in return, saving one from reflective awareness and preserving the project of deciding what to believe, where the reasoning is appropriate.

There are two main problems with Moretti's line of reasoning. One connected to the content of the proof, and the other to what Moretti identifies as the key EK issue to be addressed. Firstly, the argument he gives as an example of seeming based justification is ambiguous. If we formalise it, we have the following argument:

Pr1) R

Pr2) R→A

Pr3) ¬SH↔(A∨B)

Pr4) R→¬SH

Therefore, ¬SH

The argument is logically valid, and it shows that by reaching the conclusion ¬SH, via the seeming R one needs not be reflectively aware of it as one might be merely aware of A at that point. One can question whether this is really possible – Moretti argues for this via an example with no obvious epistemological bearing – but we can permit some leeway on this front. The gist is that when reaching the conclusion, one can become aware of some other aspects of this argument instead, such as R→A.

However, there is a problem with the above argument. Its content is inadequate for providing an epistemological defence of seeming-based justification. This is because Moretti's reasoning treads on an ambiguity. If premise 1 is simply R, then the premise is not "the seeming of R", but simply a factual statement that the table is red.[48] When left in this way, the implication is trivial, as the truth of R→A is defined by the meaning of R, i.e.

"the table is red". The table is red, so it's not white.[49] Given that ¬SH is *defined* as a disjunction whose only relevant disjunct is A, then it will be true whenever A is true, making A sufficient for ¬SH, expressing the truth of the conditional A→¬SH.

Suppose it is then assumed as in the argument above that R and R→A, then R→¬SH will trivially follow due to the principle of transitivity of implication, trivially establishing the conclusion ¬SH as well. But here's the nub of the matter: the whole line of inferences from R to ¬SH, encompassing R→A, and A→¬SH does not accrue to an epistemologically expansive argument. It just states the conceptual truth that if something is red, then it won't be white, hence trivially, it won't be white but redly-illuminated. R→A is an *a priori* knowable inference (McBride 2017:57)[50] once the meaning of "red" is in place. The inference R→¬SH is knowable a priori as well, once ¬SH is defined as "A∨…". This means that running the [R, R→A, A→¬SH, ∴¬SH] argument won't add anything new to what we already knew when we assumed premise 1, i.e. "the table is red". None of the above entailments expresses justificatory reasoning properly from seemings to a factual statement, as its initial premise R *just is* a factual statement. This conflicts with the notion of warrant that the proof aims to transmit. There is no perceptual warrant about a new fact to be transmitted in this proof.

If the premise is the "seeming that R", then the argument reformulated is:

Pr1) P

Pr2) P→R

Pr3) R→A

Pr4) ¬SH↔(A∨B)

Pr5) R→¬SH

Therefore ¬SH

With P being "The table looks Red", which *is* properly a statement about a perceptual seeming, not just a factual statement that the table is red. Now it is aptly the "seeming that R" that which entails ¬SH. However, there is a crucial problem: the proof is *valid* but requires the truth of P→R, which is *not* an a priori statement anymore. Something can look red while failing to be red. Otherwise, the argument will be invalid.[51] Unfortunately

for dogmatists, the truth of P→R is precisely what must be argued for as Cohen's father/son example shows. Thus, before one can decide what to believe, the question must be settled as to how P→R can be endorsed. This is what the problem with Moretti's strategy *as an answer to easy knowledge* consists of: the worry is not about the seeming's accuracy. It raises an epistemologically defensible question concerning the truth of the P→R entailment, which is precisely what Cohen's revised argument calls for when it asks "how one knows that the table is red merely from it looking red to one" (Cohen 2005:420). It doesn't matter that the subject might be unaware of p. If one of the steps of the actual reasoning carried out might be false and has simply been presupposed as true, this is the problem that dogmatism needs to address, instead of a problem about later occurrence of worries about accuracy.[52] This is why, even in trying to salvage a context in which the only thing that matters is deciding what to believe, the problem of settling the question about a fundamental premise of seeming-based justification strikes back.

It is thereby arbitrary to separate the two: Davies defined the project of settling the question as both conditioned by suppositional doubt and signalling "open-mindedness" regarding the outcome (Davies 2004:240-3). The two elements seem incompatible: pre-existing doubt is not the same as open-mindedness because doubt induces disbelief (Coliva 2010:103). If open-mindedness is taken as defining of the settling project, the deciding project seems to be fulfilled by what fulfils the settling project in the first place (ibid:107). By being open-minded as the dogmatists maintain them to be, Moorean proofs ought to tell what one should believe, but it is only if the proof manages to settle the question concerning the truth of the P→R entailment that it will be capable of doing that.[53] On the score of Pryor's proposal, we see that what constitutes the dialectical prowess of an argument is not merely a measure of its formal structure but of the material inferential relations it establishes, which are an epistemic matter. If a theory of justification can't provide any recognisable support for what they entitle subject to claim, all that we're left with is an arbitrary stance.

The outcome is that when Moorean proofs are shown to be unable to accommodate these questions, they fail to explain how warrant is even obtained from the initial seeming. Therefore, it is not proper to even conceive them as instantiating transmission-failure, as

warrant is not there to be transmitted from the start, and this can hardly be conceived as a merely dialectical flaw (Coliva 2010:107). This should give enough reasons to stifle the Moorean claims that the epistemic character of the stance is sound notwithstanding its evident dialectical flaws. Neo-Moorean dogmatism appears to be committed to engage with scepticism on the level of settling the question concerning the entailment $P \rightarrow R$.[54] However, something more can be extracted from their failure. The move dogmatists commit in easy knowledge cases and in external world proofs in general, i.e., allowing for basic knowledge, adverts to a much broader problematic, one that the debate has only superficially engaged with. Basic knowledge is taken to be the way to avoid the scepticism connected to the problem of the criterion. But this is incorrect: as in the next chapter we'll show, allowing for basic knowledge is a definite move *within* the problem of the criterion. The reaches of the sceptical dialectic extend much farther than the dogmatist dreams of.

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1 Externalist neo-Moorean approaches either endorse the *safety* condition (Sosa 1999) or some form of perceptual disjunctivism (McDowell 1983), which are more contentious notions.

2 For such applications of neo-Moorean dogmatism, cf. Crisp 2010; Moretti&Piazza 2015; Rogers&Matheson 2011.

3 Similar stances have been defended in Chudnoff 2011 and Brogaard 2013, 2016. An ancestor of the view is in Pollock&Cruz 1999, albeit mostly on the topic of *mnemonic* experiences (cf. Moretti 2020:8).

4 Pryor (2005:319, 2004:353) expresses it as "when it perceptually seems to you as if P is the case, you have a kind of justification for believing P".

5 Williams observes (2001:95) that the move of claiming that experience is just the way it is, subtracting it to sceptical scrutiny because of its nature is a common move within contemporary forms of foundationalism.

6 This veridicality is *sui generis* for whatever property a mental state enjoys that expresses a felt demand to believe a certain proposition. However, the explanatory power of this definition is dubious; veridicality might be due to other possessed beliefs, and it is not clear what this notion of assertiveness manages to capture (cf. Cullison 2010:270; Audi 2013:191; Tooley 2013:310)

7 This notion might create a prima facie contrast with the idea of felt veridicality the seeming supposedly possesses (cf. Tooley 2011:311ff). While both beliefs and seemings are propositional attitudes, beliefs are endorsed *based* on the seemings (Skene 2013:542).

8 Cf. Huemer 2001:103. Huemer contends that for these reasons it is the *superior* form of foundationalist internalism (2006:155).

9 See on this Huemer 2007:30, 52; 2001:98; Pryor 2000:519. Pryor recognizes however that background beliefs might act as defeaters against seemings (ibid:533, 540).

10 For seemings as mental states see Huemer 2001:53-5, 79, 99-100; Hasan 2013a:133; Moretti 2020:2-7. Huemer seems to uphold the mentalist conception (2006:147; 2011a:11). For reading that combine both see Hasan 2013b:175. Pryor is non-committal, but rejects justification as mere blamelessness as some classical deontological stances do (2004:352).

11 Bergmann (2013a:168) argues that the weak-horn is nevertheless violated by dogmatism, because there is no actual awareness requirement concerning the seeming itself. It is possible to

have a feeling of veridicality towards something and have no idea how this contributes towards generating a belief (ibid:170). Cf. Leite 2011;166 for the impossibility of distinguishing between prima facie justification and reflective luck. Bergmann (2013b) has also argued that the seeming-based strategy can be integrated within an externalist framework. In fact, if both suffer from the SPO problem, this raises the question of how much of an internalist position dogmatism can claim to be.

[12] On such attempts cf. Stroud 1984:88-9.

[13] Cf. Moore 1942:672; 1949:215-6. On Moore's responses see Stroud 1984:92-8.

[14] See Clarke 1972:757. Moore was in fact purposely trying to make the ordinary bear on the philosophical to blur the gap between the two (Coliva 2018:470-2).

[15] For a dissenting opinion cf. Sosa 1988:159 who argues that this reasoning, while explanatorily powerless, might still be useful for support purposes. However, this would also raise the question of how Moore "manages to know such a thing" (ibid:160)

[16] Cf. Moore 1942:668. On this crucial aspect in Moore's epistemology see Coliva 2018:469, Baumann 2008:190; Wright 2007a:38; Sosa 2009:8. Baumann observes that in *Certainty,* Moore views the sceptical and anti-sceptical arguments as formally on par (2008:191). Even if he maintains that there's more reason to believe common-sense over scepticism, he stops short of endorsing this as knowledge (ibid:192).

[17] Hazlett (2006:360) defends a similar view on Moorean profs: if the sceptic gives an argument based on intuitive premises, then appeal to experiential intuition is legit.

[18] Cf. Aristotle 1971:1006a11-28; 1975:72b15-25. For an objection against the idea that avoiding belief in general is self-refuting see Johnsen 2001:540, 553, who argues that it conflates between an appearance that p and assenting to the truth of p.

[19] On Sextus' own answer to the charge see M VII.440-3; VIII.473-77. On this use of dialectical methodology in Pyrrhonism and in the Academy cf. Machuca 2009:107, 122; 2019:200, 212; Hankinson 1995:24; Striker 1980:94, 102.

[20] Against the perceived naturalness of the position, it would in fact entail the endorsement of a quite substantial *a priori* principle (Skene 2013:541). See the next chapter for some elaboration on this idea.

[21] For this suggestion cf. DePoe 2011:253-3; Beillard 2016:189. It is true that it would still *seem* to you that the belief is reliable, but at this point what prima facie justifies the belief would be its being reliable, not a phenomenological seeming.

[22] On Phenomenal Conservatism substantially converging with externalism on counts of their general methodology, cf. Vahid 2013:50. Externalists usually neglect the category of propositional justification and endorse the notion of doxastic justification as fundamental. They contest to the internalists that what they require is *personal* justification. See for such stances Engel 1992 and Littlejohn 2011:ch.1. Internalists on their part do not recognize the category of personal justification. The debate is at times very confused, but it can be glimpsed that what the internalist would call propositional justification is what the externalist would recognize as doxastic justification, and the internalist deontological conception of doxastic justification – requiring reflective access – is what the externalist would call personal justification. The externalist collapses the distinction between propositional and doxastic justification, because justification is for externalists determined by the environment in relation to the functioning of cognitive faculties. This means that the basic unit of justification that can be obtained pertains to a belief appropriately formed via reliable or properly cognitive faculties. But this means that justification is already doxastic. An internalist would reply that without reflective access to how this belief was formed, all that is available to the subject as justified is the proposition that makes up the content of the belief.

[23] For this characterization of the liberal side of the distinction, cf. Neta 2004:199; McGrath 2013:353.

[24] Such an example is Schiffer's blue cube hologram case (2004:171-4).

[25] Warrant is traditionally interpreted as any fourth condition added to JTB accounts that transforms the belief in knowledge (Plantinga 1993). Wright's usage is different. It is an all-things-considered mandate for a belief that P, making it epistemically appropriate to believe P (2007a:30). This appears on the surface as a homonym of justification (cf. Brown 2005:2, Moretti&Piazza 2018:1). We can understand it as the element of epistemic appraisal in justification, that which makes it appropriate to hold the belief (cf. Leite 2011:159; Tucker 2009:445). For a different conception cf. Zalabardo 2005:33.

[26] Closure does not concern how one obtains warrant to believe a premise, it only requires that one has it. (Brown 2005:3; cf. Zalabardo 2005:46-9). For Wright warrant *obeys* closure, but closure is compatible with failure of warrant transmission (Wright 2004:178; Davies 2004:221; Alspector-Kelly 2019:12-3)

[27] Which is not the same as holding it as *valid* (Wright 2003:57). Cogency concerns being compelled to accept a conclusion, not mere formal validity of an argument.

[28] Transmission-failure is usually considered to express a quite powerful sceptical argument, cf. Wedgwood 1990:53.

[29] Cf. Alston (1986:10) for a characterization of the problem of epistemic circularity suffered by reliabilism along essentially parallel lines.

[30] Pryor contends that the other three types would disqualify formally valid arguments as "If p, then p". However, these arguments have little epistemic value as no knowledge-expanding inference can be based on them (Sgaravatti 2013:768).

[31] Pryor argues that while zebra-cases endorse type-5 dependence, other examples which instantiate transmission failure, such as the case of the red table which is not white-but-redly-illuminated are enlisted into type-4 relations (2004:361-2). It is not clear however how Pryor can support this distinction, given that all these cases – zebras, hands, tables – seem to instantiate the same problem (Vahid 2009:144).

[32] For Wright, belief in IIIH-proposition is a matter of a priori non-evidential warrant (2004:174). However, he admits that his theory of non-evidential *entitlements* is not a traditional refutation of scepticism, and involves accepting an element of *risk* in our cognitive adventures (ibid:190-2, 206).

[33] Pryor here joins the ranks of externalists who defend epistemic circularity as benign, and as merely dialectically ineffective. Apart from Alston (1986), we can mention Michael Bergmann, whose distinction between questioned and unquestioned contexts (2004:718) is used to adopt a form of Reidian commonsensism which holds scepticism to be *ridiculous* (ibid:723). For a reply against Bergmann's, see Reed 2006. Another externalist who defend this idea is Hill (1996:580).

[34] Cf. also Huemer's recent verdict that scepticism is simply not a serious possibility (2016).

[35] For these objections cf. Vahid 2009:146, Leite 2011:166, Neta 2004:205, Coliva 2008:237.

[36] Wright (1985:431-5) presented this idea right at the start of his proposal. To insist on the implausibility of the sceptical scenarios is simply to miss the point, but the further point that they do not hinge merely on matters of veridicality must have been missed as well. Huemer's recent contention (2016) that scepticism can be dismissed because BIV possibilities are unlikely is representative of how such stances miss the sceptical point.

[37] And the risk here for purely externalist positions is that they'd be blind to such a requirement, cf. Coliva 2015:37; Wright 2007a:32.

[38] Cf. also Leite 2011:166 that otherwise "the belief will be little more than a guess from that person's point of view".

[39] This issue is what Wright calls the *Simple Elevation Hypothesis*, cf. on this also Coliva 2008:242-3. For the idea that it is arbitrary to claim knowledge of p and at the same time suspend judgement on whether the epistemic conditions that warrant belief in p obtain, cf. Marušić 2013:1989; 2016:1083; and Leite 2004b:247.

[40] In this sense the neo-Moorean runs into the trap of the 'Knowledge Paradox', cf. Unger 1975:109-117. If one actually knows or has a justified belief that p, then they would be entitled to

rule out any possible defeater of p as misleading because incompatible with knowledge that p. In this case the neo-Moorean is sticking to her guns in spite of a possible undercutting defeater. No matter the fact that they have no idea whether the warranting condition obtains, they retain the justified belief that p. This means that the seeming-based justification is not really defeasible.

[41] See also Leite 2011:175-9, on the doxastic insufficiencies of neo-Mooreanism.

[42] Some assessments on this score notice that this problem is due to the fact that if dogmatism has to explain what counts in favour of IIIH-propositions without being able to rely on IH-seemings then it ends up endorsing conservative requirements (Leite 2011:166; Neta 2004:205-6; Audi 2013:194-5).

[43] This might lead to a verdict of general failure about seemings as sources of justification, but this would be the result of an inductive argument, not a presupposition of the sceptic. Scepticism does not have to establish that warrant is never available in order for it to have its role, as otherwise it would collapse into negative dogmatism.

[44] For Pryor (2004:363) what is more relevant is the structure of justification unveiled by the proof, rather than the project, but this is compatible with Davies' contention that in teasing-out what one knows, the endorsed justificatory structure is epistemically apt.

[45] It is in essence the internalist counterpart to the *bootstrapping* objection raised by Jonathan Vogel (2000, 2008) against reliabilism. While Vogel's charge targets inductive inference, Cohen's case targets deduction (Melchior 2016:216). Vogel argues that internalism is spared by his problem (2008:531), but this is because Vogel reads internalist bootstrapping as a case of *rule circularity*. Cohen reads it as a matter of *premise* circularity. On the difference between the two cf. Lammenranta 1996:115-6, Kallestrup 2012:393-4; Cohen 2010:145.

[46] Most of the EK-debate is held in terms of closure, rather than transmission failure (Cohen 2002; Melchior 2016; Vogel 2000). Zalabardo (2005:37-9) exploits the difference between the two to provide a solution. See McBride 2017:ch.2, and Lockard 2014 for objections to Zalabardo's reading.

[47] This is quite visible in the related problem of *Cognitive Penetration* (Siegel 2012; Markie 2005b; 2006), which shows how one can epistemically *elevate* oneself to knowledge of propositions they trivially ignore. Chudnoff (2011) and Brogaard (2016) have defended neo-Mooreanism on this score, but both attempts end up trading away the naturalness of the position. Thanks to Alasdair Craig for this insight.

[48] Moretti talks about the "seeming of R", but "the seeming of R" is not R, it is a different proposition. However, when he presents his argument, and more specifically the entailment $R \rightarrow \neg SH$, he is using just R as the antecedent of the conditional. $R \rightarrow \neg SH$ is not "the seeming of R implies $\neg SH$", which would take a different form. The dogmatist might reply that in the seeming of R itself there is already the fact that R. We'll engage with this issue in the next chapter.

[49] See McBride 2017:70, on substituting for these trivial inferences "P, $P \rightarrow Q$, $\therefore Q$" with simply "P, so Q". For Sextus Empiricus these inferences adverted to a crucial defect in general epistemic entailment, cf. PH II.198-203; Hankinson 1995:210.

[50] Cf. also Klein 2004:178. "The inference to the table is not white while being illuminated by red lights has not amplified our knowledge at all. Nothing has been 'gained' by inferring [it] from *the table is red*".

[51] A counter-model for the argument without $P \rightarrow R$ or with merely P both have the same values is as follows: P=True, H=True, R=False, A=False, B=False

[52] Moretti takes this into consideration at the end of his argument, referencing "Cohen's second thought experiment" and immediately quips that the solution is identical to the one we have been criticizing. (2020:85). Where a different argument would be needed due to the different question raised by Cohen's revised case, Moretti offers none.

[53] Coliva argues that the settling-project collapses into the deciding-project (2010:115), but given our analysis here it seems to be the other way around.

[54] The presumption that dogmatism does not need to do so is arguably rooted in Dogmatism's *individualistic* picture of justification, one that does not require such question-begging evidence or reasons as their character as 'question-begging' is conceived as purely dialectical, cf. Lammenranta 2011a:10, 2013:62.

Chapter 4

Basic Knowledge and the Problem of the Criterion

In chapter two, we investigated a defence of the closure principle applied via modus tollens to the sceptical conclusion. Chapter three has investigated the other alternative on the table, the modus ponens route. Moorean arguments against radical scepticism are conceived in the sin of begging the question, and the neo-Moorean strategy had to be assessed. The strategy endorsed the idea that Moorean proofs, while dialectically ineffective against scepticism, are perfectly sound pieces of epistemological reasoning, notwithstanding the diagnosis of transmission failure. The fact that they can't convince sceptics or those who defend a conservative picture of perceptual warrant, is merely a symptom of the disease scepticism is prey to. In order not to simply stop the investigation in the tracks of a deep disagreement with little hope of progress, a common evaluative ground between the conservative and the Moorean camp was attempted, under the guise of 'Humean scepticism'. This led to neo-Mooreanism having to admit at least to the precarious nature of the prima facie justification it provides. Nevertheless, some justification is better than no justification at all. A first-order justification that is nevertheless bona fide justification might be enough to bring home a victory against scepticism.

However, this precarious justification can only be genuine if it can be shown that it pertains to a level of inquiry to which sceptical doubts do not belong. The problem of easy knowledge had the merit of showing that the first-order prize that neo-Mooreanism had seemingly won – basic knowledge or basic justification – is precisely what is contested by scepticism. If the neo-Moorean envisioned the looks-based justification as pertaining to a simple basic component of the first-order 'deciding what to believe' endeavour and to the status of *being justified*, the sceptic replies that the crucial move, the endorsement of a specific experience as basic knowledge, immediately changes the scenario into a reflective investigation about settling the question as to what constitutes perceptual warrant for our beliefs. The neo-Moorean struggles to remain in the order of immediacy, the only remaining candidate for a notion of prima-facie justification lest it becomes object of reflective inquiry and immediately vanish from our epistemic grasp. The sceptic points

to the fact that the crucial step of the neo-Moorean reasoning, the transition from looks-judgments – seemings – to is-judgments – the prima facie justified belief – is precisely what is under scrutiny.

Is this game over for neo-Mooreanism, or for general experientialist stances that aim to maintain some immediately intelligible representation or relation concerning our knowledge of the external world? Not quite. We gave much leeway to the Dogmatist in order not to merely raise a deep disagreement between incompatible perspectives. So we have tried to see whether it was a move made by the dogmatists themselves that landed them into sceptical trouble. And this is where a resolute dogmatism might reply: "You sly dog! You think you've shown that Moorean proofs endorse something that must be adjudicated via a confrontation with scepticism, but this is only a trick. To see the entailment between 'X looks Y to S' and 'X is Y' as problematic means to have already caught the sceptical bug. However, for your arguments to be sound, you have to show that to accept the proofs as satisfactory, it is necessary to dabble within this problematic, and everything you've said falls short of this outcome."

We are interested here in granting as much conceptual space to the dogmatist as possible, and under this proviso this assessment is not unfair. In arguing against Moretti's solution to EK, we argued that the problem was not the precarious state of first-order justification that the experience of seeing a red table afforded, but rather that the transition from looks-judgment to the actual belief "here is a red table" was not itself warranted. But the Dogmatist could simply see this problem as motivated by antecedent endorsement of sceptical doubts, which would trivially make the dogmatist option unavailable. In addition, we said that to address the 'deciding to believe' project, one had to engage first with the 'settling the question' project, which naturally involves engaging sooner or later with sceptical problems. But the Dogmatist can again reply that this is something she is not bound to do because her starting points are absolutely mundane and allow one to simply have beliefs based on what experience affords her, drawing expanding deductive inferences from those first-order beliefs.

In synthesis, the problem for the sceptic here is that on both counts – the transition from 'looks' to 'is' and concerning the two different projects – we've merely shown what a

traditional epistemologist, who pays attention to sceptical issues, would find objectionable. We haven't shown that the Dogmatist is bound to view things in the same way. We haven't identified any fundamental faux pas that requires her to engage with the sceptic. We've simply indicated the unjustified presuppositions of the stance. Still, we haven't shown a reason as to why the Dogmatist has to find them problematic, nor engage in a dialectic against someone who thinks they are. Even though what we presented in the previous chapter strongly suggests that dialectical concerns cannot be cleanly separated from epistemic matters as the Dogmatist would want, nothing the Dogmatist did mandates that she listens to the remarks of somebody who she thinks is philosophically ill.

This chapter aims to show that the Dogmatist does, in fact, take part in the sceptical dialectic, and that dialectical ineffectiveness is something that undercuts the epistemic prowess of a stance. More specifically, the Dogmatist engages – unwillingly – in the dialectic belonging to the Problem of the Criterion. By selecting a specific answer to the question of what constitutes the source, the *what* we know, instituting general criteria for knowledge, the Dogmatist already engages with scepticism. This is something the Dogmatist is bound to do if her position is to be understood as proposing something genuinely epistemological. They won't be able to simply say that engaging with the sceptical problem is something no sane person would do. The commitments of the position will have to be discharged if the Dogmatist wants to maintain a claim that it is her position, not others, which gets things right.

Therefore, the main task is to show how the very presuppositions of the neo-Moorean stance lead them to both engage with the sceptical dialectic and land themselves in a very troublesome spot at that. The dialectical ineffectiveness of the position betrays a distinctively epistemic weakness. Before we can simply raise the problem of the criterion, we have to analyse better what constitutes Easy Knowledge and what is specifically problematic of the dogmatist position concerning that issue. This means focusing on the role of *basic* knowledge.

4.1 The Problem with Easy Knowledge

While discussing Moretti's argument against Easy Knowledge, we raised the problem of the transition from seemings to factual statements and beliefs. However, we haven't presented a case as to why the transition is problematic. It is particularly pressing that we do so because there is a fundamental risk for the sceptic here to make the position boil down to a mere appearance/reality distinction. We mentioned in chapter two that this would be catastrophic for scepticism. It would reduce the position to something completely gratuitous and would indeed give the upper hand to positions such as Dogmatism. We've also suggested that scepticism doesn't get its argumentative purchase *merely* from issues pertaining to error-scenarios and deceptions. Notwithstanding how much of contemporary epistemology understands scepticism simply along these lines, this might indeed be one of the reasons scepticism is mainly met with contempt and sufficiency. The main driving force behind scepticism that we are trying to build up a case for, pertains instead to the rational status, the objective purport, of our beliefs about the world, and on the possibility of ascertaining whether what they are based upon has the credentials required for these beliefs to amount to justification and knowledge.

To show where the neo-Moorean answer goes wrong, we have, therefore, to individuate the legitimate philosophical problem with how they construe the evidential relation from experience to belief. If we manage to uncover something that can be legitimately disagreed with on a philosophical basis, the result is two-fold: there will be no unwarranted reliance on a priori appearance/reality distinctions, and it will allow the opportunity to understand the neo-Moorean stance as undertaking specific moves in a sceptical dialectic, foiling the Dogmatist's attempts at avoiding sceptical confrontation. To accomplish this task, we have to go back into the details of Cohen's easy knowledge problem, which at the end of the last chapter was introduced in connection with the dialectical/epistemic distinction executed by Pryor and Davies, and this led to perhaps a somewhat hasty treatment of its points.

The stances that endorse a Basic Knowledge Structure can reject the proviso of having antecedent warrant in the reliability of the chosen faculty or method of knowledge,

avoiding what is usually recognised as a sceptical trap. It seems this can be done with good cause because of the intuitive character of the notion (Cohen 2002:310). Dogmatism fits the bill. The first problem Cohen identified pertained to the consequent application of the closure principle. Applied to instances of basic knowledge, it seems to warrant automatic knowledge of many more propositions automatically entailed by the basic proposition known. A case in point is that the table is not "white but redly illuminated", but we can easily think of many more propositions directly entailed by the basic knowledge claimed, which are suddenly available to us. Pryor sees no problems with such inferences and deems them perfectly respectable (2004:362). He adds that such arguments might fail to satisfy everyone, but again, they are pristine in terms of justificatory structure. Huemer considers only whether the position is too liberal in granting justification for the initial basic item of knowledge (2001:108). In a later paper, he displays the same idea as Pryor that the argument is cogent: if you know the table is red, then you know that the table is not white but redly illuminated (2011b:11). This is a point we can heartily concede. Once basic knowledge is in place, why should these inferences be considered illicit? They simply apply the closure principle, which nobody in this particular debate aims at denying, as it is mostly from internalist perspectives.[1] If one does know that the table is red, they are legitimately in the position of knowing all the propositions that immediately follow. If we don't allow for this inference, it seems implausible to hold on to the closure principle.[2]

However, we noticed that by establishing that the above entailment is unproblematic and closure should be preserved, we do end up in some very problematic bootstrapping-inferences. Once we have basic knowledge, it is not clear what stops us from bootstrapping our way up to knowledge of the reliability of that very same faculty, simply via application of the closure principle, which delivered other cogent and unexceptional propositions. It is interesting to observe that Dogmatism doesn't seem too much concerned by this possibility. Moretti appeals to the strict first-order nature of the justification provided by Dogmatism. To execute a closure deduction up to knowledge of reliability of one's faculty is reflective justification, and Dogmatism simply is not concerned with that (2020:83-5). If one were to make the bootstrapping inference, prima facie justification would be lost.

More interesting is the attitude endorsed by Huemer and Pryor. Both seem to sit uneasily with this problem: Huemer acknowledges that bootstrapping inferences would be intuitively implausible. Not only they wouldn't convince anyone who antecedently doubted the reliability of the faculty,[3] but they couldn't reasonably convince anyone who *didn't* antecedently doubt it either (2011b:13-5). His strategy is to argue that the problem can be addressed one step at a time. S has a seeming that p and forms the first-order belief that p, which has prima facie justification because of the relevant seeming. At that point, S might form the second-order seeming that her belief that p is justified, hence she forms the second-order belief that she's justified in believing her belief is justified. In case S didn't form this second-order seeming, then the first-order justified belief would disappear immediately because S would have acquired a defeater for her initial belief. In this way, we don't have any kind of vicious circularity: at the first-order we have a perceptual seeming; at the second-order we can form an intellectual seeming, and so on. In addition, while track-records arguments could not allow their conclusion to be drawn, here instead: "there is no obvious reason why, when one has the experience of its seeming to one that one knows that p, one would not be rational to increase one's credence in the claim that one knows that p. There is nothing absurd or even odd about an epistemic practice of that sort." (ibid:18).

This argument, however, looks pretty suspicious. Not only it does appear to be, in fact, a track-record argument even with distinct seemings. It doesn't even explain how bootstrapping stops to be an issue. Huemer has provided instead a structure for something like the KK-Thesis, giving an argument for why any instance of knowledge or justification ultimately issues higher-order acquisition of knowledge or justification, lest a defeater appears against the first-order belief.[4] However, this explanation says nothing about why we couldn't use this self-substantiating structure to conclude via closure that our faculties are reliable. Huemer contends that his perspective is better than the bootstrapping approach. This may very well be; the KK-thesis might even be less objectionable in principle than bootstrapping. However, this says nothing about what forbids us to make the bootstrapping inference – which Huemer continues holding as inappropriate –, except of course for the everlasting possibility of denying closure, which Huemer does not consider.

The uncomfortable situation in which we end up vis-à-vis bootstrapping is also manifest in Pryor's approach. Pryor never addresses the problem in print, but we know from Roger White (2006:555) that Pryor initially included an answer in his 2004 – which was then expunged because unsatisfactory –, substituted by the promise that he'd address the issue in the future (2004:374).[5] White reports that Pryor's initial answer was an appeal to a *disconfirmability* clause, executing a clear distinction between access to the particular propositions that could constitute the basis for the bootstrapping belief and the bootstrapping belief itself. The clause acknowledges that the propositions – the instances of basic knowledge – could not disconfirm the method through which they were obtained, and consequently, they cannot confirm it either (2006:544-5). Pryor would then see the Dogmatist as perfectly within her own right to reject the bootstrapping inference and still hold on to the set of judgments that together led to it.

Unfortunately, this does seem a completely implausible and arbitrary move when closure is around. As with Huemer we are left without any explanation as to why we cannot carry out the bootstrapping inference if we possess the first-order basic knowledge that would act as the bootstrapping basis. Are we forbidden due to some intellectual honesty? This may be, but it would be a merely *sotto voce* clause, saying, "Pssst. You could bootstrap your way up from basic knowledge to reliability knowledge, but please don't do this otherwise, you'll bring the enterprise of seeming-based-knowledge in disrepute". Maybe one could exercise some kind of conceptual distinction related to closure, such as that proposed by Avnur which we briefly mentioned in chapter two, by rejecting closure and adopting closure*, i.e. a closure principle that pertains only to *ordinary* propositions and excludes *heavyweight* implications (2012:5-6). However, this is in all respects a denial of closure,[6] and it is conceived as blocking entailments up to denials of the sceptical hypothesis. It is unclear whether bootstrapping is so extraordinary not to be entailed by the amended principle of closure.[7] White (2006:546-7) holds that such conceptual distinctions are implausible. If I believe that my vision gave me correct visual reports of a card's colour every time I saw it, how can I suspend judgment on whether my vision is reliable? Do I suppose that I got all these accurate reports via a possibly unreliable faculty? At this point, Dogmatism appears inconsistent.

Ultimately the situation doesn't look good. If we reject bootstrapping instances from basic knowledge, rejecting therefore easy knowledge, it seems that we are bound to reject closure (Melchior 2016:222). If closure-denial is rejected as well, it appears that the logical choice would be to reject what gave rise to all of this, i.e. *basic knowledge*. The move from 'looks' to 'is' is suspicious when left alone and should be argued for. In this way, the neo-Moorean won't be able to say that the sceptic is raising a problem only because they've caught a philosophical disease. The sceptic can motivate the rejection of basic knowledge against the Dogmatist, given her unwillingness to either countenance bootstrapping or closure denial. Incidentally, rejecting basic knowledge to maintain both closure and a no-bootstrapping clause has sceptical results (ibid:229-30, Luper 2007:327-8). At this point, we have a reason to claim that the Dogmatist must contend with scepticism.

4.2 The Problem with Basic Knowledge

Maybe we have focused merely on a weak point of the Dogmatist's arguments. Maybe they could simply bite the bullet and reply that they are willing to countenance bootstrapping. After all, induction might be a reasonable and reliable method, and only sceptics would say that it isn't. In addition, rejecting Basic Knowledge amounts directly to rejecting Dogmatism, rendering bootstrapping the lesser evil available, at least for a dogmatist.[8] The Dogmatist now contends that the sceptic has to point out a legitimate philosophical problem with the adoption of basic knowledge requiring active defence, not simply the existence of an uncomfortable, but all things considered not too harmful consequence of the view. Only if the sceptic can find a legitimate philosophical question on this matter, will it be warranted to engage in the dialectic, and even at that point, it's not quite sure whether it's a sceptical dialectic. It might simply be a legitimate philosophical problem that proponents of Dogmatism have no qualms engaging with.

However, the issue here is that there is something left crucially unexplained which warrants our attention. The expansion of knowledge via closure in an easy way and the possibility of bootstrapping seem to be mere consequences of some knowledge that we obtained in a way too easy manner from the start. The debate on easy knowledge understands what is *easy* narrowly, as being either the automatic expansion of knowledge

via closure or the easiness with which we can bootstrap our way up to reliability-knowledge. But these are merely symptoms; they don't constitute the underlying problem with EK. The underlying problem is that what was too easily warranted was the initial knowledge we obtained, that the table is red. All the easiness that followed came as a result of that initial gain of knowledge.

One of the few approaches of the easy knowledge problem that identifies clearly what lies at its core is Peter Klein's. He recognises that what creates the whole problem of easy knowledge ultimately lies in the transition from looks-tokens to is-tokens which institutes basic knowledge. The question we need to address, he says, is: "Is *the table looks red* a good enough reason, on some occasions, for satisfying one of the necessary conditions for knowing *the table is red*?" (Klein 2004:179). Klein answers positively because he takes it to be the 'mark of empirical knowledge' that experiences provide defeasible reasons for our beliefs. The 'looks-token' makes the 'is-token' propositionally justified. Klein admits that actual knowledge won't be based exclusively on this reasoning because knowledge requires, in his view, defeasible but undefeated belief. When we enter this realm, then looks-token are plainly insufficient to allow doxastic justification and consequently knowledge.[9] Neo-Moorean Dogmatism aimed at capturing at least propositional justification; therefore, looks can be considered sufficient for them to provide prima facie defeasible justification.[10] However, this doesn't actually answer the question Klein himself has identified, concerning whether basic knowledge or justification can *legitimately* arise from the looks-token themselves. What Klein has done is simply presenting the main thesis of Dogmatism, and in general of internalist experientialism, as being true: phenomenological experience provides us prima facie with propositional justification, which can then be turned into knowledge when no defeaters are present. The only supplement is that he reckons that doxastic justification needs more than what is provided immediately from experience. But this is something dogmatists already accepted. Accordingly, this cannot mean requiring antecedent knowledge of whether these defeaters are indeed present. Otherwise, we'd be endorsing conservatism about perceptual warrant. We return to the simple idea of basic knowledge that led to the easy knowledge problem, without providing a satisfactory account of the legitimacy of that very basic knowledge.

But why should we think that basic knowledge is suspect? Why should it be hard to get it in the first place? Pryor views the motivation for endorsing the immediacy of such basic occurrences of experiential knowledge as fundamentally analogous to very intuitive feelings for which we'd require no antecedent grounding or justification. For example, when I feel a headache, I am immediately warranted in believing to have one, or when I move an arm, there is no question as to what justified me in raising it. If I retrieve something from memory, I immediately form a belief based on what I recovered, and so on (2005:208).

The intuitive nature of the above cases shouldn't lead us astray. The fact that we indeed immediately perform such actions, or forms those beliefs, does not by itself establish their epistemic legitimacy. What seemed to me to be a headache might simply have been the elastic band keeping my hair in a knot tied too tight. The memory I retrieve might have been tampered with by my biases or a distorting reconstruction based on my state of mind in that moment. Moving an arm doesn't appear to have any epistemic bearing considered by itself. There seems to be more involved in understanding a specific experiential report as something that I can ground a belief on or as something that bestows propositional justification.[11] Even something as seemingly innocuous as a phenomenological presentation contains already much more than dogmatists allow themselves to admit.

We can observe this if we look at a possible resolution of the easy knowledge problem that endorses liberalism about perceptual warrant at the basic level by Alexander Jackson. Jackson understands, correctly, EK as a dispute about epistemic priority between the ordinary proposition H and the denial of the relevant sceptical hypothesis. Although we are trying to push an understanding of scepticism that doesn't rely merely on alternative uneliminated possibilities, the way Jackson attempts to solve the issue is enlightening for showing how obtaining easy knowledge of H – and not strictly of ¬SK – already carries with it a specific constitutive import. Jackson argues that conservatism about perceptual warrant, by rejecting easy knowledge, rejects the idea of settling whether ¬SK *after* having ascertained H (Jackson 2018:351). However, this does not imply as the conservative holds that one need to settle ¬SK *before* settling H. Jackson's idea is that settling the question pertains to *both* H and ¬SK at the same time. What does

this mean? It means that, once I know H, I immediately manage to settle whether ¬SK, because if I do really obtain justification for H, then indeed this automatically settles ¬SK as well. This indicates that already at the level of getting basic knowledge, we have already all that we could have wanted. This might seem puzzling, but in fact, it really is not. When you know that the table is red, then that should be it. You know it's not white but redly illuminated, you know it's not a hologram, you know you're not at the store under the effects of hallucinogenic drugs, nor that you are dreaming. This was the issue we highlighted when objecting to Moretti's answer to EK. However, this also means that obtaining knowledge of H based on how something looks to one isn't that much of a lightweight thing that we can simply admit for free.[12] Basic knowledge is not *naked* knowledge. It is already presented within a network of inferential relations, some of which are even relatively heavyweight, so much that it becomes problematic to simply allow the looks-is transition as if it were completely unproblematic, as the Dogmatist maintains. It is, in most respect, a theoretical construct (Williams 2005:211)

In fact, the problem for Dogmatism, and for experientialist foundationalism in general, is that it is illicitly smuggling in a whole lot of epistemological and even metaphysical, in the sense of *constitutive*, entailments in allowing the looks-is transition without reserve. This 'illegal smuggling' is a component of most stances that hold that one can receive bona fide epistemic justification, warrant, or reasons from experience in a direct and unproblematic manner, and that this suffices to ground justified beliefs. At a fundamental level, this at least constitutes the endorsement of a commitment to some general principle "If X looks Y to you, then you are seeing an X which is Y" (Sosa 2009:233). The problem is that once this transition from experience to belief is warranted, all sorts of substantial epistemological conclusions can be made to follow. We can see this at work both in Moorean proofs and those positions such as Schönbaumsfeld's, that hold that one can get substantial epistemic and rational support automatically from the experiences one is privy to.

Moore's proof has a specific way to execute this 'contraband': the entailment from my hand being here to the external world is assumed as a kind of conceptual truth (Wright 2007a:26). In fact, *it is*, given the specific commitments and background beliefs we

ordinarily share. The idea we all have is that by having experience of an object – and not merely of an internal image –, that object is a mind-independent object whose properties are, for the most part, independent of our experience of it. With this commitment providing the background of the proof, stating that 'here is a hand', or stating that one can legitimately execute the entailment from experience, from the appearance of the hand to that statement, will amount to the endorsement of that constitutive commitment. The metaphysical/constitutive idea is that my experience of something is sufficient to ascertain the independent existence of that which I've experienced. Once this metaphysical commitment is allowed, the epistemological entailment to knowledge of ¬SK follows immediately. But this simply indicates that my taking the experience of seeing a hand as indicative of the truth of the non-conditional premise is already theoretically laden (Walker 2020:2171-2). Intended in this sense, experience is non-neutral, already providing something which can be used for epistemic entailments and theoretical purposes.[13]

This also explains why Moorean proofs are held as suspicious by those who do not already share the commitments of their premises. Those background commitments already entail a rejection of the relevant variety of scepticism (ibid:2175). Again, Wittgenstein's opening of *On Certainty* should ring a bell here. If the neo-Mooreans already know, or already possess at least prima facie justification, that here is a hand, the match is already over. But there was no buzzer-beater to settle the score; the game was simply forfeited.[14] At this point, however it appears legitimate to ask two things: firstly, whether it is still possible for the Dogmatist to simply retreat in her fort and refuse to engage with an interlocutor with antecedent doubts concerning this metaphysical or constitutive baggage the proof smuggles in, and secondly, whether the proof is still capable of maintaining the same appeal to intuitive and commonsensical considerations that constituted a substantial selling-point of the stance.

Notice how the above remarks do not entail by themselves that the Moorean proof is mistaken but that it is a much more technical and theoretical construct than we'd be led to believe if we listened to its defendants. However, by being presented under such lights, we can also appreciate a deeper insight that leads to problems for the stance's representative. Chapter two presented Dretske's idea that knowledge is not closed under

competent deduction because certain statements could not reach up to what he called *heavyweight* implications. This led him to deny closure, but if we want to avoid this conclusion, there is a different theoretical option at our disposal, at least within the domain of Moorean proofs. Dretske's charge is that perceptual experience cannot present you the heavyweight or constitutive import of the objects available in that experience (Ranalli 2021:96). However, this establishes a rather trivial fact that is often downplayed in the engagement between scepticism and perceptual warrant. When I see something, that perception by itself doesn't tell me much about the constitutive, or ontological properties of what I see. If I see a stick bent in water, I reckon it is an illusion because I already know this happens when objects of a certain length are submerged in water due to light diffraction. That very perception, however, told me nothing about whether that stick was really bent or not. It might as well have been. However, if the neo-Moorean is to make her proof stand in ordinary circumstances, she must to some degree endorse a metaphysical thesis, at least a very minimal one, that what I'm presented with in my perceptual experience does tell me something constitutive about the object of my experience. The problem is that there is nothing in experience that necessitates endorsing this (ibid:101). While this is, in fact, a variety of direct realism, and is thereby compatible with Mooreanism, it is by no means a lightweight thesis that we can adopt without question. This holds even if it is true that we ordinarily think that the way an object appears to us in perception affords us with some specific details or properties of what we're perceiving. However, notice how what we can safely endorse based on the perception – considered in *itself* – doesn't amount to what the Moorean needs. We can say how that table *looks*: it looks red to be located in a certain place in the room, etc. However, none of these perceptions tells us by default that the way that thing looks, is also the way it is. It is something we judge to be so because we ordinarily presume it to be so.[15]

Two crucial comments must be made here. This might be seen as a fundamental step-back from some of our discussion. We contended that the sceptic did not endorse a kind of Reasons Identity Thesis to motivate scepticism and that scepticism cannot rely on a simple appearance/reality distinction if it wants to propose a genuine problem and not boil down to cheap rhetorical tricks. However, neither of these accusations hold true to what we are saying here. The point we are making is that a particular visual perception doesn't

provide us the ontological properties of the thing that the neo-Moorean would need for her proof to work. At the very least not in the completely theory-free conception the Dogmatist defends. We are not arguing that scepticism needs to rely on those arguments entirely. The sceptic can accept, for example, that there might be reasons in the particular situation which *do* tell me how things are. Still, it is not via perception *alone* that I'm able to retrieve that information. What could help me in such a case are pretty mundane assumptions about background conditions. But neo-Mooreans pride themselves that we obtain prima facie justification for our beliefs about how things are by relying on nothing more than the phenomenological presentation of something. Once they allow background considerations to leech in from above, the position ceases to simply present a Moorean proof and it becomes more difficult refusing to engage with the sceptic.

The same reasoning also applies to the appearance/reality gap charge. The sceptic does not require the existence of such a gap to mount a sceptical problem. It would probably be rather preposterous, and Descartes famously rejected the distinction as being capable of motivating radical doubt. However, what is happening here is the inverse; it is the Moorean who is illicitly endorsing a quite substantial assumption about appearances being, at least prima facie, already world-involving, and that looks-judgments do already reach out to the world and constitute is-judgments. If the sceptic is, understandably, forbidden from unwarrantedly assuming the distinction between appearance and reality as constituting an unbridgeable epistemic gap, it seems intellectually appropriate to reject the inverse move by the neo-Moorean, i.e. assuming without arguments that what you are presented with as phenomenological appearance *is* constitutive of metaphysical reality. Again, this doesn't entail that it cannot be so. It entails that if looks are actually world-involving, this needs to be established and contended, arguably with scepticism.

4.3 Appearances as World-Involving

The problem with basic knowledge is what is smuggled in as trivial or unproblematic in the notion. This establishes substantial assumptions about our perceptual experience, namely that looks are already world-involving independently of anything else, beliefs, norms, concepts, contingent circumstances, etc. Of course, the Moorean is not holding that simply seeing something gives you everything you need to

know. For example unfavourable environmental circumstances might go undetected in the presentation of the seeming. However, this is actually a problem for them, not for a sceptic or even a differently-minded epistemologist. If environmental circumstances such as a dimly lit room influence the phenomenological presentation, this already casts doubt about the capacity of perceptual seemings to provide us prima facie justification by default.

This holds even if, as Huemer contends, perceptual seemings have propositional content. Huemer argues that when experience provides me with a bent stick in water, it is representing "of its own nature" the object to be so, and I judge at first the stick to be bent because of the "nature of the experience" I'm having (Huemer 2001:71-2). Recognising afterwards that it was an illusion doesn't change what experience provided me, the specific content of a bent stick, and we can agree with this because we don't simply see the stick as straight after realising that an illusion is going on. Huemer recognises that this invites sceptical considerations and that an easy way out would be to hold that experience provides no representational content. However, he acknowledges that by doing so it would be effortless for the sceptic to remark that now experience is made unintelligible, and seemings couldn't provide justification anymore. The lesser evil is to admit propositional content. Propositional doesn't mean conceptual, as it can be entertained in multiple ways (ibid:73). This propositional element in perceptual seemings is somewhat suspect: why should we heed what they present to us as prima facie valid by default if this can be something true *or* false? Huemer's suggestion on this score is that the experience has a propositional aspect brought on not only by its representative aspect but also by the seeming. This seeming-related aspect could be conceived as 'para-conceptual', being nevertheless non-doxastic. The representation gives us propositional content as it is experiences. The seeming provides the propositional content which carries with itself the aspect of felt veridicality, and this means that it must also be 'para-conceptual'.

This is how some have interpreted the notion.[16] Given that the prima facie immediate justification is based on this seeming which is now not merely propositional but at least partly conceptual, this would make the position more controversial. Remember that one

of the main selling points of neo-Mooreanism is its agreement with common-sense, its naturalness, and based on such features, they motivate the need to avoid interacting with scepticism as it flies in the face of unquestionable notions. This move appears less intuitive if we have to understand seemings in this way. Pryor seems unsympathetic to having concepts thrown in the mix at all (2004:356),[17] while Huemer is silent on the conceptual/non-conceptual status of seemings. But even if we suspend judgment upon this characterisation, introducing propositional at the basic level of our sensory interaction with the world can't be accepted as a lightweight choice.

Couldn't the propositional content of the looks-experience be enough to justify the transition, at least prima facie, to the is-judgment in a relatively seamless way? The problem is, of course, that in doing this, the propositional content must be considered as already world-involving, as asserting something on the world. Otherwise, it wouldn't even be propositional to begin with. The assertiveness that Dogmatism attaches to perceptual seemings is a notion that appears at first trivial. It presents the ordinary sensation that when one sees something in a certain way, one has the feeling that that's the way it just is. But this assertiveness appearing to us as obvious does not entail that the justificatory work this assertiveness is supposed to carry out is trivial as well. Notice that when I have an experience of something that entices in me the feeling "that's how it seems to me", even in ordinary situations, I might want to provisionally suspend the corresponding belief "that's how it is". Not only this happens all the time in our ordinary lives – think, for example, at how bad we are at reading reactions from other people, even close ones –, but it concerns even basic sensory faculties, such as hearing or seeing. If I see a table that looks to me as red, I might be inclined to implicitly endorse the propositional content afforded by that experience only provided that various non-experiential conditions are in place. Endorsing a looks-proposition seems to require some sort of reflection, even on an implicit, automatic level.

This indicates that it is unclear what it means for this propositional content of experience, which generates the corresponding seeming, to be 'world-involving' by itself in the sense of being always immediately capable of asserting how things are. As Jochen Briesen notices, "the term 'assertivity' is usually used concerning utterances, so by transferring

this term to propositional attitudes, the term is used in a somewhat metaphorical sense" (2015:2243). It is a fundamental requirement of representationalism that the purported propositional content is capable of asserting something to be so, but if we try to unpack the notion, it is reasonable to argue that we require some criteria to specify how the relationship between the world and our perceptual experience is (ibid:2245). This might be easier said than done, especially for the direct realism we are subjecting to scrutiny because this assertiveness needs to be spelt out as non-inferential.[18] If assertiveness is a matter of inferential judgment, the Moorean proof immediately loses all of its intuitive epistemic strength; its epistemological ground being essentially undermined. Simply stating that direct assertiveness of the world comes from our sensory experiences won't suffice to establish that experience does indeed bear such an immediate and given justificatory purport on our beliefs (ibid:2256).

The basic knowledge envisioned by the Dogmatist as something intuitive, immediate, and unobjectionable has started turning into a conceptual mongrel. Experiential looks seem to possess some kind of given, immediate, propositional but non-conceptual intelligibility, occurring with a concurrent non-doxastic, propositional seeming which might have some conceptual import, even though this phenomenological forcefulness does not depend on previous entertainment of concepts or belief by the subject, but comes directly from the phenomenological presentation itself. Ultimately, this provides prima facie justificatory relation to our external world belief, and this belief is both basic and capable of establishing a lot of non-basic things.

Even if we allow that this might provide a more intuitive and common-sense picture than other internalist proposals about our relation to the external world such as acquaintance foundationalism, this definitional maze seems problematic on its own. It should at this point evoke in the reader the kind of criticism Wilfrid Sellars raised in the opening sections of his *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* against the very theoretical feasibility of such an immediate experiential given. In agreement with what we've analysing thus far, Sellars immediately proposes that "the given as a piece of professional – epistemological – shoptalk carries a substantial theoretical commitment, and one can deny that there are 'data' or that anything is, in this sense, 'given' without flying in the face of reason"

(1956:§1). The concept of the Given – or the *myth* of the Given – is supposed to capture that level of direct, immediate, non-inferential contact with outer reality and objects, which is, however, established in complete independence from any held conceptual determination, contextual circumstances, or background beliefs. It is a kind of primitive item, non-doxastic, but capable of constituting the foundation for the whole epistemic and doxastic edifice (DeVries 2005:98). It forms the data we rely on to construct all of our intellectual, theoretical, reflective constructs. This basis must be held as entirely stable concerning the non-epistemic content that it offers us, lest our beliefs of judgment become arbitrary or relative (Williams 1977:28). We assume that there is something determinate, straightforward, immediately available for us to use as the basis for our judgments, without requiring any sophistication or dependence from what we believe, think, or conceive, and this given element is *efficacious* in carrying out this task (DeVries&Triplett 2000:7). It is a basic determinate awareness arising from our encounter with the world, which entails the possibility of epistemic beliefs and judgments and that one possesses "simply in virtue of being in that state" (Brandom 1997a:122).[19] While this might be seen exclusively as a theoretical or substantially philosophical construct, it does play a role in our everyday vocabulary of how we engage with the world. It might seem odd to view common-sense as endorsing some kind of primitivism with these characteristics. Still, after brief reflection, we see that it is not an idea so detached from everyday experience. Ordinarily, we recognise that a variety of influences determine our judgments on what we see and experience, but at some level, we treat – either implicitly or explicitly – some feature of that which we experience as absolutely given. When we hear a sequence of seemingly unconnected and discordant sounds, even if a trained ear might recognise immediately that they comprise section five of Captain Beefheart's *Trout Mask Replica*, a listener unaccustomed to the style might fail to recognise them as an actual piece of music. The same sounds, wavelengths, tones, timbres are given to both listeners as a kind of raw material whose existence isn't really in question for either. What they make out of it is a different matter, but ordinarily we'd consider both listeners as subject to the same raw stimuli.

Sellars dealing with sense-data theories in the opening sections of *Empiricism* shouldn't be considered incompatible with our current Moorean target. Moore himself endorsed a

variety of sense-data theory that is in line with the direct realism that we are here subjecting to scrutiny (DeVries&Triplett 2000:6-7). While sense-data theories occupy in the epistemological constellation the stereotypical role of *indirect* realist theories, as what we are directly acquainted with sense-data and not objects, we remarked in the previous chapter that for Moore, what constitutes sense-data is already involving and asserting the external world, cutting the middle-man out of the picture (Moore 1903:42-4). Therefore, we can safely attribute to neo-Moorean Dogmatism the endorsement of a direct-realist variety of the given as the non-conceptual *but propositional*, building-block of justification and knowledge.

Sellars views this very notion of the Given not only as a theoretical construction that carries with it substantial assumptions. He also views these same assumptions as fundamentally inconsistent. What is *given* in standard foundationalist stances? It must be something *particular*, but if one merely had experience of something particular, it wouldn't be possible for this to accrue to a knowledge-claim, as what is claimed to be known is not the particular occurrence of an indistinct nothing. It is a fact (1956:§3). What I hear when listening to *Trout Mask Replica*, that is what I ground my belief 'I am listening to *Trout Mask Replica*' upon, is the fact that *Trout Mask Replica* is playing on my laptop, and not the particular, individual wavelengths that constitute the noise I'm receiving. But then we have a problem. The seeming I'm basing my belief on has already *propositional* structure; it is the fact that "*Trout Mask Replica* is playing". This is already a normative, epistemic fact, which has arisen from the purportedly non-normative, non-epistemic given of sounds that make up what I can identify as *Trout Mask Replica*. How did we get from a non-normative hearing sensation, physically caused by waves impacting my eardrums, to a propositional, albeit immediate and non-inferential, belief or seeming that can constitute the ground for my prima facie justified belief? Is this transition something itself normative, i.e. an epistemic fact, or is it something causal and entirely non-normative as the physical causation from the acoustic waves hitting my eardrum? (cf. Brandom 1997a:127) To hold that we can already have some epistemic relation *to the particular* seems to contravene that only something propositional can be the object of a justified belief – as otherwise its intelligibility would be forsaken –, and a particular falls short of this requirement because particular (DeVries&Triplett 2000:13, Williams 1977:32).[20]

Here is where things get tricky. The direct realist/foundationalist wants to have it both ways and contradict this very idea. The specific occurrence of sensation, the hearing, the look of something, can be treated as an instance of knowing, but knowing of a particular, the given that is afforded directly in sensible experience. Non-inferential knowing rests on a sense-content sens*ed* as being of a certain kind, and this entails "that if it be *sensed as being of a certain character,* the *fact that it is of this character* be *non-inferentially known*" (Sellars 1956:§4). Notwithstanding whether this Given is capable of being analysed in non-epistemic terms, or if it is something both irreducible and epistemic (ibid:§5), the Given as that which is being sensed is equated directly with mere *sentience* of that sensation, at least on the basic level of what constitutes the bare components of that which is sensed. This is unacquired basic knowledge, non-conceptual, free of any kind of association with inferential knowledge. It tries to uphold the common-sense idea that it would be absurd to require that "the simple ability to *feel a pain* or *see a colour*, in short, to sense sense-contents, is acquired" (ibid:§6). This means our direct-realist is trying to treat the relevant episode of sensings as a level that is both non-inferential and already epistemic, which grounds everything else that comes afterwards (Brandom 1997a:128). Sensing that the table looks of a particular colour red can have already the epistemic but non-conceptual role of justifying prima facie belief that the table *is* red.[21] From the point of view of the neo-Moorean Dogmatist, this is accomplished arguably by the forcefulness of the phenomenological presentation of how the table looks, its feeling of veridicality. Knowledge is easy because basic sensorial experiences can afford us directly with basic *knowledge*.

Sellars' diagnosis (1956:§7) is that this all-powerful capability of sensory sensings is the result of a conflation of two different ideas, both of which are endorsed by the neo-Moorean Dogmatist. The first is that there are inner sensations that sentient beings can have without relying on any conceptual requirement and without which there would be no exercise of the relevant sensible faculty, such as seeing or hearing. This idea tries to capture how our senses relate to external objects in a 'scientific' manner. When we encounter an outer object via our senses, we have a corresponding sensation of that object. This happens independently of who's having the experience. On its own, this is not an epistemic fact; it is merely a particular sensation. The second idea is that there are

some inner episodes of non-inferential knowing, which are the necessary condition for empirical knowledge in general. This additional idea establishes the existence of internal episodes that are intentional, epistemic and allow us to institute a *justificatory* story for how we establish our beliefs (DeVries&Triplett 2000:15). The conflation between the two happens as follows. The non-inferential epistemic episodes of knowing are veridical members of a class that also involves non-veridical episodes. This is trivial because if we were to suppose that these non-inferential epistemic episodes were intrinsically veridical, this would be an implausible stipulation that would easily fall prey to scepticism.[22] However, before we realise this, we connect this idea of veridical, propositional, non-inferential episodes of knowing –normative and epistemic – to the first idea, the causal, non-normative, non-epistemic conception. The sensation of a red table as something that *just is* the way it is, something not evaluable in terms of veridicality, supplies the required kind of assurance to the seeing of that table *as* red. The basic episode of knowing is established as true by reference to something that can't be evaluated on the same score. What strikes the neo-Moorean is that "it *doesn't make sense* to speak of unveridical sensations … though for it to strike them as it does, they must overlook the fact that if it makes sense to speak of an experience as *veridical*, it must correspondingly make sense to speak of it as *unveridical*" (Sellars 1956:§7).[23]

For us, the question here is: how can it be legitimate for something like a look-report, which is not by itself passable of epistemic and truth-functional evaluation, to offer epistemic support for a non-inferential epistemic episode? How can the level of sensings be capable of being endorsed as already world-involving without being at the same time evaluable on this very score?

Unfortunately, the reflections in part I of Sellars' *Empiricism* have been read in contemporary epistemology mostly as establishing a dilemma for experientialist theories between doxasticism and non-doxasticism. More specifically, the two ideas that get conflated in the empiricist Given are taken to institute two possible alternatives that the foundationalist position can take. Either endorse the first idea and end up with the given as mere sensings, which are, however, completely incapable of providing justificatory purport to our beliefs, as this given is wholly non-epistemic. Alternatively, one can go for

the immediate, epistemic, propositional element of knowledge which, by being already epistemic, will be able to generate immediate non-inferential knowledge. However, to do so it will have to be justified itself, and this will simply push back the source of justification, undercutting the foundational status of the non-inferential epistemic episode and ushering in an infinite regress. This formulation – called the Sellarsian Dilemma – is mostly due to Laurence Bonjour (1985:69, 78), and it is ordinarily taken to be an argument supporting doxasticism and coherentism. In fact, it has been called 'the master argument for coherentism' (Pryor 2005:206-7, Lyons 2016:1061), as the only envisioned way to avoid both horns of the dilemma is to reject the foundational request and endorse the idea that only a belief can justify another belief.

However, if this is all Sellars' analysis of the Given boils down to, it is not a very powerful argument. It resembles Bergmann's Dilemma, just not applied merely to accessibilism, but to all theories endorsing experientialist foundationalism.[24] Neo-Moorean Dogmatism was precisely presented as being able to resist Bergmann's dilemma, and it might indeed possess the requirement to avoid this specific formulation of Sellars' problem. This is because the dilemma was originally predicated on a strict association on the propositional-conceptual level. When the dilemma entered the debate, the accepted understanding was that a propositional, experiential episode could only be conceptual. But this equivalence between the two is now conceived as less obvious, in either direction.[25] And it seems that neo-Mooreanism can indeed offer a kind of middle way through the two poles of 'conceptualism/propositionalism' and non-conceptualism by endorsing the propositional but non-conceptual element of perceptual experience embodied by the felt veridicality of the seeming.[26]

Notwithstanding whether it is a sound option, it does appear to provide a way to steer clear of both unintelligibility and the requirement of further background beliefs. The feeling of veridicality does not need to rely in ultimate instance on any further belief to be present; it is something that belongs to the phenomenological presentation we are given. But it *does* provide us with something propositional, that what we are being presented with in sensible experience is *true*. In this way, both horns are avoided.[27]

If we instead take Sellars' charge of conflation as presented in *Empiricism*, there is reason to be sceptical that seemings can pull us out of the problem. What Sellars seems to be attacking is precisely the intelligibility of the notion presented, something epistemic but non-conceptual, capable of being world-directed or world-involving. The real Sellarsian dilemma acts more like a reductio of the notion. We are tricked into assigning some kind of immediate non-normative warrant – the first idea – to the notion of non-inferential, epistemic knowledge – the second idea – but we fail to recognise that no experiential or evidential item can play the required role of propositional justifier while being distinctly separate from any conceptual or doxastic characteristic (Lyons 2008:472).[28] Even if we allow the element of seemings to cleave the third way between the horns of doxasticism, there still remains the question of how the seeming and its associated felt veridicality can be rightly considered world-involving, especially if they are to be considered properly *veridical*. The Dogmatist owes us an explanation of how the mere awareness of this veridical element can suffice to provide a rational basis for the appearance belief one forms (2016:1062) and in addition, why this veridicality shouldn't be considered a doxastic element, hence object of truth-functional evaluation itself. This was Sellars' point; the Dogmatist smuggles an illicit claim of veridicality in the seeming while making it so that the question of its being non-veridical is out of the picture. Retreating to a merely prima facie justificatory purport won't change much. It can be held that the justification obtained is prima facie because it can be proven wrong, and the possible retraction happens only at a doxastic level because we need a context of reflective evaluation. But if this is something plausible to expect, why should the feeling of veridicality be considered capable of offering genuine, if prima facie, justification in principle? It is true that when something strikes me as immediately true, I might not be able to make the seeming itself disappear when presented with relevant defeaters – Müller-Lyer lines are a case in point, as is the bent-stick experience –, but if so, it is not clear at all why one should consider the seeming as being world-involving, or propositional in any epistemically relevant way.[29] Seemings provide felt veridicality *even* when they present illusions.

This is at bottom where the untenability of dogmatist basic knowledge lies: it smuggles in a specific *semantic* content, but it cannot defend or argue for it without it ceasing to play the role of particular, immediate, non-normative basic knowledge. The Dogmatist cannot

handle the fact that the Sellarsian problem concerns “the question of whether experiences have semantic content” (Kvanvig 2005:174).

4.4 The Problem of the Criterion

The outcome of the previous section should be relatively clear. Even if the criticism of the neo-Moorean understanding of basic knowledge is not conclusive – after all, it could still be replied by the Dogmatist that the seeming has veridical forcefulness *because* it is world-involving –, it should at this point be rather plain that the notion is not at all natural as one might have supposed. This undercuts a crucial supporting point for the position. But in addition to this, it seems that the refusal to engage in the sceptical dialectic was merely a smokescreen to hide a fundamental problem on the level of the *epistemic* dialectic.

Why should this problem be conceived as sceptical however? Isn’t this a legitimate epistemological problem that the Dogmatist might have no qualms engaging with? The matter is that, by motivating the epistemological issue of the position, we straddled quite squarely into a genuine sceptical dialectic, in the sense of an epistemological engagement where a refusal to confront scepticism ought to crucially undermine the epistemic legitimacy and efficacy of the position. Some argue that this sceptical dialectic was already in place when we realised that easy knowledge warrants bootstrapping inferences (Sosa 2009:228-30). But for our purposes, this would be too easy itself. Bootstrapping might be a legitimate epistemological problem or paradox whose existence does not bind us necessarily to sceptical conclusions. Even if we consider as sceptical the criticism against basic knowledge that we raised in the previous section, it seems that the Dogmatist could contest this and attempt to address the problem in a strictly epistemological manner without having to consider scepticism.[30]

Against this reading, we argue here that the sceptical dialectic we ended up in is a product of the constitutive smuggling we identified as being present in the Given adopted by the Dogmatist. By endorsing a specific conception of what constitutes the source of prima facie defeasible justification and a way less unproblematic one than it seemed at first sight, the Dogmatist has already made a move within the Problem of the Criterion.

The Problem of the Criterion is a centrepiece of sceptical problems since Pyrrhonism, but it owes its presence in the contemporary epistemological debate due to Roderick Chisholm. Chisholm presents it as the problem of the 'wheel', the 'diallelus': to know whether things are so as they appear to us to be, we must have a procedure telling veridical appearances apart from those that are not. But to know whether the procedure is a good one, we have to possess a way of checking whether it really manages to tell apart veridical appearances from unveridical ones. Unfortunately, the only way to ascertain whether our preferred method does so is to already know which appearances are veridical and which are not – *independently* of the method itself (Chisholm 1973:62). The problem is a recursive one. To obtain either of the two requirements, ultimately, the other needs to be known as well. If we seek a method or criterion for our judgments, we need to have already an assurance that the method is good, but if this assurance comes from the first-order level, this obviously won't do. The individual clues that the method is good would have no guarantee themselves. If, however, the assurance comes independently of the method or of any particular instance of what could confirm or disconfirm the method, then this meta-level assurance would be itself the criterion for beliefs that we seek, and the problem would present itself again.

Chisholm ultimately condenses the problem in the following dyad:

> A) "*What* do we know? What is the extent of our knowledge?"
>
> B) "How are to decide *whether* we know? What are the *criteria* of knowledge?" (ibid:65)

The conundrum would be solved if we had already an answer to either A or B, but as long as we lack either, we won't get the other (ibid:66). The problem issues in general scepticism because now it is unclear what properly constitutes knowledge and any basis that we select as appropriate to ground our beliefs on appears to be undercut, at least concerning its claim to constitute an adequate ground for justified belief and knowledge. The problem of the criterion is supposed to make us aware that if our beliefs or knowledge-claims lack effective rational support, they lack the required epistemic value we expect from them in epistemology (Cling 2018:550).

Chisholm envisions some possible answers to the problem, and they involve opting to answer one of the two horns first to solve the second. Those who start from presenting *knowledge criteria*, i.e. answering B, establish specific methods, or a priori norms that our knowledge must supposedly adhere to. These are rightly called *methodists*. Chisholm holds all general rationalist or empiricist approaches to be varieties of methodism (Chisholm 1973:67).[31] Those who start from providing an answer to A are *particularists* and follow in the footsteps of Thomas Reid's commonsensism. We start from the fact that we do indeed know ordinary propositions – such as 'here is a hand' – and that there are numerous instances of known propositions. We consequently propose an answer to B by handing out a certain method capable of subsuming under it those actual instances of knowledge we do indeed possess (ibid:68-9).

The only alternative available to these two choices is scepticism. Chisholm is inclined to think that particularists are right, as methodism begins with a too arbitrary sweeping generalisation of what constitutes knowledge, which could very well lead to counter-intuitive results. Particularists, in fact, do not require the application of a general method or criterion in order to know, although one can be extracted from particular instances of knowledge. We simply begin knowing as we'd ordinarily think we do. Chisholm recognises that this means begging the question against both the sceptic and the methodist. While this might not settle the question against the methodist, at the very least, Chisholm contends, this is preferable to scepticism (ibid:75).

How does this relate to neo-Mooreanism? G.E. Moore himself is read by Chisholm as enlisted in the ranks of particularists. The particularist proposal that Chisholm endorses does have more than one point of contact with the (neo-)Moorean solution. He holds that there is no need to "know that we know" and that if we do not have reasons to suspect the presence of any defeaters, then we should regard our sensible faculties as completely innocent by default (ibid:70). By allowing for this presumption of basic knowledge, the particularist can break the criterion's wheel and defeat the sceptical problematic arising from it. This should constitute an adequate ground for viewing the neo-Moorean position as properly engaging with scepticism. Indeed, this does not mean engaging with scepticism conceived as merely scenario-based. However, it does mean engaging with

scepticism concerning the rational support our beliefs about the external world enjoy in general, and this is something the position – any position – should account for.[32] The idea that Dogmatism can simply avoid fencing off with the sceptical dialectic and retain its epistemic efficacy seems to have vanished.

However, this is not how the engagement with the Problem of the Criterion has been received in the contemporary discussion. The rejection of the KR requirement that gave birth to basic knowledge is considered a way to *avoid* the problem of the criterion and not as a specific move within the sceptical dialectic. Cohen explicitly says that by rejecting KR and accepting basic knowledge, one can escape the problem, because this allows that "a belief source can deliver knowledge prior to one's knowing that the source is reliable" (Cohen 2002:310).[33] Huemer reads the problem in the same way (2001:178). This, however is a mistaken reading. Rejecting KR is not a way to avoid the problem of the criterion but is a rejection of *methodism*. It denies the need to antecedently possess a warranted method to discriminate what counts as valid or veridical and what not. Perhaps the reason for thinking that rejecting KR allows one to reject the problem of the criterion is that the problem is implicitly understood as concerning merely antecedent knowledge of a valid method before any particular instance of knowledge-claim is uttered. This would mean reducing the problem of the criterion to a variety of the KK-thesis. But this is incorrect. Although a variety of the problem of the criterion can be developed as an instance of the KK-thesis (Cf. Cling 1997:113-4), the problem itself is not merely a request for having at any given moment occurrent knowledge that the particular method is reliable. It asks what constitutes the method as valid in the first place.

The problem concerns the very possibility of settling upon any method in general as epistemically adequate and rational, of whether we can ascertain the validity of the chosen procedure without at some point making an utterly arbitrary and indefensible move. This understanding of what constitutes the problem is often overlooked because Chisholm runs together two different formulations. The A-B formulation is the one that manages to capture more intuitively the idea of the circle we are caught in. However, it is only a special case of the broader, general issue that Chisholm outlines right at the start of his analysis. This is not the fact that to know the extent of knowledge we have to know

the criteria of knowledge and vice-versa. The real problem is that we have no obvious non-question begging way of knowing what constitutes a rational epistemic basis or criterion for knowledge and what doesn't. We need a criterion of what constitutes a true statement –in this case what makes seemings capable of presenting us what is actually the case –- a way to detect a property as valid and to detect statements as actually possessing that property (Cling 1994:262). The A-B formulation simply presents what lies ahead if one of the two main routes for a solution to the general issue is undertaken.[34] The problem of the criterion is not simply a wheel. Nor is it merely a problem of temporal explanatory priority, which the Dogmatist could reasonably reject outright (ibid:267, Amico 1993:74-5). It is a question concerning what can constitute the basis of rational and justified belief and whether it is possible to vindicate the epistemic and rational character of our engagement with the world.

The proper argument – called the *Master argument* of the criterion by Cling (1994:270; 1997:110) – asserts that to have valuable justified beliefs, one needs a criterion that establishes which beliefs are so independently of the beliefs themselves. Therefore, good beliefs depend on an independent criterion and are not independently valuable or possess valid epistemic credentials themselves. However, it would be arbitrary to simply select any particular criterion as that which allows us to identify valid and epistemically valuable beliefs, independently of any way of checking whether the beliefs it identifies are in fact so. But this merely translates to the fact that the choice of the criterion must be executed based on beliefs that are valid *independently* from the antecedent choice of this very criterion. This means that it is the criterion that which cannot be settled independently from valid beliefs. Both valid beliefs and criteria need the independent establishment of the other item as a basis for their being settled. Both can only be established dependently on the other. Epistemic priority reigns. Scepticism ensues.

We can substantiate this point by referring back to the very origin of the problem of the criterion in Pyrrhonism, specifically in the writing of Sextus Empiricus. There are two main sections in the *Outline of Pyrrhonism* held to constitute the basis of the issue. The first, at PH I.114-17, focuses on the possibility of disagreement concerning what can constitute basic knowledge. Sextus observes that if an impression is judged to be veridical, one will

need to adopt a criterion to emit this verdict. Naturally, this criterion will be held as being correct. This is a case in point for the neo-Moorean adoption of phenomenological seeming and the *impression* of felt veridicality as that which institutes the very possibility to have a prima facie justified belief. But here is where the problem of the criterion raises its spikes. If the chosen criterion must be adopted without adducing any reason for its being *the valid criterion*, then – Sextus says – this very choice ought to be discredited. The only way such reasons could be adduced is by selecting independently valid beliefs, but without a criterion already in place, this will be merely a lucky guess. Of course, in the case of reasons or beliefs actually being adduced for this role, then those same supporting items will have to be evaluated by a criterion in turn. This will introduce either an infinite regress or vicious circularity. The overall idea is that the dispute in which the sceptic takes part involves the determination of the criterion proposed as adequate, and in turn that the basis to resolve this same disagreement – whether it be made of already valid beliefs, or principles – will be in need of a criterion itself to be settled (cf. PH II.19-20, M VII.337, 341-2).

If one retreats from this endeavour, then the result will be merely that what is proposed won't be something that could be legitimately apprehended by anyone who does not already share the same starting point of the Dogmatist (PH II.183-84). In this sense, the gambit of the Dogmatist is turned on its head. If what the Dogmatist faulted to the sceptic was to refuse endorsing a position that the layperson would have found entirely unobjectionable, now it is the Dogmatist who isn't allowing anyone who doesn't share their specific conception of what makes empirical experience as world-involving to grasp the *reasons* as to why that position is correct. Sextus also attacks the very consistency of the idea expressed by the neo-Moorean criterion, what he calls the *apprehensive* appearance, which expresses the idea that the object is 'stamped and impressed in accordance with just *that* real thing" (M VII.402, cf. PH II.4-6, III.241). This is for Sextus, a mere presupposition that overlooks how this feeling of apprehension doesn't say anything itself about what the appearance is supposed to be about.[35] Here is where indistinguishability *is* a relevant aspect, but not for engendering a general error-based doubt. Instead, it indicates that the proposed criterion is not an adequate basis upon which to ground a belief: "The apprehensive appearance then, does not have any peculiarity by

which it differs from false and non-apprehensive appearances" (M VII.411). At his point the Dogmatist would have to argue against the sceptic why the chosen criterion – the seeming – constitutes a reasonable enough basis for judgment and belief, prima facie and defeasible, notwithstanding the relative epistemic powerlessness of its purported *veridicality*.

The Dogmatist could reply that if *this* is the sceptical dialectic they are apparently taking part in, it is false that she has to engage in it because she proposes no criterion. After all, if neo-Moorean Dogmatism is an instance of particularism, wasn't one of the features of particularism the rejection of the request of providing a methodological criterion? However, Chisholm's particularist/methodist distinction is mostly predicated on the A-B construal of the problem, which appears to be at most a simplification of how to formulate the problem of the criterion. In fact, Dogmatism does offer a criterion of truth – or better, of justified belief –. When phenomenological presentation of an object of experience carries with it the seeming that things are thus-and-so, then one is at least prima facie justified in believing that things are thus-and-so. This might cast some doubt on whether neo-Mooreanism is a brand of particularism. It does appear to endorse significant aspects of traditional methodism, as much as traditional empiricism did. Once we recognise that the actual problem of the criterion is not merely a choice between a particular or a general criterion, but a different question as to what can constitute the validity and the credentials of our beliefs as asserting something about the world, then the importance of whether the neo-Moorean is arguing for either particularism or methodism fades. This is especially so given that both stances were found by Chisholm himself as fundamentally question-begging. This should signal that the problem of the criterion is not merely a problem of deciding between two alternatives but of what constitutes any proposed criterion as capable of instituting the supposed or purported world-involving character of our beliefs.

The 'no-criterion' argument was, in fact, defused by Sextus already. If someone proposes that the apprehensive criterion, is not a criterion in general as something that merely happens to somebody, it cannot function as the basis for any judgment. Given the diversity of circumstances in which we experience a feeling of veridicality, by stating that this feeling is just veridicality and not a criterion itself, we forbid ourselves from the

possibility of authenticating both whether this feeling actually corresponds to something and whether that something is how things really are (M VII.424-5). It gets even worse; by simply stating that the seeming experience is not a general criterion and merely occurs, we end up making unintelligible both how people might fail to experience this veridicality, and the fact that *we disagree* on whether such veridicality obtains.[36] The neo-Moorean conception of experience seems more suited to machines than rational beings.

To simply assume that our beliefs are valid, in a properly epistemological context, would be nothing short of a distinctively arbitrary move. These are genuine sceptical concerns, not revolving merely around the possibility of an evil demon or of dreaming, but concerning the semantic content of our belief and judgments about the world and whether there is any possibility of vindicating their rationality and authority without falling into arbitrariness. This will be the main issue we'll contend with from the next chapter onwards.

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1 Flores (2009:115-6) argues that Cohen aims at rejecting the principle of closure, but this contradicts what Cohen himself says, cf. 2002:315.

2 Luper (2007:328-9) calls this the *Hard Argument*, and connects it to Dretske/Nozick closure-denial, and to the problem of lottery propositions, which are a variation on the same issue.

3 Which is Michael Bergmann's way of defusing the objection (2004:717). For a criticism of Bergmann's questioned/unquestioned context distinction, cf. Vahid 2007:230-1, and Reed 2006:188-92.

4 Notice how this would make the position all the more liable to Wright's Simple Elevation Hypothesis we rehearsed in section 3.4.

5 This seems not to have happened so far.

6 As we mentioned in chapter two, Dretske is not committed to denying epistemic deduction tout court, but just denies that it be applied to *all* propositions. Avnur's proposal seems effectively a distinction without difference.

7 Andrew Cling (2018:556) suggests that requiring a constraint that beliefs generated via a method cannot count as reasons for ascertaining the reliability of that very method is reasonable, but this doesn't address what we should do with closure.

8 This is the route taken by most non-closure-denying externalists, cf. Van Cleve 2003, Bergmann 2000, 2004, and Alston 1986. Internalists are much more recalcitrant to bite the bullet, understandably so.

9 "the belief is doxastically justified on the basis of the [propositional] inference, but owes its status as knowledge to the fact that there are no defeaters of the justification of the proposition that the table is red" (Klein 2004:181)

10 Some confusion is bound to happen here as the perceptual warrant debate is mostly handled in terms of justification/warrant, but the easy knowledge/bootstrapping debate uses knowledge-talk. Again, we'll avoid theoretical complexities by assuming that justification is necessary but not sufficient for knowledge. What matters here is the looks-is transition, and if it establishes basic knowledge, it is bound to generate basic justification as well.

11 See Lyons 2016:1063 on the fact that awareness of a headache is by no means automatically awareness *that* is a headache

[12] Sosa (2009:221, 232) makes a similar proposal, but acknowledges that one cannot take the red-table experience at face value unless the presupposition that the situation is truth-conducive is non-arbitrarily endorsed. In any case, basic knowledge is not generated for free. While Sosa holds that his proposal avoids the antecedent known-reliability requirement, it seems that he endorses at least a minimalist formulation of it, cf. Van Cleve 2011:22. Sosa assigns the presupposition requirements to 'subpersonal systems', or what he calls animal knowledge. But as Van Cleve remarks, then it is not clear how this can make the transition from the looks to basic knowledge applicable.

[13] Cf. Walker 2020:2178 "The idea, then, is that we should understand Moore as advocating 'Moore's Alethic Methodology": … Anti-scepticism [is] supported by invoking knowledge (rather than merely confidently claiming knowledge) about an everyday proposition and deriving a substantive metaphysical conclusion"

[14] "If our senses *always* worked, then ... very likely a good chunk of philosophy, would never have arisen" (DeVries&Triplett 2000:2). See also Sextus, who argues that if a sign is revelatory of something, and that something is itself clear, it won't be signified by the sign (PH II.99, 115-6, 119-20). If everything is true and nothing unclear, then there won't be any actual investigation or dispute (M VII.393).

[15] Cf. Ranalli 2021:104-09, for an argument against Schönbaumsfeld's own employment of these constitutive neo-Moorean theses.

[16] See Lyons 2016:1073-5, who understands seemings to have conceptual content. However, he mentions in support of this reading Tucker (2010) who doesn't define them as conceptual and is only willing to assign them propositional content (cf. ibid:530, 543 fn.7). Huemer is silent on whether seemings are actually conceptual, and holds sensory experience as propositional but non-conceptual. Lyons notices that dogmatists don't distinguish carefully between sensory experiences and seemings. Huemer acknowledges (2001:75-7) that the content of experience might be partly conceptual, but that at heart the non-conceptual element of perception need not be conceptualized to act as basis for the seeming. The tension here is between an immediate, contentful, but non-conceptual appearance, and the fact that sooner or later we'll have to make that experience *talk*.

[17] Even though in his previous paper, he seemed at least open to the idea that seemings could provide conceptual content (2000:541, 546). Thanks to Beri Marušić for reminding me of this lost feature of Pryor's position. He would then reject this idea in his 2005 (pp.210-12) claiming that the very notion of conceptual content escapes him.

[18] Briesen examines a variety of possible criteria (2015:2245-51) which are all in one way or another of an *inferential* character. Direct Realism however rejects the inferential constraint.

[19] For further definitions of what constitutes the given cf. Bonjour 1985:60, "the underlying idea is that of *confrontation*: in an immediate experience mind or consciousness is directly confronted by its object without intervention of any kind of intermediary. ... the root metaphor underlying the whole conception is vision, vision as understood by the most naive level of common-sense". See also the more technical definition offered by John McDowell "the idea of the Given is the idea that the space of reasons, the space of justifications or warrants, extends more widely than the conceptual sphere" (1996:7).

[20] The controversial character of this transition from the particular sensation as something that can be by itself legitimately known is one of the driving motivations of the critique of the epistemological form called *Sense-Certainty* that Hegel develops in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Sense-Certainty endorses the idea of the Given as non-normative, non-conceptual, but already capable of acting as a ground for normative and conceptual judgments. It attacks the idea that there is an immediate apprehension without comprehension (1806:§90), immediate knowledge that becomes *knowledge* of this immediacy. The particular, atomic sensation is treated as a *de re* primitive belief independently of anything else (cf. Brandom 2019:109), and this entirely non-conceptual basis constitutes a kind of epistemic authority, whose content possesses the *richest*

cognition, most veritable aspect of the object: "For sensuous-certainty this is what is essential, and this pure *being,* or this simple immediacy constitutes its *truth*" (Hegel 1806:§91). On the nearness of Sellars and Hegel on these matters cf. Brandom 2019:111-3; DeVries 2008:72-3.

[21] As Sellars notices, this construal – which constitutes the *Myth* of the Given – manifests a fundamental tension between the idea that we have an "unacquired primitive ability" to experience sensations, and the nominalist empiricist conception that to judge something to be so-and-so is something we acquire (DeVries&Triplett 2000:13). As Brandom observes (1997a:130), by renouncing to the latter nominalist clause would immediately transform an empiricist philosophy into something resembling doxastic/conceptual innatism.

[22] Sellars doesn't spell out this aspect in its entirety, simply claiming that it would make a mockery of empirical knowledge. We can read this in three possible ways: the first is that this simply contradicts the experience of error we all make. But this point isn't inherently sceptical per *se*. The second reading views this as an assumption of infallibilism on the level of non-inferential episodes of knowing which will make it all too easy for the sceptic to raise a question of verification. The last one is that this might be merely an instance of knowledge by *grace* of nature, forcing us to accept epistemic luck.

[23] To simply assume veridicality of all appearances is something that easily leads to self-contradiction, as Sextus noticed, cf. M VII.389-93. Cf. also PH II.91-6.

[24] And this is how the relationship between the two has often been spelled out, with Sellars' dilemma being essentially a progenitor of Bergmann's dilemma (Bonjour 2003:18-9; Bergmann 2006:25-6). The caveat is that by removing the accessibilist focus, Sellars' dilemma seems to target those externalist positions that require at least some degree of intelligibility for the propositional content of a belief.

[25] See for example John McDowell's (2008) abandonment of the idea that experience is propositional, while holding on to its conceptual nature, after criticism from Charles Travis. Williamson (2000:194-200) argues that evidence is propositional, and that it can be grasped. It is unclear whether this requires a conceptual element for him, but he is inclined to deny this grasp to non-doxastic creatures.

[26] Lyons, a non-dogmatist, endorses the idea that seemings are conceptual. Tucker (2010) defends seemings as propositional, while Huemer holds that the representational content of perception is propositional, and that its conceptual character is not intrinsic to the experience. Given the Sellarsian dilemma, we hold that the only way for the position to avoid either horns is to hold the seemings as propositional but non-conceptual. In fact, as Lyons himself observed (2009:70-2; 2016:1074), if it weren't the case, seemings would be token-identical to non-inferential beliefs and there'd be no third way at all.

[27] For a dissenting opinion on whether neo-Mooreanism is capable of answering the Sellarsian Dilemma construed in this manner, cf. Hasan 2013b:175-6. Hasan argues that while seemings are capable of making a *psychological* difference, it is left unexplained how this amounts to an epistemic difference.

[28] It might be argued that one of the reasons Bonjour's formulation came to define the debate was because the very notion the neo-Mooreans are trying to salvage had been thoroughly discredited in the eyes of epistemologists in the latter half of the 20th century.

[29] Cf. Briesen (2015:2254-5) suggesting that if what constitutes the world-involving, justificatory aspect of a propositional attitude – such as a seeming – is possessing a justified content, then neo-Mooreanism is straightforwardly false.

[30] Whether this is possible is questionable. Van Cleve (2011:23) takes the attack on basic knowledge to institute the overall impossibility of prima facie justification and for him this makes it hard "to see how it can fail to have sceptical ramifications".

[31] Cf. Cling 1994:284 for a criticism of this classification.

[32] One objection would therefore be that this is a problem for any theory of justification. This is undoubtedly so and the next chapter will defend this result. However, there might be positions

which are better equipped than neo-Mooreanism to deal with this problem. For example, varieties of virtue epistemology that try to extract a virtuous notion of circularity. Varieties of conceptualism or idealism could also be better equipped on this score. What is important in this case is that only neo-Mooreans contend that scepticism must not be engaged with. Thanks to Jaakko Hirvela for raising this objection to me.

[33] Others who share this reading that it is only the endorsement of KR what allows the problem of the criterion to proceed are Vahid 2007:224; Van Cleve 2011:24; Flores 2009:122; Zalabardo 2005:47. Reed (2012:274) notices that *easy knowledge* proper *is* the problem of the criterion, but doesn't elaborate on this.

[34] This is the reading defended by Andrew Cling, cf. 1994:262-66; 2018:551. However, Cling seems to distance the two formulations too much, by assigning only to the A-B formulation a meta-epistemological character and a narrow scope. Even if understood as establishing a question about criteria of truth for epistemic propositions instead of the lower-order question about what statements are true (1994:264), it would be a genuine sceptical problem nevertheless. Cling tends to underplay the strength of the higher-order problem, possibly because he thinks that a purely externalist conception of knowledge might solve the issue (ibid:266, but cf. ibid:271 where he reckons that Chisholm's understanding does capture the problem of the criterion). Lammenranta (2003; 2011b:212) remarks that a purely externalist answer to the Pyrrhonian problematic directly endorses easy knowledge/circularity.

[35] This is clear application of *Aenesideman Modes* also occurs, cf. M VII.418-421.

[36] Cf. M VIII.19-20, 25-9 and PH I.178-9 on this score.

Chapter 5

Scepticism and Reasons

We are more than halfway through this research, so it is time to take stock of the progress made thus far. After introducing the traits of Cartesian and Pyrrhonian methodologies in chapter one, we focused on the closure principle as the primary source of sceptical worries in contemporary epistemology. After a defence of the modus tollens route that the closure argument establishes, we presented the other side of the coin, the modus ponens of internalist neo-Mooreanism, or dogmatism. The innovation that the contemporary dogmatist brings to the table is to rule as merely dialectically ineffective the kind of anti-sceptical strategy endorsed, maintaining simultaneously that Moorean proofs are epistemically cogent. We tried to chip away at this idea by introducing a notion of 'Humean' problem, to show how fragile is the kind of justification conquered. We then introduced the problem of easy knowledge to uncover the contentious assumption made by the dogmatist, a kind of basic experiential knowledge that the sceptic demands positive reasons for. To not simply raise an empty doubt, which could warrant a legitimate dismissal of the sceptical question, the previous chapter has highlighted the weight of the presuppositions smuggled in the neo-Moorean notion of basic knowledge. We argued that the theoretical load that the neo-Moorean adopts lead her right into the problem of the Criterion. At this point, the dogmatist cannot simply avoid at least a degree of interaction with scepticism. The neo-Moorean proposal on justification must be defended lest it loses its epistemic value. This also manages to object to the idea that dialectical ineffectiveness is wholly insulated from epistemic issues. If a position warrants a theory of justification with anti-sceptical import, it has to provide reasons that support such claims. Without this engagement, the epistemic value of the stance vanishes. In this chapter, the goal is to develop the sceptical dialectic we dragged the neo-Moorean in. Specifically, we will argue that they cannot rescue their stance from a condition of arbitrariness without undercutting their own rationale. The problem of arbitrariness is then generalized to a sceptical question about the available rational support our beliefs can overall enjoy. We have already hinted at this direction, especially in chapters two and four. The problem residing at the heart of both the closure argument *and* the transition

from looks statement to is statements is rational and evidential Underdetermination. The Problem of the Criterion raises precisely the dispute, the *diaphonia*, about the element or the mechanism capable of generating the required epistemic support our beliefs need to be justified and amount to knowledge. Without a non-arbitrary resolution of this issue, our beliefs remain evidentially underdetermined.

5.1 The Sceptic's Net

The problem of the Criterion establishes an issue of epistemic priority, whereas the elements at play – criteria for beliefs and beliefs confirming criteria – should be established independently of one another. However, they cannot; in the epistemological enterprise, they reveal their interdependence. Coherentism might be an option to avoid the problem of the Criterion because it rejects the structure of explanatory relations the problem exploits and the claim to independence (Cling 1994:274, Amico 1993:98). It endorses instead complete *interdependence* of criteria and beliefs. Unfortunately, it won't encounter many supporters among those who are resolutely anti-sceptical, as it might end up simply giving us a 'frictionless spinning in the void' (McDowell 1996:14). Neo-Mooreans of all stripes surely won't be happy with it.[1]

Nevertheless, dogmatists haven't been entirely blind to the existence of this request concerning the validity of the criteria they propose for justification. Huemer briefly considers the problem as being based on the endorsement of the KR principle, which we already highlighted does not constitute the actual problem of the Criterion. However, he presents a reason as to why one might be inclined to fall into both KR and the requirement of the criterion. We are drawn in by *the basic mistake of representationalism* (2001:179): every experience is at most a *sign* for something external, not the thing itself. This idea is quite instructive because Pyrrhonism treated the problem of the Criterion as having to do with the possibility of ascertaining whether a sign indicates how things are (PH II.104-8). Is the problem of the Criterion merely predicated on rejecting the *direct* component of experience dogmatists lay a claim to and endorsing implicitly an indirect form of realism?

We've ascertained in the previous chapter that the dogmatist is making a move within the dialectic issued by the problem of the Criterion. If we take the master argument of the Criterion, one of its two premises is bound to be rejected by the dogmatist, depending on

whether we read the appeal to seemings as a methodist or a particularist move (cf. Cling 1994:273). Therefore, the dogmatist cannot simply say that they are avoiding the problem. However, they might maintain that they are *solving* it by showing that it unduly rules out the possibility that seemings might not be just a sign of outer things, but just the presentation of these external things to the subject full stop. The dogmatist might say that by breaking the sceptical spell in this way, then something like a track-record argument for the reliability of seemings or immediate sensory experiences is available. It would indeed be, in some sense, question-begging against the sceptic. However, Chisholm himself maintained that the sceptic is begging the question against the anti-sceptic, so this epistemic sin should, after all, be forgiven.[2] Further, sceptical problems against this route would merely show an antecedent and unwarranted prejudice against the possibility of knowledge. In this sense, the dogmatist might engage with scepticism and even come out victorious from the other side.[3]

The problem with this idea is that it is mistaken on two counts. The first one is because if this is how ultimately seemings consists of, this is incompatible with what the dogmatist proclaimed them to be. Seemings as propositional but non-doxastic elements of experiences appear after all to be like signs that something is the case. Otherwise, they wouldn't present merely felt veridicality, but the object itself, along with a determinate assurance that this is indeed the object that one is being presented with in experience. However, this is much more than mere seemings. How could such a presentation fail to be already conceptual or doxastic? Why shouldn't this experience bring with it already an element of indefeasible warrant that would allow one to get much more than just prima facie defeasible justification? From the analysis we gave, the direct element of the object was understood to be its immediate, non-inferential, propositional character of felt veridicality, i.e. the seeming. But given that the seeming is something that pertains to a *phenomenological* presentation, it does seem reasonable for it to constitute a sign that things are thus-and-so. The rejection of an experience being merely a sign of outer things is endorsed by other direct-realist positions such as specific varieties of disjunctivism. However, they also purport the experience to afford content that is already conceptual and which allows for indefeasible truth-guaranteeing grounds.[4] The neo-Moorean cannot

endorse this position as it is at odds with pretty much everything presented in support for her stance, including its claimed naturalness and intuitiveness.

There is a second problem. When Sextus examines criteria of truth, he does not simply rule out the possibility that experiences might be more than mere signs. He entertains the possibility that things are presented to us directly[5] and explains why all of these attempts are ultimately hopeless or require non-arbitrary support. If things were presented to us directly via the senses, we wouldn't experience contradiction and conflict in how things are, but we do (PH II.51, M VII.345). If we allow experience of error in direct presentations of *objects*, we'll need a criterion to settle which are truthful and which are not, and if the dogmatist maintains that things are thus-and-so nevertheless, this will be plainly arbitrary (PH II.53-4; M VII.346). Same thing if we try the same gambit with the presentation of objects taking place in the mental life of the subject and not specifically the senses – whatever this might mean –. Without an actual criterion "we shall not discover how we are to judge in virtue of [the intellect]" (PH II.59), and it seems that intellectual criteria might be the hardest to come by at all (M VII.348-9). The dogmatist would simply reject an admixture of the two as it would imply an indirect process where things are presented to the senses, which are then grasped by the intellect (ibid:354-5; PH II.72-3). The outcome seems to be that even if one allows appearances to be more than simply signs, permitting that objects are presented directly to one's mental life, this doesn't automatically dispense of the need for criteria determining how the intellect is to make use of these presentations (II.74-6; M VII.383-4; cf. Hankinson 1995:199). To use a term that we employed in the previous chapter, we need criteria to settle whether these objects presented to us are already world-involving and world-asserting in their own right. Even if seemings as objects are admitted as a criterion, we'd still require criteria that establish the world-involving character of these seemings" (cf. M VII.388-89). If the neo-Moorean answers this by saying that they have to be, otherwise they wouldn't be real *things*, the reply is again that seemings do not appear capable of sustaining such a weight. The neo-Moorean would be advised to change her direct realism in the direction of disjunctivism or evidential externalism,[6] but this would change the position beyond recognition and make the proposal much less modest.

At this point, it should be clear what direction we are pushing the dogmatist towards. Even if we allow experiences to be a direct interface with objects, we need criteria to settle which of these experiences, if any, are factive and world-involving, *unless* one is prepared to endorse the idea that every experience accompanied by seemings settles the matter by itself. This brings the dogmatist into a rut. They can either hold on to the idea that the object of experience themselves decides this or defend in some way that the seemings are capable of offering at least prima facie justification for our beliefs, i.e. they will have to offer criteria for when a seeming has to be heeded and when not.[7] But this is nothing more than the sceptic net of the *two* modes (PH I.178-9), a synopsis of Agrippan Modes. They make explicit that any proposed solution to the criterion problem issues in a sceptical outcome. The strategy is to have any route available to the dogmatist end up in a flagrant denial of a basic norm of epistemic rationality that an anti-sceptical stance ought to endorse.

The net of the modes works in the following manner. The dogmatist maintains that the chosen seeming-criterion is not based on something else, otherwise this would undercut its foundational character. However, if the dogmatist simply assumes that veridicality is the world-involving Criterion without offering any criterion for judging it to be so, this will amount to a mere hypothesis, making the position arbitrary. The alternative involves the Criterion to be self-grounding, allowing the experience itself to provide the Criterion to settle the matter. However, this claim will be met again with disagreement, as it can be legitimately contested that seemings can provide a criterion to decide between competing alternatives among which seemings are present themselves. The dogmatist is bound to swing between an arbitrary choice that place her proposal outside of philosophical evaluation, or to end up in a disagreement about the executed choice. This latter route ultimately leads into one of the formal modes,: arbitrariness, circularity, regress.[8] The crucial result is that the dogmatist cannot simply say that the sceptic is antecedently rejecting the possibility of foundationalism. The sceptic is not antecedently rejecting that what is considered foundational really *is* foundational but is inquiring whether it can be judged to be so by using a suitable rational criterion within an epistemic dispute (Sienkiewicz 2018:169; Amico 1993:87).[9] The problem is one of defending the purported epistemic basis without flouting at the same time those very same rational norms

endorsed by the dogmatist, who regulate epistemological theorizing. Failing to do so ought to disqualify the dogmatist position because now the position itself cannot maintain a claim to what the Criterion of truth is, issuing, therefore, the sceptical suspension of judgment.

5.1.1 Disagreement and Arbitrariness

Given what we said in the previous section, it could be retorted that instead of a reasonable first-order epistemic disagreement about criteria of knowledge, what we're doing instead is raising a higher-order disagreement about any criterion of truth that could ever be proposed to settle the dispute (Sienkiewicz 2018:170-1). This seems suspect, especially because without this higher-order disagreement, the only Problem of the Criterion available seems to be a legitimate epistemological problem about which criterion to adopt to choose between different stances, which isn't per se a sceptical problem. To solve this issue, we have to detail the backtracking we only briefly presented from the problem of the Criterion to the Agrippan modes.

As we have argued in the previous chapter, the dogmatist's claim about seemings being in themselves world-involving is something that can be legitimately disagreed with from other epistemological stances. However, when this first-order disagreement is instituted, the problem of the Criterion holds sway and establishes a sceptical disagreement about the very possibility of settling the first-order disagreement. In order to solve the first-order disagreement, we need an agreed criterion upon which one can discern whether seemings or any other proposed theoretical item can fit the bill, i.e. whether the propositions they provide are true and constitute the world-involving foundation for our beliefs. Can the mere existence of a dispute generate this radical sceptical consequence? Isn't this in essence, a presupposition of scepticism by requiring that the sceptic herself be a part of the dispute by sneaking in the disagreement about the Criterion? Without the presence of the sceptic, maybe an agreement about what constitutes the Criterion of truth could be already in place, leaving merely the epistemological conflict to be solved. It would also be implausible to maintain that both alternatives would look equally convincing to the disagreeing parties (Lammenranta 2011b:205).

The answer to these questions is negative, but bringing this out requires some work. Sextus is quite outspoken about the connection between sceptical *epoché* and disagreement (PH I.195). The *diaphonia* he considers throughout his works pertains mostly to disagreements between schools,[10] but sometimes he also envisions the sceptic as taking part in the dispute (Barnes 1990:12-4). Barnes notices that if disagreement must lead to suspension of judgement, and it is merely *undecided* disagreement, it wouldn't suffice for a sceptical outcome. It is quite possible and feasible to resolve a simply undecided disagreement, and it may very well be *rational* to do so (ibid:20-1). What institutes the mode as sound must instead be instead awareness of the disagreement as undecided. This commits the epistemologist to either resolve it, or to suspend judgment. If she were to make a decision about the subject matter of the disagreement while being unable to rationally resolve it at the same time, that decision would not be a commitment she or anyone else is rationally entitled to endorse. The way out of the disagreement wouldn't be rational but arbitrary. In 'space-of-reasons' parlance, either the reason proposed to get out of the disagreement is good enough that it can be successfully defended against other reason-based challenges, or the endorsement is arbitrary and fails to establish any valuable epistemic status.[11]

Such an occurrence is not yet sceptical in itself. We are still at the lower-level of ordinary epistemological disagreement. The case only adverts to the fact that a decisive, non-arbitrary or non-circular reason for deciding between the two has not been adduced yet (1990:24). Nevertheless, here is where the dispute about the Criterion of truth ensues. In order to discover a decisive reason, an agreed criterion that would identify that particular reason as *decisive* must be found and endorsed by all parties to the dispute (ibid:26-7). Now the appearance of the higher-order disagreement about the Criterion shouldn't look as suspicious as before. We took a relatively common occurrence in our ordinary, scientific and philosophical lives – disagreement about principles –, and we registered that, to resolve this epistemic disagreement, a valid criterion of judgment has to be provided. However, now we have a bona fide sceptical problem on our hand because the Pyrrhonist holds, no decision to establish a valid criterion of truth can be reached without ultimately failing to discharge this commitment. This happens not only against other participants in the debate – this might not occur – but against the rational norms of

epistemic discourse themselves (Lammenranta 2008:16-7). In addition, the sceptic need not even be an actual party to the disagreement. What disqualifies the reasons adduced by those who take part in the dispute will be the inability to offer such reasons while also respecting the norms that constitute an epistemic standing as justifiable and endorsable. Those who take part into the dispute will become 'each other's Criterion-sceptic' (Marton 1999:70). Scepticism emerges here as that which tasks us to rationally defend our epistemic claims and endorsements.[12]

Therefore, the disagreement arising out of the criterion issues a rational command to suspend judgment, insofar as the goal of those who take part in the dispute is actually to discover the truth and no resolution is in sight. What allows the disagreement to persist is the lack of *decisive* reasons to settle the relevant Criterion for judgment. If these reasons are lacking one ought to suspend judgment over what constitutes the required Criterion of truth,[13] leaving us incapable of solving the original first-order disagreement. These reasons cannot be chosen by being partial to one of the parties in the disagreement or by taking for granted something under investigation itself.[14] We trivially could not use further seemings or phenomenological presentations as evidence to support the claim that seemings are world-involving. This is where the formal Agrippan modes enter the scene. They show how the disagreement about the Criterion, whose purport is to establish what can count as valid evidence or rational basis, ultimately involves running afoul of some norm of rational and epistemological discourse.

This means that the trope of disagreement itself, while crucial in initiating suspension of judgment, cannot establish it on its own.[15] Even if the disagreement arises not from merely psychological feelings of equal persuasion but by the rational request that our criteria be established according to rational norms of inquiry, nothing will prevent the dogmatist from trying to answer this rational disagreement. Nevertheless, any attempt in that direction will uncover the road leading to one of the three formal tropes. This reading, from disagreement to the formal tropes, also clarifies that the role of disagreement is to trigger the request for justification beyond the point where the dogmatist would pretend to stop it at first (Machuca 2015:29). Now, if the dogmatist simply rejects this demand, given that the disagreement on the Criterion has been made plausible, then she will

simply run afoul of the arbitrariness trope. If she engages, the sceptical net will continue. In any scenario available, disagreement and the formal tropes work in tandem, and without one element, the other vanishes as well. At every iteration of a claim, the sceptic will raise or create a further disagreement, and the choice of the dogmatist will be to either commit a plainly arbitrary move or continue into a regress or in a circle (Lammenranta 2013:48-9; cf. Fogelin 1994:118).

The sections of Sextus' *Outlines* that introduce the debate around the Criterion already prefigure the collapse into the formal modes, which will continuously curtail the attempts at providing a decisive reason to settle the required Criterion:

> Of those who have discussed standards, some have asserted that there is one … some that there is not … Now they will say either that this dispute is decidable or that it is undecidable. If undecidable, they will immediately grant that one must suspend judgment; if decidable, let them say by what it will be judged when we neither possess an agreed standard nor even know if there is one but are investigating the matter. Again, in order for the dispute that has arisen about standards to be decided, we must possess an agreed standard through which we can judge it; and in order for us to possess an agreed standard, the dispute about standards must already have been decided. Thus the argument falls into the reciprocal mode, and the discovery of a standard is blocked – for we do not allow them to assume a standard by hypothesis, and if they want to judge the standard by a standard we throw them into an infinite regress (PH II.18-20, cf. M VII.47-54)[16]

This does not issue in a negative dogmatist claim that no truth criteria exists,[17] nor this means that the disagreement itself must necessarily be *undecidable*[18] but only that when a resolution is proposed, ultimately we will end up in the sceptical net undercutting the purported solution (PH II.79). When the trajectory from the problem of the Criterion to the Agrippan tropes is construed in this manner, this also answers a complaint – raised by Robert Amico (1993:107) – that the argument is not sound, because it would only attest that it *seems to the sceptic* that the dispute cannot be resolved. However, this is no mere appearance, and Sextus is quite clear in numerous passages that the problem does not involve mere psychological constraints (PH I.59, 90).[19] The issue is that in any solution offered thus far, at some point one will either suspend judgment or jettison one of the rational tenets that uphold epistemological inquiry. Ultimately, the problem of the Criterion is built upon the question of 'how can we establish anything epistemological without

ultimately taking something for granted, and beg the question to some extent against our opponents?" (Conee&Feldman 2004:17).[20]

The connection between the Criterion and the Agrippan modes resides in the idea that to have an epistemic standing means possessing epistemic reasons that the subject herself can deem as both *her own* and as non-arbitrary (Cling 2009:333, 2014:166). If these requirements cannot be satisfied, it is not entirely clear how knowledge-claims or justified beliefs can be appropriately assigned, attributed, and asserted.[21] Applied to the neo-Moorean position, this raises an attack against the notion that propositional justification, the justification sought and promised by the dogmatists, could be capable of providing any significant purchase on one's knowledge. If we take the case of Norman the Clairvoyant[22] (Bonjour 1985:40-5), who has no idea of his clairvoyance gift, we see that when Norman's reliable faculty provides him with the proposition 'the president is in New York' he has available propositional justification for a corresponding belief, because the proposition is true and generated by a reliable mechanism. However, he has no idea about any of this. If he formed a belief based on that proposition it would be a completely arbitrary endorsement of a doxastic status. By lacking an adequate rational standing on the clairvoyant proposition that magically appears to him, the proposition itself is epistemically valueless, it doesn't hold any epistemic value for the subject herself. The feeling of veridicality, the seeming of 'the president is in New York' that Norman experiences, is completely adventitious. Why should he heed that? He lacks a reason, or a criterion, upon which to judge that what the faculty provided him is indeed a true proposition and that the faculty did not provide it merely as a fluke.[23] If Norman possesses no criterion upon which to judge whether what seems to him is of any epistemic value or not, then that proposition enjoys no valid epistemic merit for him, as it would be a merely arbitrary hunch, a guess. What would make that proposition non-arbitrary for him would be the possession of a reason, or a criterion of truth, thanks to which he could appropriately judge that when propositions like 'the president is in New York" suddenly appears to him, then he is entitled to form a belief based on them. If he possessed that Criterion, then he could say "I formed the belief 'the president is in New York' because it was given to me by my clairvoyant faculty, the reason why it's not arbitrary for me to having done that is because the faculty I have is a reliable one and I can prove that". A

reason for a belief needs a reason itself, or some evidence for it; however, this will foreseeably lead to sceptical conclusions in one of the formal Agrippan modes (Cling 2009:338-9; 2014:163).[24]

Now, this does look like the KR requirement again,[25] and it is. However, this doesn't mean that the sceptic is requiring endorsing KR no matter what. Instead, the strategy shows that, if one has no procedure or Criterion to identify one's own selected faculty as adequate, reliable, or world-involving, the resulting belief will be completely arbitrary. If we aim at adopting a non-arbitrary stance, heeding KR seems the most defensible choice. Of course, KR itself leads to the other two formal Agrippan modes, circularity and regress. Remember that rejecting KR does not mean rejecting the problem of the Criterion. It means giving a specific answer to it by adopting a specific criterion – the seeming in the case of the dogmatist – as foundational and basic. Moreover, this proposal as a move within the Criterion dialect is perfectly acceptable even by the sceptic (cf. Amico 1993:89). After all, if the dogmatist did not even try to provide a criterion for why our beliefs are prima facie justified, it wouldn't even qualify as a theory of justification. The problem is that the dogmatist thinks the task stops here. She stops at the propositional level, saying: "the reason why your belief has prima facie justification is that it possesses the required seeming. The seeming constitutes propositional justification for your belief". The dogmatist maintains that the seeming automatically generates this justification. She offered a reason for why the proposition believed is justified, but she hasn't offered a reason why that reason ought to be considered valid by the subject herself. If the dogmatist rejects the possibility of encountering disagreement at any particular step of the ladder, she will entitle herself to the belief that it is not warrantable to raise a contrary equipollent proposition or Criterion to the one she presented. This means that she entitles herself to choose between plausible and implausible assertions while at the same time refusing to defend the criterion upon which she entitles herself to this choice (Barnes 1990:106-7). If things stop at this point, the disagreement will only have led to establishing an epistemically arbitrary stance. Additionally, the dogmatist will have failed to establish that her position is in fact, the one we ought to rationally endorse (M VIII.350-1, 369-76). If everything that can be shown in favour of a specific position or stance is the dogmatist's own assertion or conviction, if this conviction cannot be more than arbitrary, one should

suspend judgment (Barnes 1990:99). The overall morale concerning KR is that even by rejecting it, the dogmatist ultimately has to fall back into a more comprehensive rendition of it – the Agrippan modes – if she wants her position to have epistemic merit.

These requests to go beyond the merely propositional level do not arise from unreasonable requests about infallibility or absolute certainty. Having these reasons seems important to us as epistemic agents in our everyday lives (cf. Cling 2014:167-8). We want to identify when we can consider ourselves and others as reliable epistemic agents, and we want to be able to check whether the information about the world that we acquire and share with others has some epistemic worth or value. Knowledge and justification cannot be simply something that obtains in complete independence from how we conduct ourselves as rational and epistemic agents. This requires having to engage with the question of what constitutes a valid reason.[26] This is a matter of what Sellars called having a standing in the *space of reasons*, of knowledge not as a mere matter of empirical description, but as being able to commit oneself and appropriately defend what one claims (Sellars 1956:§36). It is a matter of the authority that our knowledge-claims possess; even in non-inferential endeavours, knowledge and justification can be properly assigned only when the subject can, either via subsequent reflection or recollection, commit herself to the specific normative status tied to the claim she made (cf. Brandom 1994:215ff).[27]

The idea is then that what constitutes a belief as justified and as an adequate candidate for knowledge is established by the activity of the subject in "secur[ing]and defend[ing] a positive justificatory status by offering reasons in defence of one's belief and responding to challenges" (Leite 2004b:224). The dogmatist is before a devastating dilemma: either she completely retreats from the very business of offering reasons for her claims or engages in the space of reasons and open herself up to the Agrippan modes (Sienkiewicz 2018:183).[28] The first horn would directly surrender the very possibility of vindicating what we presume to be our ordinary access to the world, and would simply expose the dogmatist's position as what it ultimately is, the unreflective endorsement of a dogma (Fogelin 1994:133).

This at bottom is the crucial problem arising from the kind of attack about rational belief that the sceptic raises: ultimately, every explanation we can offer of how our experiential beliefs obtain their epistemic credentials, their value as beliefs, cannot find itself adequate support. The traditional foundationalist picture envisions epistemic normativity of experiences as arising ex-nihilo from something which is conceived as non-doxastic, blankly external, *yet* capable of providing us with something determinate for our epistemic beliefs. If the dogmatist maintains that membership in a particular class of occurrences is *basic*, and capable of generating the rest of our edifice of knowledge, the sceptic is perfectly rational in asking what is about that particular class of occurrences, propositions, or attitudes, that which manages to determine our beliefs as justified (Barnes 1990:126). The normative statuses of our beliefs require adequate explanatory sources (Sosa 2009:234).[29] If these sources are experiences understood as contentful but non-doxastic, there will always remain an unbridgeable gap[30] between the non-normative, purely objectual occurrence and the normative doxastic status purportedly determined on that experience. There is a missing link between some representation that is immediately intelligible and what this representation is about, which is made intelligible only via the representation it generated.[31] Saying that the object itself is present in the representation, as dogmatists elect to argue, does seem to require some quite extensive arguments in its favour. However, the dogmatist cannot do this without making the stance essentially become something radically different from the stance that allowed us to unproblematically run the modus ponens route against the sceptical modus tollens. Trivially, any new stance that has emerged from this transformation would require further defence itself.

5.1.2 Objections

Here we want to briefly run through some objections that can be raised against this trajectory from the problem of the Criterion, through rational disagreement, to the problem of arbitrariness. The debate around arbitrariness has been extensively determined by the usage Peter Klein (1999) made of this charge against foundationalism. The general idea is that any attempt at defending the basic knowledge identified by the foundationalist will simply not make it foundational anymore. Had it really been, no additional reasons would have been necessary. Given that they are required, an infinite regress ensues and holding

on to the claim that they are basic beliefs at some point simply makes the position arbitrary (ibid:297, 303-4). However, this position can be easily rejected because it is unclear why simply having a meta-justification *per se* would render the basic belief itself any less basic. This counterargument has quite some currency in contemporary epistemology (cf. Howard-Snyder 2005:23; Huemer 2003:149-50) and proceeds as follows:

Imagine S is looking at a red ball. You ask her, "why do you believe that ball to be red?". She replies, "because it looks red". If you were to ask her "yes, but why do you believe it to be red based on the way it looks?", she'd probably reply, "because ordinarily when I see something of a particular colour, that thing *is* of that particular colour".

For Klein, providing this additional reason will immediately undercut the foundational status of "looks-red", and if no further reasons are adduced, this will ultimately uphold an arbitrary belief (2000:15). As many have noticed, however, the fact that S mentions that explanation as to why she took the looks of the ball as indicative of the ball *being* of that colour does not mean that she based her belief on this explanation. She based her belief on it simply looking red to her. The explanatory justification can co-exist with the foundational justification without the latter ceasing to be foundational. Klein's argument is supposed to show that reason-giving goes on infinitely for any proposition because what we consider as basic can always be linked to a different reason, making it non-basic. Notice, however, that this is not the argument we have been providing. The problem is not that our dialectical partner has just given another reason for her basic belief. The question we raised is what makes the actual basis of S's belief – the ball looking to her as red – capable of being a rational basis for her belief, what constitutes its world-involving character, and whether it is possible to consider it as providing rational support for our beliefs to be justified in general. The problem is not merely one of providing a reason after another, and when none are found to deem the opponent's stance arbitrary. The problem is one of settling what constitutes rational support for our beliefs in general. The issue for the sceptic is that the explanatory reason is merely *exculpatory* but not justificatory (McDowell 1996:20-1).

A different objection can, however, be levied. Does this entail that in order for a reason to be epistemically valid, it must be defended against every challenge? Isn't there the risk

to depict a situation that simply doesn't take place in our epistemic practices? Furthermore, why should anybody do this if, in any case, one cannot get rid of scepticism? This is a powerful and penetrating objection. The sceptic might reply that this is no actual concern of hers because suspending judgment on whether we know anything could be precisely what we have to do and that we are all being non-rational to some degree in going on as we do. However, this has the power to undercut scepticism's own strength because, at this point, the sceptical problem might be rightfully understood to be something we should not engage at all with if we want to go on in our everyday practices. If we are bound to see ourselves as fundamentally irrational by the sceptic's own strict rational standards, maybe we'd be better off simply rejecting those standards and going on for our road. Were this the case, scepticism might have reverted to the role of a fastidious child who keeps asking "why-questions". The risk is then that the sceptical stance we have been defending leads to dialectical egalitarianism, the idea that every claim or statement needs to be defended when faced with any challenge. By not providing any reason why we should defend those claims, given that the outcome will always be bleak, scepticism ends up being *idle* because *excessive*[32]. It would also undercut the idea we set at the beginning of this research: scepticism as the negative and rational side of philosophy.

Dialectical egalitarianism is the counterpart of dialectical foundationalism, the latter defended by, among others, Brandom (1994), Williams (2004), Leite (2005, 2004b), and arguably Wittgenstein (OC). The dialectical foundationalist accepts the point we've made that there is a need to defend our claims and assertions in order for them to be properly *ours*, and it is the very aspect that constitutes us as rational, autonomous epistemic and normative agents. What they contest is the requirement that every challenge must be heeded. There are some epistemic attitudes and statuses within the space of reasons which require no explicit defence because in the rational and normative dimension one inhabits, they enjoy default warrant. It is instructive to briefly present here Brandom's position, which is quite representative of the stance.

Brandom's account understands belief as expressing a normative, inferentially articulated commitment undertaken or acknowledged by the epistemic agent (1994:157).[33] When

one utters a belief, for example, “I believe the table is red”, one makes an assertion with a particular content, constituting the significance of the assertion, to which one commits herself to. This content is conceptual, possessing objective truth-conditions, which are instituted in inferential practices comprising both first- and third-person attributions and assessments, defining the structure of the space of reasons one performs the assertion in (ibid:158). If I believe ‘the table is red’ I commit myself to treat that object as a red table in my overall doxastic and discursive practices with other subjects. Given that the space of reasons is essentially a dimension of assessments, the notion of commitment is a deontic status (ibid:159). Commitments are accompanied by the deontic status of *entitlement*. If one is committed to a particular assertion or belief, there will be obligations on her normative conduct in accordance with the commitment undertaken. When a subject is assessed as authorized to act upon her commitment by others who inhabit the same space of reason and partake in the same discursive practices as the subject, she will be entitled to act upon her commitment in a determinate fashion (ibid:160-1). Entitlement in this sense is a license, an attribution of that particular commitment to the subject; but at the same time this changes the status of the subject who undertook the commitment. Now that she is entitled to the normative status, she is also authorizing those who attributed the commitment to sanction her in case she fails to fulfil or discharge the commitment undertaken (ibid:162-3). This is because a commitment consists of an endorsement of a specific responsibility. If I assert at my local chess club that I am a skilled player – because I naively believe it – I’m committing myself to be capable of playing up to a specific standard of performances. However, by doing so, I’m also undertaking a *responsibility* to play to specific standards so that those who can license the status of ‘skilled player’ in that community can entitle me to assert it of myself. If I’m able to defend myself adequately on multiple occasions when faced with the Sicilian-Najdorf or with the Grünfeld Defence – two Grandmaster-level openings –, then I am entitled, at least within my chess club, to assert that I am a skilled player. If I keep losing because, as black, I stubbornly continue defending the c4-pawn in the Queen’s Gambit Accepted – a rookie mistake –, then I won’t be licensed to assert that I am a skilled player. My performance did not manage to fulfil the commitment I endorsed by my assertion and altered my deontic status within the practice of playing chess. I can no longer assert that

I am a skilled player, as I won't be practically treated as such by those who can license being entitled to that assertion (ibid:166). Entitlement is connected to authority, commitment to responsibility.

How does this translate to the epistemological dialectic? The space of reasons where epistemic disagreement is played out has the same structure as the social practice of attributing and denying commitments as reported above. Asserting something is "what reasons are asked for, and what giving a reason always consists in" (ibid:167). When I assert something, it requires reasons, but it also can be used as a reason for another assertion. Asserting stands in relations of both commitment and entitlement. By making an assertion, one institutes a license for further claims that inherit the commitment of that original claim, and a responsibility is undertaken to vindicate the commitment expressed by the relevant claim or belief by "showing that one is entitled to make it" (ibid:171). This is nothing less than the proper practice of justifying one's own claims. Justification acts both as a defence of the undertaken commitment and as an authorization to make further moves in the epistemic practice:

> Justifying the claim when it is queried, giving reasons for it when reasons are asked for, is one way to discharge this obligation. If the commitment can be defended, entitlement to it demonstrated by justifying the claim, then endorsement of it can have genuine authority (ibid:172)

This sounds perfectly compatible with the kind of dialectical structure that we engaged in the Agrippan Modes. One has to show that she is entitled to the belief she asserted when the entitlement is challenged, which is a commitment to a responsibility (ibid:173). The incapability of defending one's claim entails a lack of entitlement to that claim. If entitlement persists, it will be arbitrary, lacking the required normative status; it won't have any *authority*.[34]

However, this does not mean that everything one does within the epistemological space of reasons *must be* discharged in the above manner. Brandom is well aware that at one point, this mechanism will generate a kind of regress of deferral of authority to others or institute a circle by appeal to some entitlement already brought in the dialectic; these situations trivially won't produce any actual entitlement (ibid:176). The above structure cannot *originate* the required entitlements. The way out is given by the pragmatic

commitment to seeing specific entitlements as implicit in the required practices. Some entitlements need not be demonstrated to be attributed and can be in force at least until a legitimate question can be raised explicitly against them. Without this clause, the very activity of asking and giving reasons would vanish (ibid:177). The morale of the dialectical foundationalist is that doubt needs to be motivated and defended as much as ordinary claims to entitlements need to be. What institutes certain entitlements as having default validity depends on the social practice itself, or on the relevant epistemic circumstances (cf. Leite 2005:405, Brandom 1994:178).[35]

Is this compatible with Agrippan scepticism? It might seem at first sight that it is not and that it aims precisely at preventing the possibility of such a regress. The sceptic appears to be committed to Dialectical Egalitarianism. However, there is a problem with Dialectical Egalitarianism, precisely the one we identified as the pressing question of this section. It is too liable to becoming idle because excessive. Even brute challenges, completely unmotivated ones, are considered legitimate moves in the space of reasons of Dialectical Egalitarianism (Williams 2004:134). This would issue the problem that now scepticism is indeed a game that cannot be won. If we were defending unbounded scepticism, this might be acceptable, but we're not. We are trying to establish scepticism as a rational part of philosophy itself which it cannot be if it constitutes an endeavour where philosophy is bound to lose as soon as it engages it. If we take into consideration how the main proponent of dialectical egalitarianism – Michael Rescorla (2009a, 2009b)[36] – resists this charge, we see that his strategy to avoid this losing outcome is to allow for brute challenges, – the *Vulnerability Thesis* (ibid:48) –, while maintaining that they can in fact be all answered because what needs foundation is not empirical *discourse*, but empirical *knowledge*, which is grounded on perceptual observations (ibid:51). In a nutshell, every assertion in an empirical discourse can be challenged at any time because there are no dialectically basic propositions, but there are epistemologically basic observations, to which we can refer to for every challenge. Dialectical egalitarianism is made possible thanks to epistemological foundationalism.

This is even worse for the Pyrrhonist, as the privileged target of her sceptical modes is precisely epistemological foundationalism. What is the way out for her? The suggestion

we will defend in the last chapter is that it is mistaken to view Pyrrhonism as necessarily rejecting *dialectical* foundationalism. The Pyrrhonian perspective attacks criteria of truth, but not criteria of *action*. In principle, there is no incompatibility between maintaining that epistemological claims are arbitrary while recognizing that they do play a foundational role in the practices we engage in. The Pyrrhonist follows the laws and customs of her lived life, and she also admits specific dogmata and what Sextus calls commemorative or mnemonic signs (PH II.100-2), allowing us to recollect how things stand together in ordinary, lived experiences. What the Pyrrhonist takes issue with is the purported discovery of some invariant truth via such dogmata and signs (Hankinson 1995:202). However, heeding such signs does require providing an account of what constitutes the authority, the compulsion or forced assent we attach to certain feelings, experiences, intentions. This is crucial because, if it is true that in our everyday practice we have a sense of when we have to stop answering to challenges and label them as deviant or misguided, this cannot be established by appeal to criteria external to the practices, but to immanent, internal factors of the discursive practice of reasoning, justifying, and believing (Leite 2005:403). If we do not offer at least the structure of what allows certain entitlements to become valid by default, we'll end up straight back into a heteronomous conception of epistemic agency, where our reasons are not really our own anymore, and we'll be back to endorsing essentially arbitrary moves.[37] This will be the main task of the next two chapters. For now, we limit ourselves at indicating that this possibility has been overlooked, and it might pave the way for scepticism not to collapse into a nihilistic merry-go-round and retain a rational and therapeutic role.

5.2 Underdetermination Scepticism

At this point, we have to collect together the pieces of the sceptical doubt we have been developing in the past two chapters. We must do this so that it becomes apparent how the analysis carried out thus far manages to establish a general problem and that it is a much sounder issue than just postulating abnormal scenarios of deception. The way to fulfil these desiderata lies in an objection we haven't considered thus far. The sceptical dialectic we have instituted might be targeting only some specific positions. Klein (2011:81) has read the argument that Sextus raises against the dogmatists as being

implicitly directed at those premises of Aristotelian heritage, explaining why the three formal modes possess their specific character. Sextus, therefore, endorses the Aristotelian idea that neither infinitism nor circularity could ever ground respectable, rational standings (ibid:84-5).[38] However, if we don't accept the Aristotelian conception of rational arguments, one could reasonably view epistemic justification emerging 'as we provide reasons' (ibid:94) even if no ends is in sight. This might give support to coherentism or infinitism as ways out of the sceptical problem.

While this is a possibility, both answers seem to be too much in cahoots with significant sceptical insights to be an actual refutation or dissolution of the problem. Nevertheless, there is a similar take raised by Michael Williams that might do the trick. Even if directed more properly at Cartesian scepticism, Williams attacks the stance of *Epistemological Realism* as being the implicit assumption of both the sceptic and the foundationalist. This is the idea that the objects of epistemological inquiry individuate genuine underlying principles or structures, something epistemologically invariant that is beneath every possible change in circumstances or standards our everyday epistemic practices might endure (Williams 1996:108, 113). It is the idea that if we abstract from the various contingencies which influence the particular epistemic situation one is in, some sort of core will be found that is capable of explaining the whole of our knowledge and which will assign to every proposition about the world some sort of intrinsic epistemic status. These do seem to be the kind of impulses behind the request for a criterion capable of ascertaining whether entities like seemings can be world-involving. If seemings are world-involving, then, independently of the particular circumstances the subject inhabits, their occurrence will provide the subject with some intrinsic epistemic content. Both the sceptic and the dogmatist seem to share this assumption. Of course, the sceptic can simply say that her endorsement of the principle is ad hominem, but in this case, this might allow for a way out from the sceptical problem. This is because Williams contends that what ultimately motivates Epistemological Realism is a doctrine that the sceptic and the foundationalist both try to pass off as ordinary and natural, but for Williams it represents quite the opposite.

This is the doctrine of the *Epistemic Priority of Experience*, namely that our knowledge of how things are is derived from our knowledge of how things experientially present themselves to us (ibid:51). It establishes the constraint that our knowledge of the empirical world is ultimately reducible to evidentialist and experientialist grounds, and nothing else be allowed to weigh in the constitution of knowledge. The suggestion is that once we accept this priority relation, it will be all too easy for the sceptic to cleave in some scenario of deception or rely on some appearance/reality gap to institute scepticism (ibid:52-3). If knowledge of the world relies on knowledge of experiential appearances, there will always be the possibility of establishing a logical gap between the two sides. If we recall what we said towards the end of section 5.1.1, we noticed a gap where normativity is generated ex-nihilo, and this is the problem that any attempted solution to the Agrippan modes has to contend with. However, this gap is for Williams merely the product of this experientialist dominance over the empirical world. Once the distinction is instituted, it is arguably impossible to reconcile the two without a loss of objectivity (ibid:56).

The sceptic strategy presents her position as a by-product of the experientialist foundationalist option. In this way, the sceptic would at first make the case that only by having knowledge of the world grounded on experience, on appearance-data, could the sceptic be answered, and then show us that none of these attempts work (ibid:59). However, while the doctrine of epistemic priority might appear as a truism, it conflates two different ideas: while senses do play a causal role in allowing us to engage with the world, this by no means entails that knowledge of the world has to be entirely dependent on the senses (ibid:71). The idea can be rejected; there is no requirement on our behalf to accept that the senses would give us something invariant independently from the circumstances we are in (ibid:72). To think so would be to presuppose the doctrine of *Epistemological Realism*, which is a piece of substantial philosophical theorizing. Williams is even willing to admit in this sense that experiential evidence might be *neutral* on how the world is, but to simply point towards the existence of the normative gap does not establish by itself that we are stuck irremediably on a side which is cut off from the world (ibid:75, cf. Ribeiro 2002:575). The existence of the logical-normative gap has no epistemic significance on its own. To derive a sceptical argument, one needs the doctrine of epistemic priority (Williams 1996:73-4; 2001:222). This means that by simply rejecting the experientialist

position endorsed by the dogmatist, the sceptical problem would not arise, and scepticism appears as a threat only because of its narrow application.

We have indeed focused since chapter three mainly on an experientialist position, primarily because of its radical rejection of the sceptical possibility, and we indeed have to generalize the problem in some way. Otherwise, it might seem that we are simply ignoring all different sorts of positions that might fare better concerning the problem of the Criterion and the sceptical dialectic. However, Williams' diagnosis does not seem to capture what we unearthed in this chapter so far nor the previous one. Firstly, neo-Mooreanism postulates no gap between appearance and the world; seemings do not partake in the *representationalist mistake*. Its problem concerns instead how to justify that our experience is indeed world-involving without assuming it arbitrarily. Secondly, the considerations we presented regarding the value of reasons ultimately did not depend exclusively on the specific epistemic priority of *experience* over knowledge of the world. They established a general question concerning what makes any purported rational basis of our beliefs *valid* and demonstrably so. While it is true that pointing towards the logical-normative gap falls short of establishing that we are stuck on the experientialist side, we still need some positive reason to think that whatever side we are stuck on, that is the world-involving side. In short, the problem we raised does not pertain merely to *experience* as a rational basis for belief. It concerns any rational basis in general that is proposed as the ground for our beliefs. The *Underdetermination Principle* captures this idea:

> **UP)** For every S, p, q, if S knows that p and q describe incompatible scenarios and S lacks a rational basis that favours p over q, then S lacks knowledge that p (Pritchard 2015:30)

Such a principle manages to explain rather well the various cases we have presented in this research where the experience of something cannot transmit warrant to the corresponding belief without the appropriate checks or conditions in place. This principle is essentially at play in motivating the minor premise, the ignorance premise, of the sceptical argument from closure (Brueckner 1994:831, Greco 2018:57-61). When our beliefs lack the appropriate rational basis considered from the perspective of the agent

possessing the belief, the support that would qualify them as being genuinely justified is missing. Even if the belief does have as its content something propositionally justified, when the belief is held without recourse to reasons that are capable of establishing the belief as justified, there won't be any entitlement we can claim for its use in ordinary epistemic practice or endeavour. If this requirement is not met, then the commitment expressed by the belief won't be something that we can bind ourselves to in terms of an entitlement we possess and is properly ours. There won't be the possibility of defending the belief as a legitimate move in the epistemic space of reasons.

However, the above formulation is not entirely appropriate for our aims because it still seems to be committed to the idea that scepticism is merely a matter of alternatives of deception or mere truth-related errors. It doesn't manage to discharge entirely the experientialist dimension that Williams found problematic. Nevertheless, the principle embodies more than that. Underdetermination has as its target the general idea of grounding our beliefs on a basis that is adequate for the task and is rational. We have, therefore, to present an amended formulation. We can start by identifying the fact that what motivates the principle is an idea that should not be considered controversial, and it is the following one:

> **Rational Ground Principle)** If S has a rationally grounded belief that p, then S lacks a rational basis for believing not-p (Pritchard 2015:49).

Why is this principle plausible? Because holding a belief on a basis that did not manage to exclude the negation of that same belief would immediately undermine the belief itself and disqualify it as something one can endorse and employ for further ampliative inferences and epistemic deductions. When one does possess adequate support for the belief, this ought to imply the negation of what is incompatible with that belief (ibid:50). Lacking such rational support, there is no reason to consider the belief as valid or proper. The belief would lack authority.[39] Take the following example in support of the intuitive nature of the principle. A photon carries a different fundamental force than a gluon. Below energies where the fundamental atomic forces are unified, photons and gluons are distinct objects and appear in a particle accelerator, leaving distinct traces on instruments. If I were to go to the LHC in Geneva and look at a plate reporting a particle collision, I

would be bound to see lines representing photons that are by far the most common particles produced in such experiments. However, I could properly assert the belief that "those are photons" only if I lacked a rational basis to believe that the traces might be not of photons but gluons. Lacking any required expertise to tell them apart I would have such a rational basis. Even if my belief is reasonable and might very well be true, it does not possess the required epistemic value. This is because the evidence on the plate fails to function as actual evidence for my belief. If I were to simply assert the belief nevertheless, it would be nothing more than a stab in the dark, even if I were actually to be *right*. How could I defend my claim against the opposite claim that that trace was left by a gluon instead? I couldn't; my belief lacks the proper basis to be held as something epistemically worthy. While this might still appear like a problem of uneliminated possibilities, it would be mistaken to think that it just is that. The point made here is that for our beliefs to have any epistemic worth, they must possess an evidential or rational basis having the capability of making the belief inherit its rational and epistemic credentials. In its absence, the belief cannot be non-arbitrarily asserted.

The underdetermination problem can be therefore reformulated as

> **UPA)** If q is a competitor to q, then one can know p only if one can non-arbitrarily reject q, i.e. only if it has more *epistemic merit* than q (Vogel 2004:427)

This will be the formulation of Underdetermination that we'll endorse from now on. It attests to the same Pyrrhonian point we drew out of the trajectory from the problem of the Criterion to the Agrippan modes. Unless my belief possesses a rational basis that is capable of supporting the content of the belief, it would be plainly arbitrary for me to commit myself to that content. If I say "that's a photon", I need a criterion or a rational basis that allows me to non-arbitrarily reject "that's a gluon". In the absence of an ascertained rational basis I can employ to discharge my commitments,[40] I rationally ought to suspend my judgment on what that thing is (Vahid 2005:130, Yalcin 1992:12). Therefore, the principle of Underdetermination allows the Pyrrhonist to generate the needed equipollence to engender general suspension of belief (ibid:8; Gòmez-Alonso 2016:475).[41]

By raising the problem of Underdetermination, the sceptic manages to issue a plausible question against any position that purports to give a specific basis for judgment as appropriate. This will mean that it will not be enough by itself to reject experientialism and its relation of epistemic priority to make scepticism disappear, as Williams suggested. The issue touches whatever side of our engagement with the world we might be in. It is a valid problem for contextualist, reliabilist, or fully doxastic proposals for knowledge as well. They are all tasked with defending why they hold the basis of their belief as adequate and world-involving, without plainly begging the question and arbitrarily rejecting available alternatives. This is not merely dialectical ineffectiveness of a position, of course. Leaving this question untouched will make the entailments and deduction based on the particular privileged basis epistemically void (Schiffer 2004:164).[42] They would have no authoritative epistemic status. Ultimately, Underdetermination is the issue the Pyrrhonist exploits to create disagreement about the required Criterion or rational basis, which leads via the Agrippan modes to suspension of judgment, and establishes a problem of the *insularity of reasons* (Pritchard 2015:55). We need some positive fact establishing that the reasons we appeal to as the grounds for our beliefs are up to the task. Without taking up this engagement, our reasons and our beliefs based on such reasons would have little more than arbitrary epistemic merit.

5.2.1 Defending Underdetermination

At this point we can place the Underdetermination principle at the bottom of the sceptical pyramid. It both motivates the ignorance premise of the closure problem, which we saw in chapter two, and explains how the Pyrrhonist reasoning can be genuinely effective. The idea that Underdetermination is the fundamental principle that acts as the source of scepticism has been contested, most prominently by Stewart Cohen (1998), who holds that closure is actually the fundamental issue. For a defence of our position against Cohen we have to direct the reader to Appendix I attached to this research due to space-related constraints. Given that the debate around these two principles is still under-researched, we believe that our analysis in the Appendix can provide some valuable insight.

Here we will deal instead with two general problems relating to Underdetermination itself. The first one is brought up by Anthony Brueckner, who accepts the fundamentality thesis (1994, 2011a), but argues that this is game over for scepticism because Underdetermination actually leads one to endorse *infallibilism*.[43] He reads Underdetermination as consisting of the problem that the evidence making up our rational basis might simply fail to entail that which is purportedly evidence of. However, this is merely a requirement that our evidence be always able to do that, which is an obvious infallibilist requirement (1994:835, 2005:390).[44]

However, this verdict betrays a mistaken understanding of the kind of sceptical problem instituted by Underdetermination. The question is not whether the evidence acting as a rational basis succeeds or fails in establishing a belief having as its content what the evidence is about. This would still be viewing the issue merely as one of judgmental error, believing evidence E to be evidence for p, while instead, it was evidence for q. The underdetermination problem instead asks what constitutes the authoritative status of that rational basis as such, what allows that evidence to be a non-insular, valid reason for the corresponding belief to be based on it. If we recall the cases we saw in chapter two, Roush's case and the Modigliani example had evidence that supposedly entailed the corresponding belief, but that evidence was useless because it had no actual epistemic merit for the relevant subjects. Scepticism need not hinge on matters of fallibility or massive falsity of our beliefs – after all, most of our beliefs would remain true even if we were BIVs[45] – it rests instead on the question of whether any valid reason can ever be advanced in order to commit ourselves to that belief and treat it as justified (cf. Reynolds 2013:265). Underdetermination allows the sceptic to formulate a general attack against rational belief, which is at work throughout the various scenarios traditionally employed to showcase the intuitive pull of scepticism, from the BIV-case, to dreaming, and the failure of transmission template (Wedgwood 1990:51-2)[46].

Therefore, the problem raised by Underdetermination should not be conceived as a problem relating to mere fallibility in having evidence entail what it is supposed to be evidence of. Rather, it is a global ignorance problem concerning the epistemic authority of that which we purport to be the rational or evidential basis for our beliefs: "The problem

isn't that the reasons we have … fail to give us certainty – it isn't that our reasons for belief are good but somehow not good enough. The sceptic's claim is rather that we have, at bottom, no reasons for our choice at all" (Vogel 2004:439).

This shouldn't come as a surprise if we recall that the minor premise in the closure-based argument established a condition of ignorance and that the Underdetermination principle is usually considered to be behind the motivation of that premise. This perspective has been called the *Ignorance View* of the sceptical problem (cf. Kraft 2012, 2013, 2015, Winters 1981, Beebe 2010). To motivate scepticism entirely on the grounds of universal deception would foreseeably make the sceptic endorse contentious epistemic or metaphysical principles, and it wouldn't probably be consistent on logical grounds (Kraft 2013:60). Sceptical scenarios are valuable tools to make the possibility of losing one's ordinary knowledge vivid. However, core features of the problem are fundamentally independent of the particular details of the scenario, whose goal is ultimately to engender global ignorance about the epistemic merit of our beliefs (ibid:66).[47] The infallibility charge is avoided because the problem raised by scepticism does not sever the link between belief and truth but between belief and its rational basis, endangering beliefs in general on the matter of their epistemic value. This is the same problem that has also been raised by Jonathan Schaffer's *Debasing Demon* (2010:231-4). The Debasing demon is nothing more than the realization that, absent positive reasons to the contrary, we do not have the kind of support for our beliefs that we presume to possess.[48] Until scepticism is defeated and the insularity of reasons thesis repealed, we have no non-arbitrary way at our disposal to settle this score in our favour. It seems we are condemned to endorse an unexplained explainer or to simply endorse circular reasoning (Winters 1981:35). Our reasons might be adequate, but in every attempt we undertake to demonstrate the legitimacy and authority of our criteria, faculties, methods, we end up rationally committed to suspending judgment. The principle of Underdetermination is not asking us to prove that what we consider valuable epistemic evidence that here is a red table infallibly entails 'here is a red table'. It is asking us instead to provide justificatory and not merely exculpatory support that what we treat as the rational basis or the criteria for our beliefs is so without making any arbitrary appeals to hypotheses or principles out of the space of available reasons.[49] It is a problem about what constitutes beliefs as something that can

be evaluated as true or false in the first place (cf. Boult 2013:1132-3), not the narrower problem that evidence might sometimes fail to entail what it is supposed to be evidence of. [50]

However, this line of reasoning has opened the underdetermination principle to a second charge which is usually considered effective against scepticism, namely that it requires an endorsement of the dreaded KK-thesis, which is considered highly problematic.[51] While some internalists actively endorse it,[52] it seems to impose an implausible and unreasonable requirement on everyday knowledge claims. Apart from the risk of triggering an upwards regress of ever infinite complexity, it seems to contradict the immediate, non-inferential formation of beliefs we ordinarily experience. In addition, it has also suffered the attack of Williamson's Anti-Luminosity thesis (2000:91), which targets the very possibility of having infallible access to one's own mental states at any given time. While none of these arguments might be decisive, endorsing the KK-thesis does not seem a choice to be met with too much enthusiasm.

Does scepticism about rational belief endorse it? This seems to be the verdict of many, who view it as the main fault of all the three characterizations we've given here, namely Underdetermination (Vogel 2004:436), the Ignorance-view (Murphy 2013:277), and the Debasing Demon (Brueckner 2011b:297). The underlying idea of these attempts is that by requiring an answer to what constitutes the legitimacy and authority of the basis we ground our beliefs on, the implicit constraint on knowledge becomes that in order to know, one must know that she knows. This is also shown by outlining the implication in the other direction. If one knows H, then one is at least in the position to know that she knows H (Schaffer 2010:234).

Some have attempted to show that the KK-thesis is not that implausible (Kraft 2015:284-5). Additionally, if one is trying to defend the plausibility of scepticism, maybe even the untenability of the KK-thesis might be of help. Ordinarily, the KK-thesis is branded as a weapon of choice against classical internalists who are at times considered to implicitly endorse it to show that the only sensible option is externalism. However, if one is a sceptic, the very fact that the KK-thesis is problematic might come to the sceptic's advantage. She could endorse the anti-luminosity thesis – which is, after all, a pretty

sceptical conclusion, as it hinders reflective access to one's own mental states[53] – and argue at the same time that that access is precisely what one would have needed in order to conclusively ascertain that our beliefs enjoy genuine non-insular rational support. How can we try to substantiate this idea?

If you were to ask a friend whether she knows a relatively mundane fact, she'd arguably reply to you that she does. However, when you ask her, 'but how do you know that you know that?" what you will probably elicit will be a blank stare, as the question appears pointless. However, this is where it can be shown that the problem raised by Underdetermination is not at all the same thing as generating an upwards complexity regress as in the KK-thesis. If you explain yourself to her that you're asking if she can defend the credentials of what she knows, in the sense of explaining why she possesses that particular belief, the question ceases to be puzzling.[54] It might have perfectly mundane answers in ordinary contexts, such as "I've seen it", "I've read it in a journal", etc. However, notice a crucial thing. Your interlocutor is not giving these answers as general theses or criteria for how her beliefs are adequately based and possess epistemic merit. She is just reporting to you why she got that belief or better, individuating what constitutes her reasons and discharging her commitments to something you'd both agree is a suitable reason for that belief (Leite 2004b:226, cf. Brandom 1994:197). If you were to press on such questions, your interlocutor might indeed find this odd or even irritating, but she would arguably try to provide some reasons until she reaches something that she considers final.

This sequence of moves is nothing else than the Pyrrhonian dialectic we outlined in the first half of this chapter. Does this mean that your everyday interlocutor is asserting a belief in an arbitrary manner? In line with what we said earlier about dialectical foundationalism, this is a matter of circumstances, but one thing should be made clear: the status of asserting a belief or a knowledge claim is something that depends on the rational activity of the subject. Justification and knowledge are crucially normative endeavours, and the epistemological context specifically is one of self-critical, rational evaluation. Scepticism arises as a deliberation problem when we are engaged in a "reflective reassessment of our unreflectively accepted beliefs" (Marušić 2016:1083).

Once we enter this dimension, and we've given arguments here as to why we'd want to engage with this fundamental problem, claiming knowledge of p while at the same time leaving unanswered the question as to whether we know that p seems arbitrary, and a contradictoriness of sort (ibid:1086). This means that the request to defend the grounds of our beliefs, the criteria which constitute our epistemic standing, cannot be rejected as prima facie implausible.

Even if we suspend for now the question of whether your friend is being arbitrary or whether the iterated challenges must be replied to, this seems a rather different schema than the KK-thesis. It does not issue that if one knows that p, then one knows that she knows that p, but rather it issues that if one knows that p, then one is expected to provide reasons as to why she knows that p. To view this as an establishment of the KK-thesis would be to understand the basing relation between beliefs and reason as merely causal, with what constitutes the epistemic merit of the belief conceived as being established independently of our actual justificatory activity (Leite 2004b:225). But this is crucially mistaken: this very relation between beliefs and their rational basis is a matter of rational deliberation, it is something we do. It amounts to our capacity of articulating reasons in defence of what one believes (ibid:237, 2005:418). To conceive justification otherwise would be to understand it as something that merely *happens*, and we'd be no different than Norman the Clairvoyant. What the sceptic endorses ends up being closer to the KR principle, which we've already argued has become now something we *should* respect if we care for our stance not to be epistemologically arbitrary. If we are ultimately unable to heed it, this would suggest that scepticism is correct, but not that scepticism endorses an implausible thesis. It would establish that scepticism is discovering a paradox about us. For our beliefs and knowledge-claims to be rationally respectable as we would require them to be in epistemology, there are constraints that either we can't seemingly fulfil and that make us jettison the epistemological respectability of any belief we continue entitling ourselves to. If we are unwilling to revise, even radically, the structure of our reasons, it does seem that the only rational alternative available is to suspend judgement because our epistemic circumstances are unsuitable for us to defend our beliefs as we ought to (cf. Leite 2004b:234).[55]

[1] As Williams observes (2001:102), it would involve trading away basic beliefs through reflective correction, but this directly undercuts foundationalism as well. Furthermore, it is not certain that coherentism could avoid the same problems of easy knowledge that neo-Moorean foundationalism generates. Van Cleve (2003:55-7) emits a negative verdict on this score, cf. on this Lammenranta 2011b:212. One of the reasons we won't engage with coherentism in this research is that it is uncertain *how much of an answer* to scepticism it can be. A similar non-question begging answer, *reflective equilibrium*, requires embracing circularity (McCain&Rowley 2014:133-9).

[2] An important observation might be called in at this point. We are not pressing the charge of begging the question against the sceptic as problematic on its own. This is because we are open that there might be forms of begging the question which could be rationally endorsed, such as virtuous varieties of circularity. What we are seeking here is to show that at bottom, any theory of justification must salvage any criteria they select from accusation of arbitrariness. This is because arbitrariness disqualifies the rational standing of a position.

[3] Called by Cling the *defusing* strategy (1994:282). It allows the dogmatist to reject specific steps of the sceptical argument. However, it is non-question begging only against *other* anti-sceptical positions, and not against scepticism itself. It cannot defuse the question of whether we do indeed have *good* beliefs to start from. The sceptical stance does not beg the question because deep disagreements between dogmatists show that the premises of the argument are sound (ibid:278). For another attempt at arguing that the sceptic begs the question, cf. Amico (1993:113-4, 125-7). For a rebuttal, cf. Marton 1999:67-8.

[4] Among such stances, cf. McDowell 2006, 2011, 2018; Kern 2017; Leite 2012; and Schellenberg 2014. One can read this outcome as bringing out a fundamental tension at the heart of the neo-Moorean position. It tries to do too much – obtaining a direct presentation of the object itself – with too little – using something which is non-doxastic, non-conceptual, and independent of any background reason or belief – while attempting to remain *modest* at the same time.

[5] Notice how when Sextus investigates signs he allows that things which are already clear need no sign themselves, cf. PH II.99; M VIII.141-2. The issue for Sextus is whether there's anything as clear as dogmatists purports it to be, so this doesn't weaken the sceptical stance.

[6] And trivially this won't exempt these positions as well from providing reasons as to why the appealed external evidence is world-involving as they claim. This is a point evidential externalists tend to neglect. We will see a variety of this conduct in chapter seven when dealing with McDowell's answer to the rule-following problem.

[7] This is a point that will arise again in chapter six concerning rule-following scepticism and the idea of 'grasping' a mental item.

[8] For this formulation of the sceptical net cf. Hankinson 1995:191-2; Barnes 1990:117-20; Sienkiewicz 2018:166-8. Notice two important aspects. Sextus himself doesn't include the trope of arbitrariness in the "two modes" formulation, but this seems odd, because that trope is the one appealed to once the trope of *diaphonia* has been raised (cf. Barnes 1990:119). Secondly, this net is usually called the *second* net, because in standard exposition it comes after the net already established by the Agrippan tropes (ibid:114-6; Sienkiewicz 2018:157-162; PH I.170-77). It is this second net which leads to the problem of the Criterion.

[9] Cf. Sosa (1980:558-9) who understood the proposed answers of particularism and methodism to be meta-epistemological themselves.

[10] Cf. PH II.23-32, 38, 57-9, 107-8; III.30; M VII.46-230; VIII.63-68, 87-92. Cf. Barnes 1990:30.

[11] See for instance Walker's idea of the *many Moorean proofs* that could be run by subjects in different metaphysical situations, all undergoing identical seeming-experiences which lead to wildly dissimilar conclusions (2020:2167-68).

[12] This doesn't mean that the sceptic *could not* become part of the dispute. Only that she *need* not figure in the dispute herself. The two cases should not be conceived as normatively different (Lammenranta 2011b:207). Sienkiewicz suggests viewing the sceptic as either a *chronicler* and a *creator* of disagreements (2018:48-50). One is a creator when she knows of no undecided dispute about the proposed criterion, managing to create one via the equipollence method.

[13] Cf. Lammenranta 2011b:207; Sienkiewicz 2018:42.

[14] See Lammenranta 2013:50. This is a recurring theme in Sextus' development of the criterion, cf. PH II.9, 33-5 60-9; M VIII.66, 180, 285-6, 352-58.

[15] However, this doesn't mean, as Barnes argues (1990:116), that *diaphonia* is *merely* a psychological aid. If no disagreement can be meaningfully raised, then the risk is that scepticism becomes something idle. Cf. Machuca 2015:26. See Bueno 2013 for a defence of the idea that disagreement by itself is capable of generating *epoché*.

[16] For the application of this strategy to the criterion of apprehension, cf. PH II.76-8. See on truth II.85, 88-89, 91-93; M VIII.15-31.

[17] Cf. Sienkiewicz 2018:21 "in suspending judgment over whether there is a standard of truth the sceptic is claiming ... that given the evidence and the arguments he has so far considered; he is neither in a position to judge that there is a standard of truth nor in a position to judge that there is no such thing".

[18] Cf. Barnes 1990:19; Bueno 2013:26; Machuca 2015:25.

[19] Cf. on these passages Lammenranta 2008:29-30; 2011b:205-6. Sienkiewicz (2018:44-6) suggests to view the suspension of judgment as occurring as a rational, but non-psychological affair in a pre-sceptical phase, while the mature sceptic can endorse suspension merely on psychological, habitual grounds. Machuca (2009:122; 2015:27) argues that for the Pyrrhonist, the modes have only psychological effect. Given that we're more interested here in viewing how the dogmatist is committed to *epoché*, the rational account fits our purposes better, and seems compatible with the Pyrrhonist viewing compulsion to *epoché* only as psychological. Machuca (2015:29, 36) seems to agree on this.

[20] Cf. McCain&Rowley 2014:127, and Marton 1999:64. Amico (1993:37) argues that there are a few things which we cannot conclusively prove but we use them nevertheless, such as deductive logic. However, this doesn't mean the sceptic is mistaken.

[21] The only alternative would be to endorse a purely externalist conception of knowledge. However, it is unclear whether such a position could escape the problem of the criterion and its association with the Agrippan modes, cf. Lammenranta 2003 on the topic of reliabilism and Pyrrhonian circularity, and his 2011b:209-11 on reliabilism and Pyrrhonian *diaphonia*. Vogel's *bootstrapping* objection (2000, 2008) is the externalist doppelgänger of the problem of easy knowledge from which we initiated our journey towards the problem of the criterion. See also Cling 2009:334-5 on the idea that the requirement for our beliefs to be based on an adequate rational ground need not consist of the requirement that supporting reasons be *believed* to be adequate.

[22] The choice is not casual; we have been talking about internalist proposals thus far, but Norman's case targets *externalists* theories. The point we are implying is that externalism encounters the same issue, and has no easy way out.

[23] This is related to the idea that doxastic justification enjoys conceptual priority (Melis 2018:370-5). The proposal that the traditional explanatory structure of justification is actually inverted can be found in Turri 2010.

[24] As Cling notices (2009:340) the only alternative might be to reject that an infinite regress is vicious. This is what Peter Klein (1999) defends as *infinitism*. As with coherentism, one might again question how much of an answer to scepticism it provides.

[25] The KR requirement should be read as a consequence of the meta-epistemological demand of the problem of the criterion: to know what institutes our knowledge. It is in all respects what Marušić calls the *normative principle* about knowledge (2013:1980). The meta-

epistemological aspect of the problem of the criterion is a special case of the general problem of the criterion about distinguishing truths from falsehoods (cf. Cling 2014:162).

[26] Edward Craig argues that knowledge is no given phenomenon "but something we delineate by operating with a concept which we create in answer to certain needs, or in pursuit of certain ideas" (1990:3). This means that the main function of knowledge is to identify good reliable informants (ibid:91). This requires offering a genealogical recollection that outlines how the concept of knowledge we possess was developed (Hannon 2020:39). This is also, not incidentally, the idea developed in Hegel's *Phenomenology*, cf. in particular the closing sections of *Absolute Knowing* (1806:§§788-9, 791,796-8, 802-4, 808). See also Lammenranta (2013:61-2) on what he calls the *dialectical conception of justification*. We'll come back to this in the last chapter.

[27] The problem at hand is that the ideal rational authority and autonomy we presume to be entitled to might be a myth. Scepticism is the therapy we must go through in order to change our perspective on what constitutes good reasons for our epistemic standing. Otherwise we remain attached to an ideal of knowledge and of us as epistemic agents we'll never be able to fulfil and discharge, cf. Cling 2014:170.

[28] For Sienkiewicz this suffices to show that disagreement is enough to establish suspension of judgment, but in that case, it would still be puzzling why in the disagreement we cannot establish our reasons adequately.

[29] Sosa's own attempt embraces circularity to some degree (1997:238-40; 2009:239-243), by blending elements of foundationalism and coherentism by relying on the *scientia/cognitio* distinction, rebranded as animal and reflective knowledge. Sosa's virtue epistemology has been at times received to be close to Pyrrhonism: "even the deepest employment of reason as we know it will not enable increase of knowledge or aptness of belief" (Sosa 1991:214) See Lammenranta 2003:326 and Bueno 2009:201 for Pyrrhonian readings of Sosa. Marušić (2013:1998) suggests that in general externalism is compatible with suspension of judgment. This is an idea that we find also in Fogelin (1994:92) and Wittgenstein (OC:§505). Externalism embodies the essentially sceptical idea idea that it is only by grace of nature that we're not defeated by how things are. See also Craig 1990:130-3.

[30] And this gap will be instituted not by the sceptic, but by the dogmatist herself.

[31] This is, in brief, the *two-stage* representationalist story generated by Cartesian foundationalism Robert Brandom identifies (2019:40-2). Brandom essentially targets the same problem we are engaging with here (ibid:48). To postulate a gulf of intelligibility between what is represented and what does the representings, raises a question about how to understand the relation itself either as immediately or only derivatively intelligible. The latter will simply generate the sceptical ladder, the former can't be addressed by theories which hold the basic, non-inferential element of knowledge as non-doxastic.

[32] The two concepts concerning scepticism are borrowed from Marušić 2010, who however keeps them separate. Our idea here is that scepticism can become idle, a nuisance, because of its endorsement of excessive requirements such as defending every assertion against any challenge, no matter how inane. That excessiveness on this score undercuts scepticism's own rationale is also what is behind Brueckner's idea of *Scepticism on the cheap*, which we have been trying to carefully steer away from.

[33] Cf. also Leite 2004b:233 on this score, albeit he connects commitments to the institution of *basing relations*.

[34] As it should be clear from this presentation, authority and responsibilities of performances are a matter of a *socially articulated practice*, where commitments are shared between speakers and entitlements inherited as a matter of authority, of licensing others to endorse and discharge a particular claim (Brandom 1994:174-5). This is an instance of *deontic scorekeeping*, where participants in the practice keep track of what can be attributed or denied to other participants.

[35] Crispin Wright's notion of entitlement ties this constitution to the nature of the cognitive project we are engaged in (2004:189-190). This aspect is the one he individuates in Wittgenstein's writings (OC:§§103, 105, 108, 126, 337).

[36] The other is Peter Klein. Otto Neurath is considered a dialectical egalitarian, together with Pyrrhonists (Rescorla 2009b:46, 51).

[37] Leite recognizes this problem (2004b:240) by stating that the position would require a specification of what counts as an adequate reason.

[38] The difference between the two lies in the fact that Aristotle accepts *axioms* as perfectly valid, and Sextus doesn't (Klein 2011:89).

[39] The principle could also be motivated by appealing to Brandom's distinction between relations of material incompatibility and consequence expressed either as normative deontic statues, or as alethic modal relations (2019:53-61). In both cases, we ought not endorse a belief if we fail to treat its negation as factually implicated by the belief.

[40] This might advert to an internalist presupposition in this issue. But the point we are making is different, the issue concerns rational bases as available for a belief in general. There are no requirements of internal access; the problem targets the possibility of beliefs ever attaining *doxastic* justification, which is what externalists themselves seek (cf. Goldman 1979, Kornblith 2017). See Pritchard 2015:33-6 for a discussion of how externalists might be led by underdetermination to sever the link between knowledge and rational support. The risk is to jettison entirely the idea of beliefs being held for a reason (Leite 2004b:227). Externalist processes are instead intelligible as justification-conferring only within an already established practice where they can be cited and function as reasons for the belief (cf. Brandom 1994:220; 1998:378-381). On the incapability of reliabilism to solve Underdetermination-based scepticism, cf. also Yalcin 1992:16. The idea that a belief's rational status might not be at all connected to the normativity activity of a subject – what Leite calls the *Spectatorial Conception*, and which is the ultimately problematic idea behind such proposal, as it makes justification and knowledge something that *just happens* – is something that finds endorsement by internalists and externalists alike, cf. Leite 2004b:222-3.

[41] As Yalcin notices (1992:4), Descartes' dreaming argument is ultimately a problem of underdetermination. This supports those interpretations of Descartes that hold him as dealing with scepticism while having the Pyrrhonian problematic in clear view (Sosa 2009:150).

[42] This establishes that even neo-Moorean positions, in providing reasons as to why seemings are world-involving go already well beyond the simple seemings themselves (Schiffer 2004:174-6).

[43] Given that infallibilism has experienced a kind of renaissance in the past twenty years, maybe this objection isn't as problematic as it once was. For this research however we want to keep the intelligibility and value of scepticism as independent from such requirements.

[44] See Johnsen (2009:680) for a similar take, which is however recognized by himself as insufficient to capture the full extent of the sceptical problem (ibid:689). For a different argument in defence of underdetermination, cf. Briesen 2010:231-2, which however still endorses a broadly error-based template.

[45] Cf. on this Murphy 2013:274, Beebe 2010:453.

[46] Wedgwood registers this attack on rational belief in Aristotle (1975:72b5-73a20), Stroud (1984:20-3), and Wright (1985:431-4). The same idea motivates Fogelin's stance (1994:192-203). A recent defence on scepticism about rational belief is in Hannon 2021 who appeals to the psychological literature on cognitive biases.

[47] While prominent defenders of the ignorance account reject both closure and underdetermination principles as the actual sources of scepticism (Murphy 2013:278; Kraft 2013:67, 2015:282) this is because they employ the formulations of underdetermination as establishing a problem about alternative scenarios. However, if we see the issue through the lenses of arbitrariness and the criterion, this rejection ceases to be cogent.

[48] Cf. Cunningham 2019 for an analysis of the Debasing demon which relies explicitly on Underdetermination. Leite (2004b:233) imagines a similar case where albeit we have available what would otherwise be good reasons, we fail to appreciate them as good reasons. To claim that specific reasons are valid reasons for belief, they must be appreciated as such. This suggests that to talk of merely *propositional* reasons is an epistemically empty category.

[49] For a cognate defence of underdetermination vis-a-vis the infallibilist charge, cf. Kraft 2012:63-5.

[50] Additionally, the idea Brueckner relies on to identify underdetermination as establishing an infallibilist requirement can be contested. Jessica Brown (2018:28-9) argues that the problem of evidence failing to entail what it's supposed to be evidence of is only an infallibilist proviso when conjoined with the requirement that evidence be *factive*, i.e. that there cannot be *false* evidence.

[51] The KK-principle is assigned already to Cartesian doubt by viewing knowledge as requiring knowledge of everything that is incompatible with it (cf. Williams 1978:70, Stroud 1984:27-9, Marušić 2013:1978-9; 2016:1084-5), and its mere presence is at times considered a definitive objection against Cartesian scepticism (cf. Hawthorne 2004:32).

[52] Cf. Smithies 2019:229.

[53] While Williamson does not register his argument as being sceptical, some have noticed this characteristic, cf. Wong 2008, and Meeker&Poston 2010:227-30 who find the same argument in Hume (1978:180-1). Dodd 2007 defends the reading that Williamson's overall position is genuinely sceptical. For a reply cf. Littlejohn 2008, who however admits that Knowledge-First has issues in addressing underdetermination. This is arguably because evidential externalism cannot engage the *quid iuris* question that institutes underdetermination.

[54] For further reflections on why the question 'how do you know that you know?' is not illicit even in ordinary contexts, cf. Marušić (2013:1995). Notice how this perspective will disqualify as meaningful answers to scepticism those externalist non-evidential positions that require no actual evidence or reason to be available in principle to the subject for her to have knowledge. Jack Lyons (2009) defend a proper functionalist account in this direction. The most important externalist perspective on this is defended by Alvin Goldman via recourse to the problem of *forgotten evidence* (1999:280). This stance, raised as an objection against internalism, argues that knowledge can be had even if no reasons can be adduced for one's belief. This conception however might be mere knowledge for machines, not human knowledge.

[55] The way we're understanding the KR principle might make it look like what Marušić called the *Self-Knowledge Rule* (2013:1980): "Necessarily, one should believe P only if one knows that one knows P". Both are normative and not constitutive dimensions of knowledge. However, Marušić also holds that endorsing the Self- Knowledge Rule requires denying the idea that knowledge requires belief, if it is not to entail the KK-thesis. Marušić holds that this is possible because on a third-person view non-accidental true belief is enough for knowledge. Our perspective here has instead focused crucially on first-person knowledge which requires belief. Specifically, on first-person knowledge Marušić appears to be in agreement with what we present here (ibid:1986-7), and he calls scepticism based on suspension of belief "essentially first-personal" (ibid:1997). Maybe the idea that knowledge does not require belief can be countenanced in this research. However, what cannot be negotiated here is the link between knowledge and reasons.

Chapter 6

The Rule-Following Paradox

In the previous chapter, we connected the Problem of the Criterion to the Agrippan Modes, raising the problem of the arbitrariness concerning our chosen criteria and the basis of our beliefs as the central issue to be addressed. To generalise the problem and avoid dependence on mere experientialist positions, we traced the issue to a specific epistemic principle, Underdetermination, which motivates the minor premise of the closure-based sceptical argument. In defending the principle, we also achieved a distinctive perspective on sceptical doubts: scepticism does not rely on mere possibilities of error, uneliminated defeaters, or implausible but logically possible alternatives. Scepticism establishes a question about the epistemic merit enjoyed by our beliefs, and about the possibility for us to claim that our judgments are world-involving in a non-arbitrary manner. This makes manifest that scepticism shouldn't be conceived as a kind of very obstinate opponent who refuses to grant us access to how things are, or that simply begs the question by ruling out from the start as inadequate any proposed basis for our beliefs. Scepticism establishes a genuine philosophical question about what allows our beliefs about the world to be epistemologically valid. However, this also suggests that epistemological doubt ultimately derives from a deeper problem concerning the semantics we implicitly endorse in our epistemology. Throughout this research, we've been essentially engaged in a backwards journey, from the more vivid Cartesian scenarios to what is covertly at work behind them. In this chapter, we ultimately transition to this constitutive question by investigating a troublesome sceptical paradox that expresses specifically the source of our worries about epistemic authority and its underlying semantics, the rule-following paradox.

6.1 A Semantic Problem

Before moving immediately to the rule-following paradox, we must establish the last step from ordinary epistemological doubt to normative scepticism. To accomplish this, we take up again a perspective we briefly introduced concerning the underdetermination principle, namely Michael Williams' diagnosis that scepticism presupposes *Epistemological Realism* and that philosophical doubt is not a mere by-product of our

ordinary epistemic practices. We should have already highlighted how Williams' verdict is not entirely accurate, given that underdetermination arises from a quite mundane principle, the Rational Ground Principle, which any epistemological account would want to endorse to be consistent. We also don't plan to reject Williams' charge of *Epistemological Realism*. This particular aspect of Williams' stance is one the sceptic could endorse, as it is essentially a kind of theoretical scepticism about the general 'object of knowledge' that the classic epistemological enterprise aims at capturing (1988b:422; 1996:113). Williams is, in fact, 'sceptical about knowledge, but does not deny that we know lots of things' (Brandom 2000:176).[1] However, he also views sceptical questioning intended as something that has to be answered and not merely dissolved as arising from two components, the *neutrality* of evidence and the Myth of the Given, which are *sceptical assumptions*.

The concept of neutrality of evidence is precisely the issue established by underdetermination.[2] Our experience, or the reasons for our beliefs, do not seem thus far to disclose their own justificatory purport. Neutrality of evidence is nothing more than a particular expression of the general insularity of reasons our beliefs suffer from. However, Williams is willing to admit this neutrality while denying that it can generate scepticism on its own. He finds that scepticism is only made plausible when one additionally endorses the relation of epistemic priority between experience and reality that we mentioned when generalising from the problem of arbitrariness to underdetermination. Evidence neutrality doesn't establish an epistemological point, even less a sceptical one (1996:77-8 2001:189). It is only when we conjoin this aspect, as the sceptic does, with the ideas that for Williams constitute the Myth of the Given that scepticism can establish its grip on us. For Williams, the Myth of the Given is constituted by the idea that experience is non-propositional, a fundamentally atomistic affair (ibid:102, 222), the assimilation of "thought to mere sensation" (ibid:198). Scepticism not only endorses such priority relations but "argues for them" (1996:57). Once we free ourselves of this sceptical assumption, the mere acknowledgement that our evidence or reasons cannot disclose their epistemic merit shouldn't be enough to engender radical scepticism.

One could try to contest Williams' theoretical diagnosis. For example, it can be doubted whether the commitment to basic beliefs is necessary for scepticism to arise (Vogel 1997:12), or if the supposed reliance on epistemic priority makes scepticism itself a circular position (ibid:14). As others have also tried (Ribeiro 2002:577), we could argue that epistemic priority is itself intuitive on Williams' contextualist construal, which would vindicate Barry Stroud's original contention that scepticism is embedded within our epistemic practices, a contention that Williams was explicitly trying to resist (Williams 1996:40). This is not the route we'll be taking. For it appears instead that Williams is reading the whole sceptical dialectic upside-down, specifically on reading as presuppositions what are in fact *conclusions* of scepticism. We can see this better if we unearth a bit more of the idea of the Myth of the Given in Sellars' writings.

The central expression of the Myth of the Given for Sellars resides in the specific *semantics* we endorse to individuate the ultimate 'court of appeal' in our engagement with reality. The idea is that there must be some fact that is known non-inferentially, requiring no other belief or knowledge to be known, and whose authority is capable of supporting our claims about the world (1956:§32). Even when we are simply making a *Konstatierung*, a report that things are thus-and-so, what constitutes them as genuine beliefs is conceived by us to be their being merely correct report-tokens, and this itself is sufficient for us to have knowledge based on them (ibid:§33, Brandom 1997a:155). Sellars is not contesting the non-inferential character of most of our ordinary knowledge, nor that in our ordinary experiential parlance, we reserve a substantial role for observational reports as fundamental and as reporting *facts*. The problem is the associated semantic idea that this given element is completely *self-standing*, its authority deriving allegedly from nothing else than itself for an experiential report to be *credible*. This is where the real problem lies. This claimed authority is entirely arbitrary. It can, at most, express one's conviction but cannot function as a genuine justificatory basis for our beliefs. Its intrinsic credibility is made unexplainable, a mystery, if we conceive of our observational reports as requiring nothing else than the Given material they purport to tell something about. The Myth of the Given is constituted by the envisioned self-authenticating character of non-verbal observational reports,[3] mere awareness that something is already the case, a fact with a specific if bare, content (1956:§34).

This characterisation should sound familiar; it is the same idea behind the basic, world-involving knowledge or justification we have been analysing and attacking in the previous two chapters. The Given becomes a Myth when we realise that we cannot vindicate our commitment to the epistemic merit and authority we unreflectively assign it. Every attempt we undertake to redeem the warrant we claim to obtain from such self-authenticating reports ends up being an arbitrary assertion.

Sellars' later lectures, *The Structure of Knowledge*, can help us clarify that the Given is what we identified as completely insufficient to resolve the Pyrrhonian problematic. Sellars acknowledges the traditional idea that the very possibility of inferential judgments requires the existence of a non-inferential stratum of self-certifying beliefs, which are held as capable of transmitting their epistemic authority to the higher-level of inferential beliefs (1975:336). This is authority in terms of the reasons they can provide for the inferential beliefs, their acting as a *rational* basis for those beliefs. However, reasons are, in ordinary parlance, a variety of inference. They figure in the premises of implicit inferential structures to support a conclusion. "Non-inferential reasonableness seems to be a *contradiction in adjecto*" (ibid:337), at least on an unreflective conception, because a reason needs to be possessed, understood as such. The epistemological way of circumventing this issue is the one rehearsed above, something belonging to our experience of the world which is self-grounding and self-authenticating, that can be used as a basis for further beliefs without requiring antecedent reflection. A non-doxastic level, "unmediated by concepts … the very *source* of concepts in some such way as described by traditional theories of abstraction. It would be 'direct apprehension' of facts; their 'direct presence' to the mind" (ibid:338).

This description fits the bill of the dogmatist position we took as our primary opponent here, and it explains why we did so; it does strike as a natural position to endorse, especially in independence from epistemological questions or requirements. However, what is Sellars' verdict as to why this Given is merely a Myth? Perhaps unsurprisingly, Sellars' answer is strikingly similar, almost identical with the charge of arbitrariness we levied against dogmatism in the previous chapter:

> I suspect that the notion of a non-conceptual 'direct apprehension' of a 'fact' provides a merely verbal solution to our problem. The regress is stopped by an *ad hoc* regress-stopper. Indeed, the very metaphors which promised the sought-for foundation contain within themselves a dialectical moment which takes us beyond them (ibid:339).

By offering a privileged basis as providing an alleged ultimate, self-authenticating authority that cannot be explained itself in reference to other beliefs or concepts, the proposed stopping point becomes merely arbitrary. For Sellars, the Given not only is fundamentally arbitrary, an exculpation which offers no justification, but it also commits the sin of conflating the epistemological element of an evidential basis with its ontological conception (1981:28, 33), treating the seeming, or sense-impression as directly giving us *the fact itself*, the actual existent object in the external world.

This mistake carries over into our conceptual parlance as well. Sellars' sections in *Empiricism* about the looks/is distinction are a clear example of how we import this idea of the Given in how we treat and understand our experiential reports. We find the core dimension of *givenness* in those statements of the form "X looks red to S at time t" (1956:§10), which are held ultimate and irreducible in allowing one to make the entailment from that looks-statement to the corresponding *is*-statement (§11), as we saw in chapter four. However, this is a mistake; Sellars argues that this relationship of logical priority is inverted. The example of John, the necktie salesman,[4] shows that notwithstanding the similarity between saying that something "looks red" and that S sees something red, the latter one is not merely a report of that experience but an endorsement (§16, Brandom 1997a:140). The looks-report instead has an already more complex use, as by saying "X looks red to me", I am withdrawing the endorsement that it *is* red[5] because I might have reasons not to commit myself to the conclusion that X is indeed red. While saying that "X is red" can be used as evidence for the corresponding proposition that 'I'm seeing X is red', the same thing does not carry over to the corresponding looks-report. By saying "X looks red" I'm not actually committing myself to endorse that X is red, only that there is an X (Sellars 1956:§§17-8).

This suggests two crucial considerations: looks-report are already embedded within a conceptual use of something *being* the case, and not the other way around as the neo-Moorean, or in general, the experientialist would have led us to believe.[6] It is a matter of

standard conditions, of circumstances that define when something looks the way it *is*. Secondly, there is no intelligibility of looks-tokens before grasping the corresponding concept (Brandom 1997a:137). We are led to believe that we can ground our knowledge-claims on how things appear to us and that such appearances are sufficient to grant us prima facie defeasible knowledge of factual matters. This is crucially mistaken; claims about how things looks are fundamentally empty because incorrigible (ibid:143). One can meaningfully employ looks-statement in an ordinary setting only as derivative from the employment of is-talk, which in itself is something we acquire only within a linguistic, conceptual, habitual sphere (Sellars 1956:§19). To utter "X is red", one must know that the required circumstances apply, but then there is no fundamental, atomistic dimension of sensorial seemings or data to which we can reduce everything. We merely tried to smuggle in as non-contentious something that instead crucially relies on something that goes much more beyond itself. That this is something that appears to ourselves as natural is nothing more than the revealing trait of our endorsement of a semantic whose consequence cannot but be sceptical, the semantics where something is conceived as immediately intelligible one side and is employed to reach something not immediately intelligible on the other (cf. Brandom 2019:44-8),

All of this has the consequence for Williams' diagnosis that the Myth of the Given is not a semantic assumption made by the sceptic. It belongs pervasively to our ordinary conception of empirical knowledge and of how we treat experiences independently from philosophical reflection.[7] It is the semantics of our ordinary stance. The mistake made on this score by many is to conflate the ordinary with the pre-theoretical. Our ordinary lives are already imbued with norms and concepts we unreflectively endorse and commit ourselves to. This result shouldn't come as a surprise: the same position we found guilty of endorsing a dogmatic conception of basic constituents of knowledge had among its selling points precisely its purported closeness to our everyday understanding of the world. Now, it *is* true that scepticism *exploits* this Given, and this is noticed by Sellars when he considers the problem of the inverted spectrum, and the fact that the issue the sceptic expresses through it requires an answer based on the Myth of the Given (1956:§26). However, this is not the same as viewing the sceptic as requiring such endorsement from *her* side. If it makes sense to view scepticism as expressing a

reflective, self-critical side of philosophy, then the fault lies with the common-sense epistemologist, the naïve realist, who upon the discovery of the inverted spectrum problem, cannot accept an answer that goes against the idea that the basic experiential sensings be not only immediate and non-inferential, but self-authenticating and authoritative for everyone.

What about evidence neutrality? Williams contends that neutrality was another assumption of the sceptic, but it required no answer on its own. However, here we see the point where Williams pivoted the entire dialectic on its head. Neutrality of evidence, or insularity of reasons, is the *result* of the sceptical problem from underdetermination. When we realise that we cannot assign epistemic merit on our beliefs nor their purported rational basis, we retreat from assigning such endowment, and those reasons together with the associated evidence become epistemically neutral or empty. It is telling that Sellars' conception of what constitutes knowledge when it has been established that the idea of the Given is a myth essentially endorses the same underdetermination-motivated requirement we identified at the end of the previous chapter and which superficially resembled the KK-thesis. For an experiential report to be valid as an actual instance of knowledge, the authority it must possess must "*in some sense* be recognised by the person whose report it is". This can only happen if the person uttering such reports possesses a conceptual grasp of those standard conditions by which the token-report can be recognised as possessing epistemic authority (1956:§35, cf. 1975:324-5). This establishes the requirement that to properly utter a knowledge-claim, one must also be in possession of reasons that are capable of guaranteeing, at least fallibly, that knowledge-claim. Knowing that p would then become "[having] reasons good enough to support a guarantee that-p" (ibid:333). However, this is nothing less than the requirement that contending with underdetermination scepticism made visible to us: knowing that p entails an expectation of possessing reasons supporting that commitment. As long as we endorse an epistemological semantics modelled along the lines of the Given, we will fail in this task.

Therefore, Williams is mistaken in viewing the sceptical problem as a matter of an illicit endorsement by the sceptic of the Myth of the Given, together with a neutral character of

evidence conceived as unproblematic on its own.[8] Instead, the issue has the following trajectory: we recognise that our ordinary, 'givenist' epistemic reasons and our treating them as intrinsically authoritative lead us to the arbitrariness problem made vivid by the Agrippan modes and the associated underdetermination principle. Once we realise this, we suspend judgment on the epistemic merit of those reasons, and we must take up the task of substituting the semantics we endorsed with a different perspective. Sellars' attempt involves establishing the conceptual, normative aspect of experience as something that is to be played out in the space of reasons of "justifying and being able to justify what one says (1956:§36). No individual knowledge claim can express proper observational knowledge for the subject unless it is also possible to recognise the subject as knowing that the appropriate conditions for uttering that knowledge-claim obtain as well (ibid:§37).

Once the normative and conceptual element already in play at the observational level is taken in stride, for Sellars it becomes misplaced to hear from the sceptic whether we have any right to know that things are such-and-such, and certain criteria obtain (1975:344). To properly utter a knowledge-claim, we must already be in the normative space that allows specific faculties and their employment in specific circumstances, as possessing the required epistemic authority (ibid:345). Scepticism averted then? Again, not quite. This is undoubtedly the right track to solve scepticism *as a problem*, but simply stating that we need to adopt a different semantics for our empirical lives won't put us out of the woods yet. While Sellars seems to gesture towards a kind of transcendental argument for establishing the authority of our principles and criteria,[9] there is a sceptical threat that, instead of targeting the observational level, directly attacks the very objectivity and authority of our norms and concepts that whose use we would entitle ourselves to in the space of reasons. This is the rule-following paradox as identified by Saul Kripke in Ludwig Wittgenstein's later writings.

6.2. Normative Underdetermination in Wittgenstein

Wittgenstein's rule-following considerations are usually held to begin around paragraph 138 of the *Philosophical Investigations*, but his concerns with norms, concepts,

and how language relates us to our world constitute a general concern of his whole work. Some stage setting is called for.

Wittgenstein views linguistic norms and meaning as inseparable from the activities wherein our words have significance (PI:§7-10). Within these activities, however, several questions about the determination of meaning and norms arise. For example, whether there is any strongly intellectual requirement, such as having a determinate picture before our mind, understanding what something means, or what constitutes the correct usage of signs and definitions (§20-3).[10] This question of determination pertains to our everyday experiences in general (§80). Wittgenstein notices that our engagement with objects doesn't lay down for us a complete set of norms we ought to follow in every possible circumstance. If we understand rules as signposts, giving a clear indication for some specific use, Wittgenstein asks where the specificity they suggest comes from (§83-5). Requiring further rules would set off a regress. Additionally, it seems that everything appears to us as being in order if rules-as-signposts are followed in close connection to their *purpose*. However, what constitutes this purpose is a local matter concerning the specific language game played; hence we cannot identify a single 'ideal of exactness' to determine how we should follow a specific linguistic norm (§§87-88).

From such considerations, Wittgenstein introduces his therapeutic methodology, the grammatical[11] inquiry directed towards the *possibilities* of linguistic and normative phenomena (§90). Notwithstanding the tendency of reading Wittgenstein as entirely uninterested in any philosophical enterprise, there is a genuine philosophical idea behind his approach: to ascertain whether our search for determinate specifications of words and norms uncovers merely a myth, the effect of some picture holding us captive. If this is the case, we might be looking for something that ultimately isn't there. The only way to avoid this biased perspective is to divest our approach from implicit theoretical endorsements and go back to the *rough ground* of everyday use (§§107; 115-6). This supposedly gives us the external constraint, the friction that allows us to make sense of what we do, but we won't achieve it if our goal is to uncover some kind of basic fact, cognitive or otherwise, that is ideally able to carry all the normative weight of our practices on its shoulders, as Sellars' attack on the Given also established. Wittgenstein here investigates the realist

picture of norms and meaning – also called *Platonist*[12] – that theoretical accounts attach to our normative agency. He also observes that no transparent determination of normative agency seems available: how we follow a sign or a rule might be just *one way among many*. Thus, the grammatical inquiry investigates whether such a picture is essential and what would follow its absence.

The phenomenon of *understanding* becomes a prime object of this inquiry; it is an everyday normative occurrence and epitomises the idea of linguistic activity having determinate content and development. When we understand something, it becomes immediately manifest to us what to do next, as if we grasped a hitherto incomplete mental picture that now is capable of guiding us in every future iteration of the specific normative activity (§§138-9). However, while Wittgenstein does not deny this ordinary feeling (Fogelin 1976:144), he observes that it amounts at most to a psychological compulsion, falling short of the *logical* necessity we presume to identify when we claim to understand a particular normative process. This presumption is not merely a philosophical artefact; it appears to be implicated in our discerning correct from incorrect normative behaviour. Without such necessity of understanding a particular sign or norm in the way we feel compelled to understand it, the rule would lack its felt authority.

Why is this feeling merely psychological? In the first part of the *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, Wittgenstein comments that the question revolves around identifying the normative criterion to understand a sign or formula. However, even if we already possessed it, how would this influence how we actually follow it? (RFM I:§§2-3) The feeling that no doubt is present when we understand or master a specific norm makes explicit our adherence to a certain picture our understanding of the rule has to agree with, but it is very abstract and rigid (ibid:§8). If we feel inclined to endorse this idea because it provides a good explanation of our subjective phenomenology of understanding, we already employ a particular conception of how things are. For Wittgenstein, this is merely the endorsement of a dogmatic position, which would make its attached elucidation something trivial at best (PI:§§131, 134). If we believe that no application of a rule or understanding of a sign is possible except the one does occur to us, we are neglecting the possibility that “somebody may reply like a rational person and yet not be playing our

game" (RFM I:§115). Appealing to the 'assertiveness' or 'phenomenal force' of the mental image as in the Platonist model fails to bear the weight of understanding norms as a determinate process whose application is valid for every circumstance (PI:§142, Goldfarb 1992:109). It also fails to discover the logical necessity that would halt the need for further rules (McNally 2017:60). Wittgenstein's considerations leave us with the result that although what we were seeking for was the source logical compulsion capable of grounding the perceived authority of our normative claims, all we're left with is a psychological compulsion. We have a feeling that we follow rules in a particular natural way, something that suggests itself as if it were not possible to do things otherwise. As to why this must be so, we are silent (RFM I:§118; PI:§191).

An intuitive rejoinder against these considerations originates from the fact that such issues do not arise in our ordinary endeavours, and we seem to follow a rule competently just from how it is being made manifest to us. We can derive what to do in most circumstances, and this is an occurrence Wittgenstein acknowledges.[13] However, the problem for Wittgenstein is that this idea treads on an implicit notion of what constitutes a *normal* case as opposed to those situations where we might be at a loss concerning what to do. It is only in those former cases where the rule appears to us to possess an incontrovertible meaning. (PI:§§141-2). Rules are not stamped with meaning, and our intuitive mental grasp cannot ground a claim to 'anticipate reality' due to how circumstances might develop or whether the criteria for understanding that appeared to us in a flash might cease to be valid (cf. McNally 2017:54, Zalabardo 2003:313-4). The tension between what we believe naturally to belong to a normal case and the possibility that things might go otherwise is at the heart of the *pupil* sections of the *Investigations* (§§143-153).

We find here a problem pertaining to the rule's content and the identification of the circumstances where a specific normative behaviour is to be expected. When does the pupil count as having mastered a specific numerical sequence? When can her application obtain the needed normative authority to be counted as correctly continuing the numerical sequence? The tension is between thinking that "Understanding is itself a state which is the *source* of the correct use" (§146), and the fact that we can easily imagine the pupil as

correctly continuing the sequence with no occurring mental state, disposition, or anything else resembling understanding actually taking place (§152).[14] Appeals to the way we are trained (§§156-9) simply appear to sweep the question of normative authority under the rug. They cannot explain the puzzling situation that notwithstanding the assertiveness we experience when we understand a norm, if we look closer at our normative activity, the compulsion we experienced disappears (§§173-5). It seems the only thing left to identify what is going on is a matter of circumstances. This contrasts with our ordinary understanding of normativity, which views the rule's content as determining its normative domain in every possible circumstance.[15]

When the pupil deviates from the expected continuation of the numerical sequence, our impulse is to simply repeat the initial instruction (§185). This would work if the meaning-determinist conception of rules was indeed capable of establishing in advance every step of the way.[16] But this won't do, as anyone with some teaching experience can easily attest. The mere repetition of the rule cannot exclude the different ways in which its determination can be grasped. This indicates that the naturalness we experience is an illusion concerning its explanatory power as to what one is expected to do. We aim to uncover in analysing the phenomenon of understanding some philosophical superlative that is nowhere to be found (§§191-92; RFM I:§124). We are *seduced* into thinking of normativity as if it were some flawless kind of machinery, and yet we tend to forget that even machines might deviate from their intended purposes (PI:§193).[17]

Wittgenstein's remarks attack our tendency of overextending our immediate normative phenomenology into domains where it is bound to be inadequate, unveiling our implicit commitments to sophisticated and theoretical ideas about meaning (§§195-7). It would be intuitive to recoil from this into the conception that following a rule means interpreting it, as a kind of insight or decision (§186). But this would plainly clash with our experience as normative agents because doubt is not really available in most situations. There is no feeling of being subjected to a choice (§213; RFM IV:§31; VI:30; Lewis 1988:291). At times, however, Wittgenstein does seem to be presenting this as a viable possibility, as a counterpoint to the idea of meaning as use-independent (RFM VI:§8, §24; Wright 1989:182). In judging the mistake made by the pupil in her divergence from our

expectations, we *interpret* the mistake as something systematic. In the *Remarks*, Wittgenstein is quite willing to engage with the interpretative perspective: “the rule does not do work, for whatever happens according to the rule is an interpretation of the rule” (RFM IV:§48) Elsewhere, he appears as defending the possibility of interpretation against the meaning-determinist conception (cf. RFM I:§114; VI:§44; VIII:§39). This is not a completely bizarre stance because, when faced with a superlative Platonist picture that cannot be discovered, interpretation does appear as a possible alternative that answers the need for guidance and justification for our normative agency (Williams 2010:159). An interpretation can offer the support that makes intelligible both our compulsion towards a certain understanding and provides a reason as to why we act accordingly.

Allowing interpretation in the arena of plausible conceptions of rule-following Wittgenstein’s normative considerations ultimately establish their total reach. In the pupil example, we have three main aspects that converge onto a crucial point. The pupil believed to have understood the rule in agreement with what we expected her to do. Secondly, her behaviour up until the point of divergence in the sequence was such that we couldn’t tell that her interpretation differed from what we were expecting. Lastly, when the mistake was recognised, her interpretation of the rule couldn’t be shown as *inconsistent* with the rule, only with the expected interpretation. This is what institutes the proper *underdetermination* aspect of rule-following. The application of the rule cannot attest to the normative authority one is entitling herself to. If we establish the connection between action and rule via interpretation, every act can be made to fit the particular rule (Wright 2007b:448). Postulating inner mental states providing the rule with fully determinate content requires a kind of sideways-on view. Normative underdetermination becomes a *gerrymandering* problem,[18] where everything can be made accord to a particular rule as two of the most famous paragraphs of the later Wittgenstein attest:

> “But if you want to remain in accord with the rule you must go this way” – Not at all, I call *this* ‘accord’ […] However many rules you give me – I give a rule which justifies *my* employment of your rules (RFM I:§113)
>
> After all, whatever I do can, on some interpretation be made compatible with the rule […] every interpretation hands in the air together with what it interprets, and cannot give it any support. Interpretations by themselves do not determine meaning (PI:§198)

This is what is usually considered to be Wittgenstein's rule-following problem: if any course of action, explanation, or interpretation can be made accord with the rule, the very notion of accord and conflict, which constitute the very possibility of intelligible normative agency, breaks down (§201). Ultimately normative underdetermination leaves us with a dilemma. If there is no self-presenting semantic content as the Platonist would have it, appeal to further rules seems called for, but this would immediately open the way for a regress.[19] On the other hand, appeal to regularities to be interpreted won't do either. We are torn between the Scylla of regulism/semantic Platonism and the Charybdis of regularism, which aims at extracting behavioural patterns (Brandom 1994:29, 62).[20] The problem is not merely one of establishing a regress, but rather that no preferred or privileged conception of normativity can account for normative agency.

This situation might already be understood as raising distinctive sceptical concerns on its own. However, Wittgenstein's reflections might fail to constitute a refutation of the Platonist position. In order to see how Platonism might strike back, we have to briefly look at how Wittgenstein continues developing the rule-following paradox as presented thus far, i.e. to present the practice-oriented and social aspects of his understanding of normativity. This will also offer us the possibility to establish a continuous thread between Wittgenstein's conception of normativity, Kripke's solution, and the proposed Hegelian correction in the next chapter.

When Wittgenstein analyses the phenomenon of understanding, he presents the idea that the intelligibility we seek of such processes is tied to a particular grammar, which concerns the possession of an ability and mastering a technique.[21] It expresses the idea of looking at what we *do* when we understand something. Reductionist proposals ignore that the kind of normative evaluation is part of a practice, such as a teacher that identifies the pupil's behaviour as incorrect (Williams 2010:157). Normativity being tied fundamentally to practices also indicates for Wittgenstein that at some point, interpretation – while a legitimate move in certain phases of the activity itself – won't be adequate anymore to correctly follow a rule (PI:§201; RFM VI:§38).[22] We follow a rule unreflectively because it belongs to us, to our specific normative endeavours and activities that define our lives (PI:§190; RFM VI:§29). Only when we abstract from such

immediacy we begin to feel normative agency as 'queer' (PI:§197). By neglecting the connection between practice, agency, and understanding a norm, the Platonist ends up transforming something completely mundane into some mind-boggling fact that requires extraordinary explanation (Finkelstein 2000:68). Even if we had some kind of intellectual intuition or inner voice as the Platonist would have it, there'd still be the question, "how do I know *how* I am to obey it?" (Wright 1989:183).[23]

Normativity can only be understood as intelligible within a technique, a mastery that takes place in our custom (RFM I:§63). In virtue of this, normative agency does not pertain to an individual considered in isolation, as if it were so, then the distinction between properly following a rule and merely thinking of doing so would collapse (PI:§§199-202). Wittgenstein's argument against private language follows these sections, not by mere chance.[24] The example of the diarist (§258) has the goal of showing that if it were up to an isolated individual to identify what count as correct, there wouldn't be any meaningful ascription of genuine rule-following. Even the intelligibility of private sensations presupposes common normative language, a common ground of shared reactions and volitions, shared techniques we can master (§261; Lear 1984:230). Common human behaviour establishes the possibility of rule-following as a dialectical process: "I do it, he does it after me; and I influence him by expressions of agreement, rejection, expectation, encouragement. I Let him go his way, or hold him back; and so on" (PI:§208; cf. RFM VI:§17). Normative practices are what we are initiated in and agree with each other concerning how to proceed (Williams 2010:194). Normativity is possible and made intelligible only *in medias res*, played out in what Wittgenstein calls a *Lebensform* (PI:§241). This is the motley of activities, techniques, customs, and uses we share and are brought up into so that we can possess a horizon of immediate intelligibility that constitutes the bottom, or the background of our language games (cf. OC:§94, §204).[25] The main result of §201 of the *Investigations* is that there is a way of determining how to go on. This doesn't entail anything mysterious but simply expresses our entitlement to our background of linguistic and normative practices (Goldfarb 1985:487). Isolated normativity would collapse any meaningful distinction between proper and improper rule-following unless we already endorse a thoroughly Platonist picture of norms.[26]

If this is how Wittgenstein dispatches the problem of determining how we follow a rule, then what is the problem, if any, that should still bother us now? Unfortunately, the Wittgensteinian therapy outlined above is not bound to strike many as a convincing account of normativity or managing to provide a decisive refutation of the determinist picture. Wittgenstein's idea is that at the bottom level, our reasons as to why we understand something in a specific manner are exhausted and we go on without reasons (PI:§211-2, RFM VI:§24). Our spade is turned and we can say nothing more than describe what we do (PI:§217, RFM III:§74). We follow the rule blindly (PI:§219). It is not necessary to be an ambitious system-builder to find this conclusion suspiciously unsettling. Instead, what is present is a lingering worry that we are in the dark as to what acting correctly can even mean (Goldfarb 2012:74, Fogelin 1976:159). It feels almost dangerously close to some kind of subjectivism, leaving normativity in a fundamental arbitrary state. In addition, it seems implausible to institute a communal, public dimension of shared normative activities merely on the immediate feeling that we are correct in doing what we do. This leaves us with an eerie sensation that our grasp upon our normative agency is tenuous, and all we have left seems to agree with a broadly sceptical stance that is ready to make us admit that we can't really claim knowledge that what we're doing is what we think we're doing.[27] There is a fundamental 'failure of fit' (Bridges 2014:270) between how we conceive our ordinary normative agency and the discovery of this supposed normative blindness. We are left with the perspicuous question concerning what right we possess to believe our practices to be intelligible as we think them to be.[28] If we consider these reflections as aiming to recapture the intuitive, pre-philosophical notion of how we follow rules, use concepts, and grasp meanings, it is also uncertain how much of these considerations manage to salvage a notion of normativity that we would identify as properly *ours*.[29] Wittgensteinian reflections on normativity seem to have cast doubt on the very coherence of the notion (Zalabardo 1989:33).

Two alternatives might be available here to quell these worries. The first possibility is to treat our forms of life and normative activities therein as a kind of *given*, where what matters is not a defence of what we do but a simple description of what we do (Lewis 1988:302). The intelligibility of what we do would then be a consequence of the brute agreement in the public practice. However, this intelligibility would have to be read off

regularities in behavioural patterns of the community, landing us back into sheer regularism. Furthermore, it seems that agreement between agents can be of help only if it has already been determined how the agreement can function as a criterion of correctness, raising the regress trope.[30] The alternative is to reject *entirely* the pertinence of such questions and endorse a purely externalist account of normativity. Normative blindness wouldn't be a problem anymore. However, it is debatable how much of an adequate picture of normative agency this is, and it could pave the way for an entirely mechanistic conception of rules.[31] If we have no way of understanding the merit of our norms and concepts, how can we entitle ourselves to them? Why should we heed the feeling of acting correctly if ultimately what we do is a mere automatism we have no control over? If normative agency is beyond our control, evaluative claims become insignificant, as rule-following can't be deemed correct or incorrect anymore. It would just happen.[32] If Wittgenstein ultimately proposes quietism, our normative agency relinquishes the possibility of receiving rational support. It would lack the justification it sought and would amount to a seriously revisionary project (Forster 2004:87).

This hints that the problem runs deep. Normative blindness is not associated with actual cognitive *certainty* but with a basic level of actions that is "uninformed by anterior reason-giving judgment" and for which it is misplaced to ask for reasons (Wright 2007b:496-7). If this were understood as a bare grasping of the norm's content, akin to a passive phenomenal experience, then Platonism would be better positioned to solve this puzzlement by arguing "that the correctness of a rule-informed judgement is a matter quite independent of any opinion of ours" (1989:210).[33] Wittgensteinian reflections haven't ruled it out conclusively. We ended up in this quandary because Platonism was ruled out as incompatible with a perceived pluralism of interpretations and behaviours. But Platonism – the meaning-determinist idea that 'a subject S follows rule φ characterised by content ψ when what S does it following φ exemplifies ψ' (Zalabardo 1997:468) – offers us a kind of 'last interpretation' whose merit is to settle what it means to follow a particular rule, providing something capable of justifying our use of concepts and rules.[34] If heeding pluralism of understanding and behaviours led us to this standstill, then there is reason to rule out divergent behaviour as incorrect and maintain that the feeling we experience in grasping a rule is one of bona fide *logical compulsion*. If we find

this guidance aspect problematic because we have no idea how it would be capable of communicating us what it is to be done[35] then, by adopting an externalist rendition of blindness, higher-order awareness would not be necessary anymore, and this would deliver an actual regress stopping item. Lacking a proper argument against Platonism, the mere spectre of normative underdetermination cannot eliminate it from the pool of available accounts; Wittgenstein's position seems at least on the surface to commit a question-begging manoeuvre against the very possibility of a primitive state that determines the meaning of the rule[36], and to many, the Wittgensteinian picture of meaning and normativity appears less than agreeable.[37]

6.3 Kripkenstein's Monster

The alternative Wittgensteinian picture is bound not to convince many that didn't already share the therapeutic impulse behind much of the *Philosophical Investigations* of opposing the general demand for explanations that philosophy requires (PI:§654).[38] However, the insights against the above picture can be substantiated by establishing a genuine sceptical paradox that the Platonist has to defeat. This is the role of Kripke's reading of Wittgenstein's considerations. The strategy is that by following Kripke's interpretation, we can exacerbate the fracture with theoretical accounts of meaning and show their incapacity of offering a satisfactory picture of normative agency.[39]

Kripke starts by recognising the intuitive character of the determinist picture. Employing the sign '+' as the rule of addition is something we *grasp* immediately. Together with its application, this occurrence took place a *finite* number of times (Kripke 1982:7-8). Every time we used the sign '+' as an addition, there was an implicit intention of applying it in accordance with past uses that did not require anything interpretive. However, the sceptic asks to consider an addition we never entertained so far, with summands higher than in any other addition we ever computed. For example, '68+57'. The sceptic asks whether the result we have to give right now has to be '125'. Thus far, every addition we computed is compatible with a different rule, namely '$x \oplus y = x+y$ iff $x, y < 57$, otherwise $=5$'. Can we point to any fact that would be capable of distinguishing the two rules in our past usage? If the sceptic's question is patently false, there should be a way to show this, ruling out

any ‘stab in the dark’ (ibid:9) and establishing that we were indeed following specific, determinate directions in our past usage.

This is not a mere error-scenario. The sceptic does not deny, at least for now, the fact that there is a function that corresponds to ‘+’. The sceptic allows even complete absence of doubt regarding what we should do if we use the function ‘+’ and does not start with questioning the *present* use.[40] What the sceptic is querying is our impression that we were following specific directions exhibited in previous applications of the rule, but everything that we did was compatible with a different rule (ibid:11-13). Can we still claim that we are going on as before as we presumed?

> [the sceptic] questions whether there is any fact that I meant plus, not quus [⊕], that will answer his sceptical challenge. Second, he questions whether I have any reason to be so confident that now I should answer ‘125’ rather than ‘5’ … An answer to the sceptic must satisfy two conditions. First it must give an account of what fact it is (about my mental state) that constitutes my meaning plus, not quus. But further, there is a condition that any putative candidate for such a fact must satisfy. It must, in some sense show how I am justified in giving the answer ‘125’ to ‘68+57’ (ibid:11)

The problem is presented in a two-step procedure (Guardo 2018:13).[41] Firstly, the sceptic tasks us with finding a way to establish the agreement of past behaviour with what we presume to be the *present* correct behaviour. Secondly, she requires us to justify why answering ‘125’ *is what we ought to answer right now*. Two of the already rehearsed strategies concerning normative underdetermination are brought under scrutiny: regularism – from patterns of behaviour to determinate rule-following – is suggested as powerless in answering the first question. If it could do that, the paradox wouldn’t have arisen in the first place. However, the second horn casts a shadow over interpretative solutions, as we’d need a reason to justify our *immediate grasp* of the rule as addition over quaddition, and postulating interpretations would pull us into a sceptical regress, together with infringing the immediateness condition. Facts about my mind or facts about my behaviour do not seem to deliver an actual solution: “Nothing justifies a brute inclination to answer one way rather than another’ (Kripke 1982:15). To simply state that *this* is what we must do over the available alternative would be a plainly arbitrary move.

If my past behaviour cannot be reconciled with my present intention, neither via behavioural regularities nor by some inner act that distinguishes between the two rules, this generates the result that even in the present moment, my intention of following plus as opposed to quus lacks rational support (ibid:13; Wright 1984:763). There's no cogent or compulsory reason why I'm justified in answering '125' over '5'. Preferring either is groundless, a leap in the dark. This threatens the intelligibility of normativity: we can't make sense anymore of what seemed intuitively natural. A reasonable answer would have to meet some specific constraints. A purported meaning-determining fact would have to make sense of our *immediacy* in understanding a rule, our *lack of hesitation* when doing so, and that we deem ourselves justified in such occasions (Kusch 2006:14; Guardo 2014:755; 2018:64).[42] A first attempt at fulfilling these constraints is constituted by internalising a rule instead of extrapolating the rule from finite past behaviour or presumptions. In this manner, we'd have it 'engraved on a slate' in our mind (1982:16). However, this is implausible, as it does not give us an actual determining fact that could justify our internalisation of the rule in that specific manner; it just pushes the problem further back. We'd be ignoring that normative underdetermination befalls this proposal as well – as such an action can hardly be deemed non-normative. Further attempts along these lines do not fare better: maybe we are guided by the rule, but this is hardly different from the situation of normative underdetermination we encountered already in Wittgenstein' pupil example. Even the appeal to paradigmatic instances of rule-application will be little more than arbitrary if we lack an ascertained determination of how these instances can be considered as *paradigmatic* (Guardo 2010:371).[43] Ultimately these simple replies to the problem fail because they cannot meet head-on the requirement the sceptic is asking them to fulfil: we need something that justifies our employment of a particular norm or concept (Kusch 2006:17):

> the process must stop, with 'ultimate' functions and rules that I have stipulated for myself only by a *finite* number of examples … In what sense is my actual computation procedure … more justified by my past instructions than an alternative procedure[?] … Am I not simply following an unjustifiable impulse? (Kripke 1982:18).

Without such a terminus, the result would be bleak. These sceptical considerations go well beyond mathematical rules and attack general normative endeavours, sign use, or

language practice we engage in (ibid:19-20).[44] The Platonist is now in a more precarious situation than how we left her after the encounter with Wittgenstein. There, she could still resort to the possibility of offering a last interpretation that would satisfy those epistemological requirements we highlighted. However, it seems that direct answers based on internalisation, guidance, or appeal to paradigmatic applications can't really offer this last interpretation, at least not in a way that would make the Platonist proposal capable of actually solving the problem.

This doesn't mean that the Platonist' hopes are over. The possibility that Kripke takes most seriously into consideration argues that the sceptic is focusing on *occurrent* actions or mental states, but normative agency should be instead analysed along *dispositional lines* (ibid:22). To mean something or to follow a rule is individuated by the subject's disposition to give a particular answer or execute a particular action in response to specific queries and circumstances. If past mental states alone failed to provide a factual basis to make normativity intelligible, dispositional facts over time might supply what we seek. Dispositional facts are outlined along subjunctive conditionals: "If I were to add 68 and 57 I would answer 125", or "If a guitar tuned in standard tuning were to be strung, it would produce an Em11 chord". My meaning 'plus' is individuated by the fact that when queried concerning a particular sum, I would have replied by following the rule of addition instead of quaddition.

The dispositional answer must fulfil two criteria to be viable. It has to account for the covariance between 'being disposed to follow the rule or use the particular sign" and "meaning something specific via that sign or rule". In this way, it would explain the objectivity of rule-following, in terms of agreement between being 'disposed to do X' and 'to mean Y via sign or action X'. It would also allow for the possibility of being mistaken when the relationship here expressed is not met. This is the *extensional* requirement. In addition, what the dispositionalist has to offer must intuitively resemble the ordinary picture of normative agency in its immediacy, and this places strict constraints on how refined a dispositional picture can become (Kusch 2006:18). This is the *intensional* requirement.

Now, if the dispositional answer stopped here, the sceptic would need little effort to decree it as insufficient, as it fails to shed light on how these purportedly dispositional facts can justify giving a determinate answer. This is because its only way of resolving the problem of underdetermination appeals to finite past cases of rule-following, which would simply raise again the problem of what determined past cases in a specific manner: "How does any of this indicate that – now *or* in the past – '125' was an answer *justified* in terms of instructions I gave myself, rather than a mere jack-in-the-box unjustified and arbitrary response?" (Kripke 1982:23). If I were to point towards *my present* disposition as what justifies the response given, this would simply mean that whatever I take to be correct will be correct, but, as Wittgenstein highlighted (PI;§258), this would simply make normativity and meaning vacuous. The simple dispositional picture cannot account for how we systematically make mistakes when trying to do what we intended to do. Any course of action can, in principle, be read off as a particular disposition, hence understood as anything we believe we really wanted to mean.[45] It would fail to make intelligible how we can follow the rule we claim to follow in a way that would justify the corresponding normative claim (Kripke 1982:24, 29).[46] The extensional requirement is flouted as the required covariance cannot be accounted for.

If this dispositional attempt fails, maybe an *idealised* variety can pull it off. Perhaps dispositions work under a *ceteris paribus* clause: one would indeed be able to give the correct answer to a normative query if, on parity of conditions, one could have enough time or cognitive capacity to carry out one's intention beyond finitary constraints. One would then have the disposition to correctly determine the rule. However, this would work only if what I mean by that particular function that I deliver as an answer is already settled (Kripke 1982:28). The difficulties concerning the possibility of making mistakes are furthermore still present, as the dispositionalist cannot account for the disposition to make systematic mistakes without already assuming what the correct notion of intending to execute a particular rule or function is (ibid:30).[47] The infinitary reply also fails to meet the intensional requirement, as it cannot provide an account capable of intuitively resembling the immediacy of our rule-following due to its idealised character (Guardo 2018:46; Kusch 2006:19). Whatever an idealised response could offer in terms of dispositions, it would not be an answer that would pertain to us as normative agents.

6.4 The Justificatory Problem

We can try at this point to take stock of Kripke's argument in order to argue how it manages to exclude Platonism as an available stance in the dispute, in a way Wittgensteinian observations alone couldn't. The underdetermination between addition and quaddition is material. One ought not to think she's done both simultaneously, even if all calculations carried out until now were *compatible* with both. The Platonist will retort that there is a rational basis for knowing that what we did in the past – and what we are doing now – is carrying out addition over quaddition: we either grasped the rule of addition or that was the disposition we had in mind. The situation changes when Kripke's paradox enters the scene. The facts the Platonist proposes fail to differentiate between the two, and this happens even by allowing the proviso that nothing is left hidden and that we have access to all the relevant facts. No fact *in general* can provide this rational support (Kripke 1982:39). We need facts that can determine which rule the agent is correctly following, but in order to identify such facts as the correct criteria for normative agency, we need to know already in which cases we have a correct conduct (Shogenji 2000:506-7).[48]

The ordinary understanding of Kripke's paradox is that what the dispositionalist offers is a merely descriptive account of normativity: "if '+' meant addition, then I will answer '125'. But this is not the proper account of the relation … the relation of meaning and intention to future action is *normative*, not *descriptive*" (Kripke 1982:37). This is because *meaning is normative*. It tells us what we ought to do, not merely what we *will* do. This is considered the core of Kripke's argument, establishing as its target the idea that meaning is regulated along Classical Realist principles (ibid:73; Wilson 1994:373; 1998:105). In order to ascertain whether our use of '+' corresponds to what we mean with 'plus', there must be facts that establish correctness criteria for its use:

> The fact that the expression means something implies … a whole set of *normative* truths about my behaviour with that expression: namely that my use of it is correct in application to certain objects and not in application to others (Boghossian 1989:513).

If I mean plus, the normativity of meaning should establish a set of uses of the sign '+' in agreement with the meaning of 'plus'; this is a truth-conditional conception of meaning. The truth-conditions of the expression institute the correctness criteria for the possibility

of meaning-ascriptions. The idea that meaning is normative seems to be what Wittgenstein is engaging with as well. When the pupil diverges from the expected normative sequence she was tasked with continuing, we classify her action as an error in virtue of the deviation from what she *should have done*. This, in turn, is supposedly settled by the semantic content of the given rule understood along the truth-conditions of the rule. Her error is due to the rule "*mean[ing]* what it does" (Bridges 2017:375). This is in line with what the Platonist was looking for, the idea that the content of the rule guides us, doing so *immediately*. But the Platonist/meaning-determinist cannot appeal to dispositions to explain this command's normative authority, as dispositions are merely *descriptive*. Dispositionalism fails to provide an account of how we got a genuine normative command from something ultimately non-normative. In Pyrrhonian fashion, scepticism arises out of the attempts to make sense of something in a specific fashion, not due to some impossibly high standards: if meaning and normativity are to be made intelligible, the weapon of choice of the meaning-determinist seems powerless for the job.

The idea that meaning is normative has been widely endorsed in the literature on the rule-following paradox[49] and is explicitly endorsed by Kripke himself. It does appear to belong to that intuitive and natural construal of following a rule that a solution to the paradox is trying to provide. However, there are some troubles in assessing the rule-following paradox exclusively along these lines of the above *normativity argument*. Firstly, semantic normativity appears to be fundamentally connected with the very possibility of the paradox arising in the first place. Therefore, one could doubt why we should hold on to the idea that meaning is normative, as this would jettison the whole paradox altogether. This is related to the second point, namely that it might open the door for those anti-normativist proposals – such as Hattiangadi 2006; 2007; Glüer&Wikforss 2009 – that directly reject the idea of meaning having a prescriptive dimension. Their argument goes along the following lines: the capability of norms to offer guidance and tell us what we ought to do can be instantiated only by relying on further norms or intentions, such as a desire to assert only truths. Therefore, before we can be in the state where we follow a norm, we must already be in a contentful normative state, and this would lead us back into regress (ibid:55-62; Hattiangadi 2006:236). Even if a rule supposedly tells us what to do next, why should we abide by the particular recommended *ought*? If all these states and attitudes

can deliver is a mere conditional prescription, meaning is ultimately not a matter of normativity (ibid:228).[50] Crucially, the normativity argument as presented above begs the question against the dispositionalist. It is not entirely clear whether Kripke has identified something genuinely problematic were the paradox restricted to the normativity argument. Why should descriptive dispositions be unable to enable normative agency? This is a substantial premise whose burden of proof relies on the sceptic. In its absence, the dispositionalist can simply appeal to past dispositional states and claim that they suffice to deliver a basis to break the tie between the two alternatives or even appeal to further non-dispositional facts. To think otherwise would entail deriving a catastrophic sceptical paradox out of a mere is/ought gap.[51]

This situation adverts to a central property of the sceptical paradox. The underdetermination principle that we found motivating the normativity argument seems at first a plain sceptical principle in the 'brain-in-a-vat' conception of a deceiving scenario. The problem seems to be merely a matter of indistinguishable alternatives, and we might be wrong. However, this plainly epistemological problem doesn't seem to be the main issue at work here, as it wasn't in those we raise in previous chapters. Kripke recognises this straight away (1982:21).[52] This problem concerns what could ever manage to constitute the role of *justifier* of our behaviour if that is to count as genuinely normative. We noticed that the way the issue is established is compatible with divine omniscience being unable to provide an a priori answer to this problem. If the matter were a mere issue of breaking a tie between two alternatives, it would be puzzling how could there be an issue at all. The puzzlement arises within the understanding of prescription conditions of meaning as *correctness* conditions, truth-functional criteria that establish that "a speaker who means something by an expression ought to ensure that she uses it *only* when it is correct to do so" (Hattiangadi 2006:227). This is a plainly epistemological reading of the problem in the sense that what seems problematic is the impossibility of excluding a mistake or a misunderstanding in how we *ought* to apply the term. Not only is this conception inadequate to capture what is at stake here, but it also offers the flank to the anti-normativists to just throw away the baby with the bathwater and allow them to argue that once this 'normativity as correct prescription' picture is rejected, the problem disappears (2007:35).[53]

The problem must be formulated to avoid giving the anti-normativists' opportunity to reject the problem and beg the question against dispositionalist answers. This is the *justificatory* understanding of the problem. The Kripkean paradox does not merely concern how can a rule *compel* me into going on as I believe, but – and this is where most naturalist and anti-normativist answers cannot provide an actual answer – also how *I* can consider myself justified and compelled in applying the rule in the way that I intend it. The problem does not revolve around mere adherence to correctness *conditions*, but it concerns what constitutes the possibility of justification as something *mine*. This is central for Kripke's own way of presenting the issue:[54]

> The sceptic can maintain that the hypothesis that I meant quus shows that I had no *justification* for answering '125' rather than '5'. How does the dispositional analysis even appear to touch this problem? … after giving a number of more specific criticisms of the dispositional theory we have returned full circle to our original intuition. Precisely the fact that our answer to the question which function I meant is *justificatory* of my present response is ignored in the dispositional account (1982:37).

To answer this question, the dispositionalist would have to present a case for why the (dispositionalist) processes appealed to are capable of compelling us to answer in that particular way so that it would make it justified to ourselves that which we have to do. Without this element, the answer provided would be straightforwardly arbitrary (Zalabardo 1997:479).[55]

The sceptic is not posutlating merely an *a priori* denial that a descriptive account can ever have normative force. She is rather pressing the question on what rational basis can we claim that the chosen dispositional facts are those items that can allow us to reject quus non-arbitrarily. Without an argument resolving such concerns about the possibility of normative justification, any chosen fact won't do. The reasons we will appeal to claim that we are adding rather than 'quadding' will again be fundamentally *insular*; they won't provide the required basis to non-arbitrarily establish the justification we require ourselves (Pritchard 2015:55). Ultimately all we have at our disposal would be mere conformity with a purported rule while having no ground to privilege this accord as an adequate justificatory criterion for our normative agency.[56]

Here the dispositionalist must say something about how the chosen dispositional facts can deliver this rational basis, and she has two options available. The first is to determine the procedure and ascertain whether it can justify our answer as what we ought to do via an inferential basis by reflectively investigating our past dispositions. However, this is not how we engage with rules ordinarily. We do not wonder whether what we are inclined to do agrees with past dispositions. We simply have the inclination of going in a particular way. This proposal, therefore, fails on the *intensional* requirement.[57] In addition, this route endorses an admixture of normative and non-normative elements – the inferential rule of comparison between different intrapersonal time-slices, and the dispositional facts of our mind – whose capacity of providing an answer to the sceptical question is dubitable because question-begging. In fact, in investigating past dispositional states to provide the required rational basis to solve the problem, the dispositionalist would commit both sins of regulism and regularism. She would select a set of privileged non-normative dispositions and extract from these a regularity that is supposed to deliver the adequacy criterion that justifies my present response of + over ⊕.[58]

The only alternative is to reject this inferential investigative check and abide by the intensional clause that dispositions provide the subject with an *unhesitating* response, ditching any conscious inferential engagement (Zalabardo 1997:484). This is the classical realist idea that some property is capable of simply transforming a non-normative dispositional state into the adequate basis of a normative action. However, this requires that we have *access* to such a privileged property in a way that would make it non-arbitrary. Otherwise, dispositionalism would be unable to explain what gives those criteria their normative and epistemic merit. By being unable to do so, the sceptical problem treading on the UPA-principle presented in the last chapter would be still valid. If the UPA-based question is simply ignored, it is again a mystery how to grant a rational basis to our normative agency.[59] All that is left to the meaning-determinist is to adopt a kind of primitivism – usually through appeal to Wittgenstein's suggestion that the continuation of the rule is already present albeit in a queer way (PI§195) –, and explain these dispositions in terms of a primitive *sui generis* state, which 'brushes such questions under the rug, since the nature of the supposed 'state' is left mysterious" (Kripke 1982:52-3). The move to a resolutely Fregean kind of Platonism to describe this primitive state as non-mental

doesn't manage to solve the quandary; it raises the old problem of Plato's *Parmenides* about participation to ideas, that must ultimately involve something mental (ibid:54). Maybe these words will sound hollow to the dispositionalist a-là Fodor, for whom these remarks construct a problem out of thin air. However, this is a mistaken verdict, the question of how is it possible for bona fide normativity to arise out of non-normative constraints or facts is genuine. All the dispositionalist has been able to provide is an exculpation that generates normativity *ex-nihilo*.[60]

6.5 Kantian Scepticism

To conclude this chapter, we can take stock of two main results of this analysis. The first is that the meaning-determinist/Platonist is now in a much worse situation than before. If, at the end of Wittgenstein's presentation, the classical rendition of rule-following as dictated by determined truth-conditions was still on the table, now it is not anymore. On the score of answering a genuine sceptical doubt, this perspective either fails to explain the ordinary understanding of normativity as immediate or – in trying to account for it – is revealed as unable to heed the sceptical problem due to it being sui generis. It either ignores the non-arbitrariness constraint or postulates mysterious rule-determining mechanisms. The second point concerns the character of the sceptical problem here analysed. It is not merely a problem revolving around matters of accuracy, error, alternative possibilities – notwithstanding this appearance due to the plus/quus dichotomy –. The question targets the procedures and conditions which purportedly constitute genuine rule-following and whether we can ever consider ourselves non-arbitrarily justified in claiming them. We've seen in the previous chapter how the underdetermination principle is connected to the Pyrrhonian methodology. The rule-following paradox is clearly established in accord with it. However, Pyrrhonian scepticism – especially in the guise that has been with us since chapter four – doesn't institute by itself an independent, sceptical question. It allows to keep the philosopher's claims in perpetual check through *diaphonia* about criteria[61] but lacks a prescriptive content except its opposition to dogmatism (Williams 1988a:551). Is there a genuine sceptical problem here, or is this merely the result of a misapplication of a sceptical methodology and of a mistaken idea of philosophising?

We suggest that there is a specific sceptical question, distinct from the standard epistemological, or Cartesian, kind. Many have remarked that the problem is not fundamentally epistemological but has a metaphysical or *constitutive* essence. It is a question concerning identifying those facts that constitute meaning and normativity (Ginsborg 2018:153).[62] It is a problem about what constitutes authoritative normativity and concept-use *instead of* what makes a particular account of rule-following *correct*. The rule-following paradox should be therefore understood as an instance of what James Conant called *Kantian Scepticism*. This scepticism targets the objective purport of our rational faculties, what constitutes the validity of our judgments in general, and in this specific case, the conditions for normative agency we appeal to and endorse in our judgments and claims (Conant 2012:5-6). It asks whether what we understand as normativity is a consistent notion: how can a sign, or a string of noises, *constitute* something which can be understood, referred to, developed, corrected objectively? (ibid:62). This comes before questions of mere correctness; it is a problem about our *mindedness as such* (ibid:20). The question raised is on how experiences can amount to be something that can be judged as being such-and-such, something that can justifiably be the content of a belief, and that can be "the thought of an object" (Hamawaki 2020:149). In the specific case, it concerns our normative as something objective and rational.

The problem is distinctively Kantian because, for Kant, our engagement with the world is essentially discursive, rule-based, conceptual, and what matters "is to understand the bindingness or validity (Gültigkeit) of concepts" (Brandom 2001:603). We find the problem at the level of normativity because our trajectory has brought us to a point where we realised that if we depend on a semantics that views reality as having what Brandom (2019:42-4) calls *differential intelligibility*, then scepticism will always be the outcome. But recognising this faux pas does *not* take away the question of how our experiences, concepts, norms are in general about objective reality while establishing rational authority on us (cf. El Kassar 2016:131). Once we have rejected the idea that there is a level of self-authoritative items or episodes, i.e. once we enter the idea that until proven otherwise, our rational and normative bases are *neutral*, the task becomes how to regain the idea that experience and normativity can still exert authoritative constraints on us

(McDowell 1996:18). At the heart of the sceptical problem, its semantic core has been unveiled: how is it possible for our judgments, concepts, experiential reports to stand in a rational relation to the world? (ibid:125; Rudd 2008:316). The justificatory problem and the ensuing insularity of reasons will underdetermine any attempt at establishing any doxastic norm purporting of licensing our judgments as objective (Stern 2000:34).

Being a problem of rational authority also integrates the distinctively Pyrrhonian element of the problem. The sceptical impasse encountered by the dogmatist was to explain in a non-arbitrary way how experience could manage to present us with a basis for justified beliefs that could have valid epistemic and rational credentials, i.e. that it could be authoritative for us in how we form beliefs. The question of epistemic authority is at the heart of the Pyrrhonian methodology as well. Setting the sceptical tropes in motion, it generates the question that opposes the dogmatic stance – which for our purposes here is paramount to the Platonist/meaning-determinist stance – to its incompatible alternatives (Striker 1983:121-2).[63]

An objection raised against Pyrrhonian scepticism is that it involves a kind of implausible *detachment from oneself*, in assigning equal force to one's own experiences and those of one's counterparts in the disagreement (Burnyeat 1980:54-5).[64] But if we understand this conflict in terms of the authority of one's own experiences and how it can function as the proper basis for our beliefs, then the question ceases to arise from a mere assignment of equal worth to the experience of others. It arises instead from the authority we entitle ourselves to in judging how things are and how can we be rationally responsible to what we thereby commit ourselves to. This pertains to both the Kantian problem and the Pyrrhonian dialectic against any attempt to solve the issue.[65] Unless we solve the issue concerning the rational character of this authority and how we can bind ourselves to it, we cannot rationally commit ourselves to our ordinary claims, and we are in a situation of ignorance concerning the credentials and the conditions of our beliefs, experiences, dispositions, and so on. We ought to suspend judgment, independently of the specification of the relevant sceptical scenario.

If we recall the extensional requirement, the Kantian question can be posed in a parallel fashion: "what is it that which objectively institutes the agreement and covariance between

the norms we claim to follow and what our norms are supposedly about, i.e. their object, in a way that makes it rational to proceed in the determinate manner that feels natural to us?". How can any explanans on this score be able to exercise an authority over us normative agents that is capable of making our actions rational and justified? Given that rule-following is "an exercise of the human capacity of rationality … to recognise and act (or form attitudes) for reasons" (Bridges 2014:259), we can easily see why the problem is particularly pressing. What is at stake here is the very possibility of rational agency in the world. Ultimately the Kantian question confronts us with a *boggle* in which we cannot make sense anymore of our ways of understanding what we do and how we engage with things. Our standing as rational normative subjects becomes a mystery (Conant 2012:32-3).[66]

This is also why the rehearsed answers, dispositionalist and (Fregean) Platonist, are unable to solve the paradox. They sweep under the rug the Kantian problem the paradox reveals, together with the demand to defend the authority of our concepts and reasons, which has now become neutral. How can dispositional, mental, behavioural, or ideal facts constitute rule-following, and how can we lay claim to our being justified in what we feel compelled to do except by arbitrary privileging a certain set of properties? The main issue is how could there be in principle a fact that can quell these doubts, not merely the problem that we can't find any such facts (Zalabardo 1989:38).

This has a distinctive outcome on the overall dialectic. We mentioned the idea that the specific normative paradox arises out of the idea of *semantic normativity*. This thesis being an implicit presupposition of the sceptic, is an idea with a good degree of currency even among those who look upon Kripke's analysis favourably (cf. McNally 2017). But we've argued here that the sceptic does not propose the semantic requirement; it rather belongs to the ordinary idea of rule-following, that it is something determinate, immediate, with distinct criteria of correctness we can commit ourselves to. Once framed properly within the Kantian perspective, the question becomes a question about how any of this can be salvaged vis-à-vis the paradox it generates. Semantic normativity has proven itself to be categorically incapable of providing a good answer. Rejecting semantic normativity does not make the question of intelligibility disappear, as the anti-normativist claims,

because we still need an answer as to what constitutes the source of normative authority. Neither that approach nor traditional semantic normativism answers this question. They do not explain how regularities, mental items, or graspable ideas exert rational authority on us, nor how they function as a rational basis for our concepts and beliefs. This means that actual solutions to the problem will have to say something about this issue. This is crucial for Kripke's solution and the Hegelian improvement we'll propose in the next chapter. The suggestion is that a different structure of normativity might do the trick of making sense of how we can be rational normative agents whose rules exert objective authority on us, without falling back into the hopeless attempt at specifying meaning truth-conditionally, retaining the fundamental sceptical insight that no reductive move will ever bring us out of this boggle. The idea is that scepticism about classical realism, meaning-determinism, or Platonism, is compatible with intersubjective normativity.

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[1] This might be enough to warrant qualified agreement with scepticism tout court, as Williams seems to recognize that scepticism arises immediately once we are in a reflective endeavour on knowledge. Cf. Ribeiro 2002:580.

[2] The only work where the relation between neutrality and underdetermination is made explicit is Maeve MacPherson's PhD Thesis, cf. 2018:187. Duncan Pritchard has confirmed in communication that neutrality of evidence is in essence his insularity of reasons thesis.

[3] Which means for Sellars *non-conceptual*, cf. Brandom 1997a:156-7

[4] For an argument similar in spirit against Chisholm's theory of appearances, cf. Sellars 1975:308-10. Fogelin (1994:129-33) also presents a converging argument on this point. Lammenranta 2013:50-1 uses Sellars' example as an instance of Pyrrhonian *diaphonia* conceived as a fundamental disagreement about basic perceptual faculties.

[5] Cf. on this Brandom 2002:356-7; 1997a:142-3.

[6] This is the general "essence of Descartes' foundationalism" (Brandom 1997a:136) and of all those contemporary positions that uphold the same immediate access to inner episodes as basic.

[7] Arguably because it fits the explanation of sense-perceptions in a 'scientific style' (Sellars 1956:§7).

[8] Pritchard (2018:240) argues that the motivation for Williams' stance and its associated blindspot, lies in his neglect of the underdetermination problem. For a defence of Williams against underdetermination, cf. Ashton 2015. Ashton's defence focuses on the contextualist aspect of William's position. For criticisms of William's contextualism cf. Pritchard 2015:105-110; Vogel 1997:20-4; Brandom 2000:169-70; Ribeiro 2002:579-581. It is peculiar that Williams doesn't recognize the semantic issue at the heart of the neutrality of evidence, given what he himself wrote about Sellars and scepticism, where he identifies this as a crucial problem (1988b:418-9; 2009:154; 2014:63-5). A plausible explanation is that he views those issues as pertaining to *Agrippan* Scepticism, which he keeps distinctly separate from traditional Cartesian scepticism.

[9] Cf. Geier 2021, and Sellars' own comments at the end of *The Structure of Knowledge*.

[10] Cf. Wittgenstein's focus on the 'last explanation of a word' (PI:§29) together with the possibility of interpretation and the pluralism of admissible moves within language games (§§34, 59).

[11] Grammar is meant to express the internal logic of our concepts and word-use. Grammatical inquiry clarifies what we actually do with words, meaning, and rules (cf. Forster 2004:7-8).

[12] The term *Platonism* characterizes most varieties of classical normative realism that are investigated by Wittgenstein and attacked by Kripke's paradox cf. Luntley 1991; Finkelstein 2000; Zalabardo 2003. Kripke (1982:53-4) compares the ideas of rules and meaning as fixed independently from their use to mathematical Platonism. Martin Kusch (2006:3-4) calls this picture (low-brow) *meaning-determinist*, the idea that what is meant by a word dictates both how one will use it and ought to use it, specified as a connection of properties such as privacy, understanding as grasping, objectivity, classical realism (ibid:41). See also Guardo (2018:74). For our purposes, Platonism and *meaning-determinism* are interchangeable terms, cf. Wilson 1994:375.

[13] On this cf. Fogelin 1976:147 and Goldfarb 1992:113.

[14] This concerns every solution that appeals to something *hidden* in our minds: "how can the process of understanding have been hidden ... and If I say it is hidden – then how do I know what I have to look for?" (PI:§153).

[15] Wittgenstein's remarks concern the reductionist and theory-laden conception of meaning and rules that properly belongs to our common-sense understanding of normativity. See on this Wright 1987:122; 2007b:484.

[16] In the classical realist picture, the meaning of any sentence is tied to truth-conditions of these kinds, i.e., *semantic normativism*. Cf. Kusch 2006:10; Boghossian 1989:513; McNally 2017:71.

[17] Cf. the image of the *rails invisibly laid to infinity* (PI:§217). The machine as a symbol for normative processes does reside explicitly in the way we think of mathematical operations, see Wright 1989:189; PI:§221.

[18] The term is due to Brandom (1994:28), who uses it to describe the tendency of deriving normativity from patterns. It has won a wider employment in describing the problem of the relationship between any explanation and the norm it is supposed to unpack (cf. McNally 2017:60-2; Williams 2010:155-6; Kiesselbach 2012:106).

[19] Regress both of support (McNally 2017:60) and of explanation (Verheggen 2003:288). In both cases the semantic determination we sought is undercut.

[20] Brandom understands this dilemma slightly differently from John McDowell (1984:341-42) as for him Scylla represents intepretationalism and Charybdis the outcome where there are no actual norms. For McDowell the dilemma establishes the paradoxical nature of what he calls the *master thesis* (1992:45), requiring every normative action to be interpreted in order for it to acquire meaning. Brandom recognizes more clearly that the problem is essentially one of *underdetermination* as both alternatives – Platonism and regularism – are at bottom non-normative, underdetermining any normative status in general (cf. Kiesselbach 2012:101). Brandom argues that the regulist horn appeals to norms implicit in practice which can then be gerrymandered as we see fit (1994:62).

[21] Cf. PI:§150 and RFM VI:§2 "For only through a technique can we *grasp* a regularity".

[22] See RFM VII:§47 "How am I supposed to follow a sign-post if whatever I do is a way of following it? But that everything can (also) be *interpreted* as following, doesn't mean that everything is following".

[23] See also Wittgenstein's remarks against mere intuition (LFM:30), which is unable to shed any light on such issues (Lewis 1988::288-9). von Savigny (1991:74) presents Wittgenstein's argument as a reductio which leads to an upwards regress.

[24] The Private Language Argument is quite accepted as valid in Wittgensteinian scholarship, with some distinctions, such as Baker&Hacker's contention that meaning is public but not necessarily social (1984:39-42). Cf. Williams (1991:110; 2010:204-5) for a criticism of this stance.

[25] This is not a crude variety of conventionalism: what constitutes meaning and the content of the norms we share is not for Wittgenstein the result of any explicit or intentional agreement, cf. PI:§61, §§241-2; RFM IV:§8; VI:§40-9.

[26] Otherwise, it is debatable whether the argument possesses any bite. The idea is instead that a private semantic norm is no norm at all, cf. Fogelin 1976:167; McNally 2017:100-2. This is stronger than reading the PLA as establishing the *impotency* of private normativity in guiding our responses (cf. Zalabardo 1997:487). McDowell (1984:343-5) seems to endorse the more general worry defended here. For a reading of the PLA as targeting merely the possibility of understanding the private sensations by another subject cf. Goldfarb 1985:480; 2012:82.

[27] Cf. Lewis 1988:299-300. If normative blindness is allowed, then Wittgenstein rejecting any explanation might become indistinguishable at heart from a sceptical view (Wright 1989:189). For Wittgenstein it is never in doubt that we are compelled to act one way or another, making his view of rule-following very akin to the Pyrrhonian conception of *approvals*, forced and undogmatic assents which we can't resist but *are not a guide to truth* (PH I.19); cf. Vogt 2010:171; Gòmez-Alonso 2016:467-8.

[28] Cf. Fogelin 1976:182.

[29] As Forster notices (2004:83), Wittgenstein himself would at times in his lectures admit as much, specifically that by denying meaning construed in an internalistic way he was departing from ordinary parlance on the matter.

[30] For these considerations pertaining to agreement in performances cf. Guardo 2010:370 and Brandom 1994:208. Establishing brute agreement as the ground from which to derive criteria of correctness doesn't seem to give us much beyond these criteria being "simply *whatever we take them to be*" (Wright 1989:188). Cavell has also made the point that *if* all there is to language and meaning is a matter of finding criteria or norms we share, then scepticism is directly a *natural* possibility as a standing threat to thought (1979:47).

[31] The insight that normative blindness leads to this picture hasn't been much appreciated in the relevant literature. Cf. Rhees (1958:xii-xiv), and Kripke (1982:47-8). It would place normative bindingness out of our reach, making it heteronomous and enigmatic. Rule-following as something that 'just happens'. See again the closeness to Pyrrhonian *forced assent*, with approvals as "automatic responses to changes in the environment" (Gòmez-Alonso 2016:472).

[32] See Zalabardo 1989:42 for this verdict, which is ascribed to Kripke's rendition of the problem.

[33] On this see Lewis' (1988:293-5) assigning a kind of normative innatism to Wittgenstein's position.

[34] Cf. Zalabardo 1997:485-6 "on the realist approach ... the facts in terms of which the realist approach construes satisfaction would justify these procedures". D'Agostini (2002:38) notices that appealing to the plural and countless varieties of concept use underscores a Platonist commitment to a basic uniformity in conceptual behaviour.

[35] Cf. Wright 1989:184; PI:§§209-213. Wright mentions that grasping such an inner item would violate Wittgenstein's 'no inner voice' proviso, but an externalist position could sidestep the issue. Recognizing a phenomenological feeling of confidence or certainty does not require over-intellectualizing it (Bridges 2014:269-71).

[36] Cf. McNally 2017:68 who criticizes the way we presented Wittgenstein's point – which he finds also in Williams 1991:97 – because it makes the gerrymandering argument a question-begging argument against Platonism.

[37] As Wright (2007b:498-9) comments, Wittgenstein's attempts go "deeply against the [contemporary philosophical] grain". Wittgenstein's meta-philosophical stance on precisely these matters has been deemed incoherent and haphazard (Boghossian 2006:108-9) or descriptively

inadequate (Chomsky 1986:227). Kripke's own reading has endured similar accusations (Boghossian 1989:542; Fodor 1990:94-5).

[38] Cf. the remarks on the 'temptation to say something more' (RFM VI:§21), the 'disease [being] one of wanting to explain' (ibid:§31), the ideas about philosophy explaining nothing (PI:§126), and the rejection of both reasons and criteria as elements of an adequate picture of normativity (RFM III:§74; VI:§24; VII:§40).

[39] On this see Forster (2004:95-6).

[40] Indeed, Kripke (1982:14, 21) allows even for God to be peeking into our mind in order to assess what we intend, but this won't pull us out of the problem either. Wittgenstein agrees that external omniscience wouldn't be able to solve such issues (RFM VII:§41).

[41] Guardo (2010:368) observes that the paradox is better construed as a single-step argument, but this is in reference to the transition from the sceptic's attack on the singular expression 'X means Y by Z' to its extension to the whole of language as meaningless. Cf. Boghossian 1989:522-525 for an interpretation along those lines.

[42] Called by Kusch *low-brow* meaning-determinism, the ordinary philosophical picture that any sophisticated, high-brow refinement is supposed to uphold (2006:13).

[43] "it is no help to suppose that in the past I stipulated that 'green' was to apply to all and only those things 'of the same colour as' the sample. The sceptic can reinterpret 'same colour' as same *schmolor*, where things have the same schmolor if…" (Kripke 1982:20). Cf. also Shogenji 2000:516.

[44] On this general outcome, cf. Wilson 1994:369; Hattiangadi 2007:14-5; Miller 2010:171.

[45] Simple dispositionalism fails to account for the fact that dispositions might be easily interfered with and we can assume such interferences can be common-place (Wright 1984:771), and the fact that our past history might very well be *inconsistent* with the rule we are claiming adherence to (Shogenji 2000:504).

[46] Cf. Boghossian 1989:509 "One cannot read off a speaker's disposition to use an expression in a certain way what is the *correct* use of that expression".

[47] Boghossian (1989:537) has contested Kripke's argument on this aspect because he leaves unexplained why this specification couldn't be given in non-normative, non-intentional ways. However, Boghossian himself provides some independent backing in support of Kripke's argument (ibid:538-9).

[48] Shogenji (2000:508-10) disputes that the problem is one of underdetermination, selecting instead the problem of the criterion as the culprit because only under its influence can rule-following appear completely indeterminate. Chapter five should have managed to establish their connection. The rule-following paradox is not a mere problem of disagreement between alternatives, but it pertains to the notion of 'rules' itself (cf. Zalabardo 1989:36). Cf. Kripke's insight that he's not trying to offer an analysis or truth-conditions of rule-following (1982:87).

[49] Cf. Wilson 1994:370-2; Ginsborg 2011:228-230; 2012:127; Bridges 2014:250; Blackburn 1984:35; Wright 1987:120; Finkelstein 2000:50; Brandom 1994:14-18, 22-3; 1997b:193; McDowell 1984:325; Miller 2010:169; von Savigny 1991:67; Shogenji 2000:516.

[50] For similar reflections on the intuitive strength of the anti-normativist arguments cf. Kusch 2006:60 and Guardo 2018:52.

[51] Cf. Zalabardo 1997:471; Guardo 2018:55; Bridges 2014:254-5. For an example of a naturalist position that rejects the Kripkean paradox as a mere *open* question based on the 'is/ought' gap cf. Fodor 1990:134-6.

[52] In addition, if only that were what constituted Kripke's paradox, then it would be less general than Wittgenstein's own reflections, as it would focus merely on the gerrymandering argument (Cf. McNally 2017:89).

[53] We cannot investigate more in depth the anti-normativists' arguments here. It suffices to show that their understanding of the problem is narrowly epistemological, as a mere issue of correct prescription. For specific criticisms cf. Hlobil 2014, and Ginsborg 2012:129-130. The

correctness condition itself is not rejected by anti-normativists – they are factualists about meaning. What they argue against is that these correctness conditions have to be *prescriptive* in semantic realist terms (cf. Hattiangadi 2006:226; 2007:65). Without this, the anti-normativists observe that all that remain is the problem of *underdetermination* that can be refuted by showing that there are *facts* establishin what we mean (ibid:211). These are either naturalistic *prudential obligations* (2006:237; 2007:182), or Fregean *sui generis* entities (Glüer&Wikforss 2009:65). Both proposals, while they might be able to handle the issue of correctness, are incapable of solving the rule-following paradox as a justificatory issue. This is also what sets anti-normativism apart from those stances (Kusch 2006; McNally 2017) that reject the 'meaning is normative' thesis because they object to the specific *semantic* content of normativity and not to normativity as such.

[54] Cf. Guardo 2014:751 on the relevant passages that can be read along the standard normativity argument. That the question is already justificatory in Wittgenstein's original reflections is a point made by Meredith Williams (2009:153).

[55] Or alternatively one will end up merely *presupposing* what we had to uncover in the first place, cf. Wright 1984:765. Wright is usually enlisted among those presenting the ordinary normativity argument, but he shows a distinctive sensitivity to the proper question of justification, cf. ibid:762-3.

[56] Cf. Shogenji 2000:512. This is still consistent with omniscience concerning our internal facts. The problem is that *these facts* cannot function as a rational basis for our claims. We can't 'assign content' to these facts because this would make them be normative by *fiat* (ibid:517).

[57] Cf. for this argument Zalabardo 1997:480-1, and Guardo 2014:754; 2018:63. Kusch (2006:23) defines these *high-brow* attempts as unable to be reconciled with the low-brow picture meaning-determinism is expected to capture. Wright (1989:175) also considers the problem with dispositional accounts to be that the non-inferential aspect of rule-following is made mysterious.

[58] Cf. Brandom 1994:28: "For the simple regularist's identification of impropriety with irregularity to get a grip, it must be supplemented with some way of picking out, as somehow *privileged*, some out of all the regularities exhibited. To say this is to say that some regularities must be picked out as the ones that *ought* to be conformed to, some patterns as the ones that *ought* to be continued ... therefore does not solve ... the question of how to understand the normative distinction between what is done and what ought to be done."

[59] See Wright 1989:175; Guardo 2018:67.

[60] In terms of the Problem of the Criterion, the transition from the mere problem of correctness to the problem of what constitutes the justification that any selected fact or item is tasked with providing, we see the Pyrrhonian transition to the Agrippan modes. See also Shogenji (2000:519) on the arbitrariness entailed the primitivist-intuitionist picture.

[61] On this use of *methodological* in contrast with Cartesian scepticism cf. chapter one, section four. The reading of ancient scepticism as having a method comes from also from Hegel (1825:374; cf. Forster 1989:10).

[62] See Kripke 1982:21; Goldfarb:1985:474; Wright 1984:762; 1989:186; Boghossian 1989:515; Blackburn 1984:29; Kusch 2006:14-5. Cf. Meredith Williams (1991:108; 2010:203) for the idea that the whole of Wittgenstein's reflections on normativity pertain to a metaphysical and not epistemological point. Ginsborg 2018 is an epistemological rejoinder to these readings, understanding the issue as one of agreement between past and future uses of the rule. See also Hanfling 1985:4-5.

[63] For passages in Sextus where it is this problem of rational authority that sits at the heart of the problem, cf. PH I.88, 98, 102-3, 112-4, 121; II.39-41). As Broughton noticed (2002:79) this is one of the main differences with standard Cartesian doubt, where the latter grants immediate authority to the content of one's own mind. This is also the reason why Hegel thought of Pyrrhonian scepticism as the more genuine doubt of the two (1802:339; 1825:332; cf. Forster 1989:14-7).

[64] Cf. Hankinson 1995:254-5 for an objection against this idea. Equipollence is just a consequence that *we do not know* how other people are affected.

[65] For analyses of the Pyrrhonian dialectic as arising specifically from questions of authoritative entitlements, cf. Johnsen 2001:553, and Williams 2010:299.

[66] Kripke explicitly says that the problem has a central Kantian aspect due to its instituting a question about “How can we show *any language at all* (public, private, or what-have-you) to be possible?” (1982:62). For a recent attempt at investigating the paradox through this lens see Geier 2021.

Chapter 7

A Sceptical Solution

This final chapter aims to analyse a sceptical solution and provide an amendment that embodies the reflections developed in the previous three chapters. We seek to avoid the foundationalist, meaning-determinist pitfalls that lead to sceptical paradoxes and allow an intelligible picture of our normative engagement with the world that doesn't relinquish the objectivity of our norms and concepts. Thereby the goal is to domesticate, but not refute, the semantic scepticism at the bottom of the whole edifice of philosophical doubt. Kripke's sceptical solution must be improved concerning its shift to intersubjective assertability conditions via the conceptual arsenal found in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. This aims to propose a social externalist picture of justification, according to which to be justified in having a belief, or be entitled to engage in normative endeavours in a particular way, is a function of the reason-giving practices that constitute our making sense of what we believe and do.

This dialectical picture of justification allows the possibility of rational, external, authoritative constraints on what it means to follow a rule, constraints that we can understand as defining our own commitments and upon which other normative agents can agree or challenge us. This supplies what is lacking in Kripke's communal solution, which remains at a superficial Humean level, curtailing the objectivity of what we believe and do as a mere matter of habit. Only by treating normative statuses such as justification as instituted by social reason-giving practices can our concepts and attitudes acquire the necessary epistemic authority to function as a rational basis for our specific beliefs and judgments about the world. One of the main culprits that we individuated at the heart of epistemological scepticism in this research was the problem of the insularity of reasons. This underdetermination befell any rational basis upon which we grounded our knowledge claims and our entitlements to justified belief. By endorsing a dialectical, intersubjective picture of justification, we can vindicate the normative and epistemic claims we entitle ourselves to. However, this vindication must be seen as the result of the thorough sceptical engagement here developed. The question concerning the authority of our concepts and beliefs leads us to recognise that what institutes their status as rational are the social practices and endeavours we engage in with other subjects.

The concepts we employ to understand the world, the normative statuses we attribute to ourselves and others, and that we defend when challenged are not grounded in any particular, blankly external fact or mental item, nor are they beyond our effective reach. They are instead instituted by what we take part in with other subjects and how we do it. We enter the sphere of actually intelligible rule-following only when we establish mutually recognitive normative practices with other agents. We make sense together of why we believe what we believe and do what we do with them. Knowledge and the normative status of justification are established as practices, intersubjective enterprises whose function allows us to engage with the world meaningfully, share information, identify reliable sources, understand our environment. We can explain the normative and epistemic disagreements that challenge our assertion, and we can inhabit the space of reasons where we have the opportunity to defend and revise our commitments. This is a distinctively *social achievement*. Experience as something we do, as work, is shared between mutually recognising agents, and this what allows us to go on in our epistemic inquiries in a manner that can still be understood as *rational*. Scepticism becomes the rational side of philosophy and epistemology by liberating us from assumptions we cannot defend, dogmatic presuppositions, pictures that held us captive.

7.1 Kripke's Solution

. To achieve this goal, we start by assessing the sceptical solution Kripke provided to the rule-following paradox, as it manages to set the treatment of the normative problem on the right track, even if it falls short of a satisfactory position.

Kripke argues that semantic scepticism cannot be left unsolved, as it is something we cannot plausibly live with (1982:60). The strength of semantic scepticism is apparent by comparing it with its external world counterpart. It is tolerable for us to live with the possibility that we might be dreaming or living in a simulation. It would entail that we have no actual knowledge, and all we see is an illusion, but as a conclusion it isn't unbearable by itself. The real challenge it issues is strictly epistemological; it asks for arguments to show that what we presume to know really *is* like that. Semantic scepticism flies in the face of phenomena we all experience, namely, meaning and communication. We communicate, convey contents, agree with other people, and recognise such doings. The

rule-following paradox tells us that all these events cannot be made intelligible beyond their being an idle *Spiel* or a mere pretence. There has to be an explanation, a reconciliation of sorts that will allow us to salvage meaning and our practices based on it. There is an instability in the sceptical paradox (Boghossian 1989:518), but its awareness cannot bring us out of our boggle.[1]

Kripke's strategy is to provide a crucially concessive reply to the sceptical dialectic. He provides a 'sceptical solution', upholding the idea that the sceptic's negative contention is at bottom unsolvable. A sceptical solution is different from a *straight* solution in declining to meet the sceptic's fact-stating demands or formulating truth-conditions specifically constituting what we mean (Kripke 1982:69). However, we do not require the kind of justification that the sceptic has shown us to be impossible (ibid:66). This justification is the semantic kind that supposedly grounds all of our intentions and behaviours; having that, we'd simply have a straight solution. Not providing such an answer is conjoined with a different picture of how norms and intentionality work allowing us to defend our normative practices. Kripke agrees with the sceptic that there is *no fact* as to what I mean when I use a word or intend to do something (ibid:71), not if by 'fact' we understand a particular item, either mental or ideal, that would answer the semantic question directly. However, this does not require endorsing the entailment from this discovery to the untenable statement that meaning is impossible or that normativity itself is a pipe-dream. Wittgenstein surely never argued for this conclusion, and Kripke heartily agrees. To adopt a terminology established by George Wilson (1994:370-2; 1998:107-8), the idea is to accept the *basic* sceptical conclusion and reject the *radical* sceptical conclusion by offering a sceptical *solution*.

This is where Kripke's inclusion of Wittgenstein's Private Language Argument in the rule-following dialectic comes in handy. By comparison with the Humean solution to scepticism about causation, Kripke reads Wittgenstein's idea of the impossibility of a private language as the basis for a sceptical solution to rule-following. We cannot obtain the justification we require because we implicitly endorse the idea that meaning is ultimately answerable to meaning-determinist, truth-conditional criteria. Wittgenstein's reflections show that the establishment of truth-conditional criteria does not constitute our basic

linguistic elements; semantic intelligibility and its criteria can only be instantiated *intersubjectively*.

This allows us to improve our situation by substituting to truth-functionalist criteria for meaning *assertability conditions* for statements and claims:

> Wittgenstein replaces the question, "What must be the case for this sentence to be true?" by two others: first, "Under what conditions may this form of words be appropriately asserted (or denied)?"; second, give an answer to the first question, "What is the role, and the utility, in our lives of our practice of asserting (or denying) the form of words under these conditions?" (Kripke 1982:73)

This shift to assertability conditions is Kripke's way of rejecting the classical realist proviso that to make intelligible what we think and do, we need to *state facts*.[2] Assertability conditions instead are *justificatory* conditions, but not in the meaning-determinist sense of providing us with an external fact we can point towards. These are conditions where I am *allowed* to state that things are such and such (ibid:74). It is a matter of permission, of the authority that we can legitimately claim when we endorse a judgment. The possibility of properly laying a claim about this authority depends on circumstances, not on 'entities and facts' (ibid:77). The circumstances that 'license' us to make assertions and judgments to have intelligible meaning must refer to a community (ibid:79).

This pertains to any structure which can be made intelligible, from declarative statements to sensations. We can observe this in the private diarist example at §258. By the lights of semantic normativity, if the diarist assigns a particular definition that institutes a connection between a certain sensation and a specific sign on the daily page in the diary, this constitutes an actual language. After all, the sign *means* that specific sensation. However, this instance of meaning-institution is isomorphic to all those cases that Wittgenstein had investigated in the first sections of the rule-following considerations, such as the cube example (PI:§§139-41), the continuation of a series (§143), or the example of reading (§156).[3] There was nothing semantic in each of these cases that compelled a subject to proceed in a specific way. The same is valid here. There is nothing semantic about the connection between them that compels the private diarist to use that sign to signify that particular sensation. What the sign stands for and the sensation it purportedly represents has no actual determination insofar as the connection remains a

private one. For the connection to be normative, i.e., to play the function of something we can refer to convey something, the private diarist needs to be held accountable by other subjects on when and why she writes down in her diary the distinctive sign. There are no semantic facts about the specific sign or sensation upholding the connection that could grant it justificatory, authoritative power determining a specific meaning. This would change if the private diarist allowed other people to read her diary. Other speakers of her language could ascertain whether her sign usage has instituted a distinct pattern, establishing a genuine connection to the sensation or if her use of the sign has failed in establishing such a use. Intersubjective normativity acts as the ground of what that sign means, not any internal mental item or semantic property of either the sign or the sensation.

McNally (2017:115-6) argues that this example is not an application of the social dimension of language and normativity. Instead, it is an argument against what seems a perfectly intelligible counterexample to the Private Language Argument that can be asserted without any appeal to intersubjective conditions of assertions. However, if this were so, it would simply be a restatement of the main gist of the initial paragraphs of the rule-following considerations, namely that the compulsion we feel is merely a matter of application habits. However, now we are past the crucial paragraph §198, where Wittgenstein talks about ways of proceeding forward as our *Gepflogenheiten*, which are socially instituted customs (Von Savigny 1991:81).[4] The argument against private sensations is connected to the result of the rule-following considerations. We cannot talk about following a rule in a private sense (PI:§202), and if a person were to write down her inner experiences for *solitary* use, we could not understand what she means (§243). The sections immediately preceding §258 are already embedded within the social character of *Gepflogenheiten:*

> *How* do I use words to signify my sensations? – As we ordinarily do? Then my words for sensations tied up with my natural expressions of sensation? In that case my language is not a 'private' one. Someone else might understand it as well as I (§256)
>
> When one says "He gave a name to his sensation", one forgets that much must be prepared I the language for mere naming to make sense. And if we speak of someone's giving a name to a pain, the grammar of the word

> “pain’” is what has been prepared here; it indicates the post where the new word is stationed (§257)

Suppose this ‘preparing’ was made possible by a solitary subject who never engaged with another subject in all of her life. In that case, we’d be back into either extracting a normative regularity from a mere behavioural pattern. Alternatively, we would be endorsing the meaning-determinist semantic notion we revealed as a dead-end. The extent of the private language argument against inner sensations is already placed within a reference to social customs. This is not to say that a person couldn’t keep track of her headaches in a diary and do this with a perfectly determinate meaning (Kripke 1982:110). However, for her reporting to be an actual meaningful report, she’d have to refer back to all the needed stage-setting so that what she does can be treated as reporting by herself and others (Williams 2010:288). She does this with a specific purpose that is already embedded within social customs. Couldn’t this purpose take place within a non-social setting? It would be an example of what has been called *teleological normativity,* involving much more than strictly intentional purposeful action (Bar-On 1992:32). However, this would set the requirements for being a normative agent way too easy to fulfil; we’d have to include numerous non-human animals, which would entail jettisoning the idea that being a normative agent means being a rational agent (McNally 2017:119).

By admitting normativity as non-factual, Kripke's solution substitutes for it intersubjective normativity, where meaning is possible by reference to conditions of legitimate assertion and attribution of normative statuses. To understand how these conditions are instituted, we must look no further than our language games, where these specific moves have their utility and role (1982:86-7). If we stay at the individual level, we cannot make sense of what lies at the bottom of our language games. This solitary conception underlies the idea of following a rule *blindly*. This changes if we switch to the communal circumstances in which normativity is exercised; the authority of the individual is not wholly sovereign anymore. What we do will be subject to correction by others, and our inclinations to judge or follow a rule in a certain manner will amount to provisional entitlements. Acceptance of authority of others is a function of continued agreement in the normative practices. The uniformity of the community in the responses given allows the avoidance of general disagreement and meaninglessness (ibid:90-2). Admittance into the community is a

matter of passing specific *tests*. Those who deviate from expected normative behaviour are considered to lack command of the relevant rule or concept. The community's denial of admittance into competent normative agency will exclude a particular subject from participating in the relevant language games (ibid:95).

The turn to the community seemingly supplies the required friction that makes it possible to endorse correctness criteria. Recall the two epistemological constraints that we identified in chapter six, extensionality and intensionality. The latter is now the immediate confidence that we are acting in agreement with our community, and we will expect the other members of our community to concur with us in continuing, for example, a sequence of normative acts in a specific way (ibid:96). Additionally, the reference to the community institutes the extensional co-variance between the rule and the behaviours that are conceived as admissible under a specific rule. This is where the main culprit of sections §201 and §258 of the *Investigations* is addressed, the idea that there must be the conceptual spaces for things that are right and that seem right to come apart. What ultimately institutes this crucial distinction is a matter of communal agreement (Miller 2020:4), without which any constraint would be mere empty categories.

We must not be tricked into viewing the solution given as one that establishes truth-functional conditions, as if it specified what the community must do when confronted with a specific rule. This would be an instance of a straight-solution, a dispositional theory simply transposed on the community level (Kripke 1982:111, 87). The communal reference the solution endorses constitutes the possibility of agreement between subjects, which is another action that individuals who participate in the language game undertake. Subjects are not bound to agree; possible disagreement in how we act in our language games is a plausible occurrence, leading one to revise their commitments or abandon the game if the disagreement isn't resolved. The solution is sceptical because the agreement in question does not constitute evidence that some fact-stating truth-condition for our assertions obtain (Miller 2020:6). Communal agreement creates instead the conceptual space for individuals to understand and make sense of what they do, in terms of treating their normative agency as objective,[5] because their course of action is agreed upon by other subjects sharing the same *Lebensform*. It allows one to test their

claims – implicit or else –, to understand whether their assertions are warranted in those circumstances, to ascertain whether how they proceed is how one ought to proceed. This '*ought'* specifies that we are still engaging in normative matters, but now there is no prior reference to a semantic level abstracted from what we do; there is a reference to intersubjective agreement. This discourse does not state facts; it discloses the possibility of agreeing with each other.[6]

Let us take stock of what the solution proposes. It moves from a meaning-determinist picture, semantic normativity, to one where normativity is a matter of intersubjective, functional relations between subjects engaging in shared practices. It rejects the idea of meaning as a matter of internal privacy and the picture of 'knowing our way about' as a matter of intrinsically authoritative knowledge of something given. This immediacy is a function of the confidence we acquire progressively as masters of normative techniques and practices within a community (Kusch 2006:29). There is a level of primitive inclination of understanding the correct way of going forward that corresponds to this immediacy (Kripke 1982:91), but this must not be construed as grasping a particular mental item, nor as being a basic interpretation of some sort. This primitiveness is fundamentally *intersubjective* (Kusch 2006:38); it is our inclination to see our judgment as something that can be agreed upon in principle by others. This solution echoes the Kantian notion of *Gemeinsinn* – *sensus communis* – for reflective aesthetic judgment. Kant argues that we endorse a kind of necessity in our judgments of taste that envisions the possibility for every other normative agent to agree with us (Kant 1791:§§18-19). This is a conditional necessity in our conceptual judgments; it is based on the idea that in uttering an aesthetic judgment, we understand our judgment as something other subjects can agree in principle with; otherwise, the judgment couldn't even be *communicated* to others. It wouldn't be a judgment. It is only by presupposing this possibility that our judgment becomes intelligible, even if there is no universal agreement with what we assert (§§20-21)[7]. Intersubjective agreement is the necessary condition of universal communicability of our knowledge, and it is not a matter of any evidential or experiential warrant:

> Now this common sense [*Gemeinsinn*] cannot be grounded on experience for this purpose, for it is to justify judgments that contain a "should" [ein *Sollen*]: it does not say that everyone will concur [*übereinstimmen werde*]

> but that everyone should agree with it. Thus the common sense … is merely an ideal norm, under the presupposition of which one could rightfully make a judgment that agrees with it and the satisfaction in an object that is expressed in it into a rule for everyone: since the principle, though only subjective, is nevertheless assumed to be subjectively universal (an idea necessary for everyone), which, as far as the unanimity of different judges is concerned, could demand universal assent just like an objective one (§22)

In this understanding, we can identify many aspects that Wittgenstein's reflections on rule-following and Kripke's sceptical solution essentially endorse. Agreement [*Übereinstimmung*] in our inclinations of judgment is not an evidential fact, but it nevertheless institutes the possibility of transforming something seemingly subjective into a judgment with an objective purport. This is a normative principle, but not of a *semantic* kind of normativity. It is specifically intersubjective; it is an agreement we reach *together.*[8] Kant defines this condition of intelligibility in our judgments as a "communal sense", a capacity for judgment that in expressing a judgment takes into account how everybody else would judge as well:

> […] in order as it were to hold its judgment up to human reason as a whole and thereby avoid the illusion which, from subjective private conditions that could easily be held to be objective would have a detrimental influence on the judgment. Now this happens by one holding his judgment not so much to the actual as to the merely possible judgment of others, and putting himself into the position of everyone else (§40)

This leaves open the conceptual space of disagreement and error, rejecting the mechanistic picture that was lurking in the background of Wittgenstein's remarks. The inclination towards agreement in judgment is, for Wittgenstein, the kind of *trust* one begins with, even if we do not know whether our judgment will agree with the judgment of others (OC:§150).[9] Even in endeavours such as mathematics, we agree with other subjects, and if this agreement doesn't take place, "then our roads part" (RFM I:§66). In establishing a dimension of *identity,* we create the possibility of linguistic understanding and communication. Otherwise, even "language would stop" (II:§72). This doesn't individuate any fixed dimension, as our agreement in what we call an agreement can plausibly change. Not even the *hinges* of our language are once and for all retreated from circulation, as there might come the time where our purposes and goals will entail a reflective critical stance on concepts and norms we view as fundamental. Forms of life in

themselves are at least in principle *negotiable*, as what constitutes the ground of their making sense to us is a function of what happens between us in our normative practices. The background structure based on agreement is, in essence, *dynamic* (Borutti 2005:96).[10]

Kripke's 'Wittgensteinian' solution rejects privacy, factualism, semantic normativism, and in general any form of determination that could identify a fixed ground capable of resolving every possible difference or doubt about what we do and what we mean. In this sense, it fully accepts a Basic Sceptical Conclusion. However, it crucially rejects the idea that meaning, justification, and normative statuses, in general, are mere chimaeras. Communication and meaning are perfectly real and ordinary endeavours[11] Our attempts to reduce language and conceptual engagement with the world to meaning-determinist or truth-functionalist structures are the problem. The reification of our practices into what they are not is what leads us into the sceptical, semantic boggle. The sceptical solution is the therapy we have to endure to free our understanding from committing such self-imposed blunders.

7.1.1 Primitivism

Kripke's solution has been met with a certain widespread opposition from most Wittgensteinian camps. While we cannot here engage in-depth with the extensive debate that the rule-following paradox and its associated solution generated, it seems, however, required to at least take into account some of the leading criticism raised, in order to defend the case for an intersubjective sceptical solution

A common objection relies on a different idea of normative primitivism than the one presented by Kripke, and various resolute readers of Wittgenstein have endorsed it. It suggests rejecting the idea that a real paradox is in motion in Wittgenstein's writings. Ultimately what constitutes our normativity is a matter of our belonging to the forms of life we inhabit, incorporating, therefore, the dimension of *Gemeinsinn* without requiring reference to a community conceived as the arbiter of our actions. There is no underdetermination problem at all in our rule-following; we have a sense of going on correctly given to us by the circumstances of our ordinary life. This perspective is usually associated with John McDowell. He has argued that Kripke's reading is predicated on the

endorsement of the *master-thesis*, the idea that one can only make normativity intelligible in inferential, interpretative ways (1992:45). This dooms us to the regress trope. However, it is a misunderstanding based on a mistaken reading of the crucial §§198-201 paragraphs of the investigations. McDowell contends that Kripke makes Wittgenstein endorse the negative character of paragraph 198 – the part on the rule and its interpretation both hanging in the air – while neglecting at the same time that paragraph 201 makes clear that there is a way of following a rule which is not an interpretation (1984:331). Prompted by the negative conclusion of paragraph 198, the Kripkean reader is led to seek an interpretation that resists this verdict, an interpretation 'that cannot be interpreted' (ibid:332). This is where we recognise that the mythology behind this understanding, which sees rules-as-rails, is untenable in either a regulist or regularist fashion.[12] McDowell argues that it is a mistake to conceive what Wittgenstein says as instituting a genuine sceptical problem. Instead, it should be seen as a *reductio*, a display of where the idea that we interpret rules brings us.

McDowell argues that it would make sense to refer to the notion of membership into a linguistic community because it allows for the conceptual possibility of making mistakes, something interpretation could not do. However, this completely glosses over Wittgenstein's distinction between meaning and consensus (1984:335).[13] This is a fair point and a legitimate criticism of the communal solution's overall tone, which we'll have to come back to in the next section. However, the main gist of his criticism is directed against the very meaningfulness of the justificatory question outlined in chapter six. Analogously to deeming unintelligible to ask somebody how she knows that she is to make a certain movement when we tell her to raise her arm (PI:§433), the justificatory question can only appear meaningful if predicated on the erroneous idea that meaning is always a matter of interpretation (McDowell 1984:338).

This is a contentious point because, while true that Wittgenstein viewed the traditional handling of such questions as handled by bad philosophising, which needed to be done away with, this doesn't equate immediately with the idea that no problem whatsoever is actually there.[14] Even if dissolved away, a problem must be there to begin with to be dissolved. We also argued in chapter six that it is a fundamental mistake to see the whole

paradox as simply issuing from the philosophical idea that mental items and actions need to be interpreted. Interpretation is raised in the *Investigation* as a possible candidate for a solution, after introducing the picture of rules-as-machines, and then discarded because inconsistent, almost in a Hegelian *Phenomenological* process of experience of error.[15] McDowell realised this: simply pointing towards the fact that we understand a rule not as an interpretation isn't much of a solution to a real problem. This fundamental problem is the one concerning the *neutrality* of our reasons. In McDowell's eyes, interpretation is an intuitive notion because it confers meaning on something normatively inert (1992:42, 45; cf. Verheggen 2000:198-9). We saw that most foundational or experiential accounts of evidence could not themselves account for the content of what they were trying to make sense of – experiences or, in this case, mental items – without falling into the Myth of the Given. Nevertheless, if the Given is exposed as a myth, the semantic question of what constitutes the content of what we believe and act upon is still available.[16] McDowell's primitivism tries to address this issue by showing how mental items are not inert and neutral, without at the same time incurring back into the Myth of the Given.

McDowell endorses a variety of primitivism, which he envisions as a *straight* answer to the sceptical paradox (1992:43), arising from Wittgenstein's following ideas: that obeying a rule is a practice (PI:§202), that we can follow a rule because we've been trained in what is essentially a custom (§198), and that the agreement in such customs is not a matter of opinions but of forms of life (§241). However, we should not understand this as reaching a level where normativity has to be done away with, as otherwise, there'd be no possibility of accommodating meaning at all. We have to steer a middle ground between the idea that there are norms that we have to discover and interpret and the regularist idea that norms are done away with entirely (McDowell 1984:341-2). McDowell focuses not on reference to communal assertability conditions but on our customs and practices. These practices are obviously intersubjective, McDowell is not trying to pass Wittgenstein off as a kind of individualist thinker,[17] but the requirement of publicity is different from how Kripke takes it to be. Kripke's mistake was to confuse the paradox at §201 with the idea that we cannot consider a normative agent in isolation. However, the 'paradox' targeted instead the alleged illusory character of meaning due to the interpretive requirement. Envisioning the subject in isolation was an attempt to avoid this conclusion, which itself

fails (ibid:343). McDowell is objecting to the anti-realist component of the social solution devised by Kripke because it would ultimately obliterate normativity in the relation between communal language and the world (ibid:347).[18] Going on as the community does is merely superficial correspondence, where an aggregate of individuals essentially mirrors one another (ibid:350).

The above point is sound. The 'mere exteriority' of Kripke's solution is one of its weakest points. However, McDowell's own proposed alternative has issues of its own. It holds that if we reject the anti-realist point that sees the linguistic community as a mere mirroring play by individuals, we can conceive membership in a linguistic community as giving us the possibility to "make our minds available to one another, by confronting one another with a different exterior from that which we present to outsiders" (ibid:350). This specification is not very enlightening. The main idea that McDowell tries driving home is that there is no interpretation needed to make sense of what others do. Language is what gives us the possibility to "hear someone else's meaning in his words" (ibid:351). As an attack on the social aspect of the sceptical solution, this verdict is inaccurate. One of Kripke's solution features was to explain the immediacy of judgment to satisfy the intensional requirement. McDowell, believing that all the troubles behind rule-following are due to interpretation, isn't allowing himself to recognise the presence of standing problems even if we don't endorse interpretive requirements. He commits the mistake of judging communal-directed responses as making use of interpretations even if they do not.

Additionally, in McDowell's proposal, it is unclear what is supposed to do the job within language that constitutes immediate understanding. From what can be glimpsed in McDowell's observations, what allows one to make meaningful utterances in a language is participation in the relevant customs that make up our forms of life. This doesn't entail rejecting a truth-conditional nor a realist construal of rules, nor adopting a kind of factualism, but only their extreme varieties which renounced any control on their content. There is no Platonist autonomy reminiscent of 'super-rigid machinery' (ibid:353). Normativity and meaning can be understood in relatively moderate realist terms, and they are made possible and available to us immediately by our having the forms of life we

have. Within forms of life, and the habits and customs we are thereby trained in, the immediate identity between norm and objective world is realised. To ask for more would be to reject Wittgenstein's dictum that philosophical theorising is not to be attempted (1992:50-1).[19]

McDowell's position does recognise several legitimate problems within the sceptical solution, especially that it blurs the distinction between meaning and consensus and that communal authority seems to disappear at the intersubjective level. However, the picture he aims at replacing this understanding with is dubious. Not only it relies on an overly narrow conception of normative underdetermination – through a peculiar mix of philosophical quietism and arguments *ad verecundiam* – but what it proposes does not seem to provide us with more purchase on what constitutes normativity and rational agency. McDowell asks us not to look at agreement between members of a linguistic community but at the customs and practices naturally shared between them. The question of how such customs are instituted and from where their normative grip upon us originates appears not to strike him as cogent. If the question we are trying to solve is one of normative bindingness, it would seem that McDowell doesn't engage with this issue. But this would be a mistaken understanding. The normative bindingness is, for him, a natural, essential component of the form of life. Paragraph §241, which arguably upholds the whole of McDowell's position, understands agreement as occurring not in opinions but in forms of life. These forms of life require our active participation to avoid the possibility that meaning is a matter utterly extraneous to us. The problem is that this proposal sits in between a kind of mysterianism, with normativity magically arising within our forms of life, and naturalised Platonism, where what we immediately grasp are not mental items belonging to the supersensible realm but genuine normative items present in our custom and habits.

The charge of McDowell's position being close to a kind of Platonism is not surprising. It resides already within Platonism as it rejects too the interpretive solution, which for McDowell is the main patsy of the whole problem (Zalabardo 2003:317).[20] By granting this much normative power to our customs and our forms of life, while at the same rejecting any request as to the source of their authority and endorsing a moderately realist

and factualist account, McDowell has provided a lesser version of normative Platonism,[21] one that doesn't see rules as items belonging to a different, outer realm, but to an intra-mundane one made by shared habits. However, by adopting this overall stance, we don't have conceptual resources to rule out endorsing the more substantial Platonism (ibid:319), which was the problem we encountered when assessing Wittgenstein's observations. Kripke's paradox established a genuine semantic problem that Platonism couldn't solve. After reducing it to merely a matter of interpretation, McDowell presents a picture of normativity that accommodates liberalised Platonism while subtracting the argumentative resources that made *rampant* Platonism unviable in the first place. All of this arguably in the name of fidelity to quietism.

This outcome is not unexpected. The turn to naturalised Platonism is the same turn that McDowell developed in *Mind and World*. Rampant Platonism, and the Given it embodied, threatened to make a mystery of how the realm of causes – the external world – could ever enter the sphere of intelligible justification. By bringing everything on the same level, reality becomes the conceptual realm, and Platonism becomes liberalised. The mute and enigmatic outer given becomes something immediately intelligible and normative, capable of exerting rational constraints on our judgments because always already conceptual. Tied to our *second nature*, our nature as rational, reflective beings lays before us something we understand directly.[22] If pressed concerning the question of how is it possible for these very concepts to be about the world, McDowell claims the "intellectual right to shrug our shoulders at sceptical questions, if they are asked with the usual philosophical animus, namely, to point up a supposed problem about whether our thought is in touch with its purported topics" (1996:143). This is because, for McDowell, ultimately, there is only a residual problem of human fallibility, not the question of what constitutes the credentials and authority of our reasons and cognitive methods. McDowell is in the strange position of recognising the Kantian semantic concern but never nominating it or engaging with it as such, i.e., as semantic *scepticism*. By doing so, he can claim to have vanquished scepticism (which seems to comprise for him only the Cartesian, external world kind) and explained the rational intelligibility of experience in a non-inferential way. However, he reaches this result by ultimately not addressing the Kantian question of what constitutes the objective and rational purport, the authority, of these very same

unbounded concepts.[23] By neglecting this question and at the same time taking up the associated constructive task, he ends up substituting for the Myth of the Given a Myth of the Conceptual Given,[24] intrinsically authoritative, normative, immediately intelligible, and arguably constituting our forms of life.

7.1.2 Projectivism

A different problem is however on the horizon for the sceptical solution. Crispin Wright argues that its non-factualism makes it endorse a kind of instrumentalism, where truth- and objectivity-talk about meaning is retained – arguably due to its usefulness in everyday endeavours – but it is denied factual status (1984:767). This is not a mistaken assessment: Kripke's solution involves as central a dimension of acting 'as-if' what we believe and do were true. Even if we lack an actual set of correctness criteria stated as facts, we still behave – and we're still entitled to think of ourselves as behaving – as if there were thanks to our membership in our community (Guardo 2010:377). The absence of objective facts means that the licenses we give one another regarding whether we fulfil the relevant assertability conditions are another language game in itself (Kripke 1982:97). The only fact we can talk about is the *brute fact of agreement* in our responses, which is something contingent (ibid:109).

For Wright, this constitutes an oversimplification, given the importance and the extent of self-directed attributions, where we don't merely pretend, but we do legitimately believe we're in the right of doing what we do and believe what we believe. Endorsing the sceptical solution might mean jettisoning altogether the entailments between what we mean and how things are that do play a role in our lives (Wright 1984:768). There is a tension between recognising the uncanniness of the ordinary through scepticism and still attach oneself to those very same normative statuses whose fragility has been exposed. However, the Kripkean sceptic might reply that this is still more feasible than trying to reconstruct the whole of our semantics without incurring scepticism once again. In addition, it is not true that everything about our meaning and truth-talk must be thrown overboard. The sceptical solution does allow for justification-talk and warranted assertion in a way that seems compatible with genuinely upholding how we ordinarily engage in truth and objectivity-talk.

Wright, however, argues against this contention by appealing to the concept of 'projectivism'. Projectivism pertains to those assertions that, notwithstanding their superficial resemblance to statements representing factual matters, are instead used to "*project* various aspects of speakers' attitudes and affective responses" (1984:760-1). This is what the sceptical solution ultimately recommends, a shift from non-projectivist to projectivist discourse concerning meaning. The problem is that this would ultimately involve projectivism about truth as well:

> If the truth value of S is determined by its meaning and the state of the world in relevant respects, the non-factuality in one of the determinants can be expected to induce non-factuality in the outcome … A projectivist view of meaning is thus, it appears, going to enjoin a projectivist view of what is for a statement to be true (ibid:769)

However, for Wright to hold projectivist views on such a global scale is incoherent because the sceptic will want to endorse the statement that meaning-discourse is non-fact stating, and to do so, she has to hold this in a way that it is not *itself* projective (ibid:770). In simpler terms, if global non-projectivism holds due to the sceptical solution, then the very conclusion of the sceptical argument must be held as a projective statement itself and not as an actual sceptical conclusion.

Now, there are a few issues with this argument. First of all, it seems to simply revert to the elenctic trope of self-refutation of scepticism, which is relatively ineffective because the sceptic can always double down and agree with this verdict and challenge us to come up with a better solution that escapes this predicament. It doesn't issue any conceptual contradiction to assume that even the sceptical argument establishes something *at best* projective. Connected to this is the fact that Wright's reasoning endorses the following conditional: "If meaning ascriptions are not used to state facts, then truth ascriptions are not used to state facts". However, observe the contrapositive statement: "If truth ascriptions are used to state facts, then meaning ascriptions are used to state facts". This is something the sceptic would very well deny. Why would the sceptic have to agree to the truth of the contrapositive? The sceptic can maintain that truth-ascriptions can state facts and meaning ascriptions do not. Wright sees this as impossible because he holds that truth-ascriptions are themselves a matter of meaning. Still, the sceptic can

legitimately disagree with him on this score, and hold as viable a deflationist account of truth (Boyd 2017:6; cf. Kusch 2006:172).

However, the above might be peripheral to what is really problematic for the sceptic here.[25] Let us say we allow global projectivism and that the sceptic has no qualms in accepting that even his sceptical statement has to boil down to a projectivist statement. After all, the sceptic we are following here is not a nihilist; we are not trying to uphold the Radical Sceptical Conclusion, but the basic one against forms of meaning-determinism and superlative justificatory facts. The sceptic could accept the moderate extent of the doubt while holding that all the alternative positions that were shot down in the process do not have the resources to take up their weapons once again and fight back.[26] To hold that projectivism by itself might be unacceptable would ultimately be merely a display of the still implicit endorsement of semantic normativity that has been dutifully rejected (Davies 1988:136). However, the problem that Wright's projectivism charge raises targets the *solution*: how can we talk about intersubjective assertability conditions as being effectively in place if we cannot talk about such conditions in a substantially factual manner?

This is a problem that others have raised against non-factualist rendition of the sceptical solution.[27] By asking how the community can evade the same sceptical argumentation that Kripke unleashed against individualistic forms of normativity, there seems to be a genuine problem of whether we are entitled to take assertability conditions as actually satisfactory for our understanding of normativity. This is fundamentally connected to those problems against the solution that we mentioned while analysing McDowell's perspective. The solution seems to conflate meaning and consensus and to rely too much on the actual positive verdict of our community in order for us to consider ourselves right in what we do.[28] Additionally, this doesn't seem in line with the 'immediate inclination', the sceptical primitivism Kripke aims at defending to satisfy the intensional requirement.

Most importantly, however, if the justificatory problem questioned the authority of our individual inclination in replying '125' instead of '5', why couldn't the same problem arise at the community level? It seems that the community might be liable to the same criticism we raised against McDowell. For him, the authority of our forms of life was immediate and

recoiled ultimately in a myth of the conceptual given. Here we are simply treading on a social, communal ground, and we are in peril of recoiling into a myth of the *social* given. This vindicates somewhat McDowell's contention that Kripke's solution boils down to a *Spiel*, a mere pretence, a mimicking play where everyone is just externally pretending that their entitlements are correct and their agreement with the entitlements of others is so as well, with others' entitlements suffering the same, tragic fate. Kripke's mistake lies in providing a merely *Humean* solution to a Kantian problem,[29] where we continue doing what seems to us right because we've always conceived it to be 'what is' right. However, even under the auspices of a Basic sceptical conclusion, we'd not only reject meaning determinism, classical realism, or semantic normativism; we reject the very idea of authority and objectivity of our meaning-constituting intersubjective practices essentially. It is not clear what remains to distinguish this situation from the radical sceptical conclusion. We are merely pretending of making sense.

The situation is probably even worse for the Kripkean solution. One might try to salvage it by allowing a kind of Factualism that would save us from such a dire dead-end while accepting the basic sceptical conclusion against meaning-determinism. This is, for example, the attempt undertaken by George Wilson (1994, 1998). His underlying idea is that by rejecting classical realism and its associated concept of meaning-stating *facts*, we do not necessarily reject talking of facts tout court.[30] Unfortunately, this is simply a way to be again into sceptical crosshairs (Miller 2010:174-5). If social assertability conditions constitute the content of meaning ascriptions, stating – facts about meaning ascriptions –, then they ought to be doubted in the same way the original classical realist conception came under attack.[31] Even if one tries to take this fact-stating discourse as requiring mere truth-minimalism – allowing declarative discourse to be disciplined according to proper and improper standards, with these standards being merely minimally truth-apt (ibid:179) – the mere fact that assertability conditions be understood as truth-functional standards, conditions of appropriateness, is enough to make us fall back into scepticism (ibid:180). Kripke is quite clear on the subject: the sceptical solution does not give any necessary or sufficient conditions of what rule-following consists of (1982:87).

Now it seems we are swinging on a see-saw. We either try to make sense of our actual practices of meaning-attributions by postulating truth-conditional criteria for attributions of meaning, making us liable to the same sceptical doubt we were trying to avoid, or we reject everything about fact-stating discourse entirely, falling back into projectivism and the absolute flatness of our meaning-involving practices. The line we have to tread is extremely narrow. We will attempt to meet the Kantian issue with a suitable (post-)Kantian account. The goal is to explain the authoritativeness and objectivity of our practices without thereby reducing any of their aspects to truth-conditional meaning-constituting facts. The idea is at the same time to counter the suggestion that ascriptions of truth-conditions are themselves arbitrary. This is why we appeal to Hegel's conceptual arsenal of experience as error and normativity as intersubjective *mutual recognition*. If we manage to explain how and why we understand the practices we engage in as authoritative and objective in how we understand them to be, we will reject the idea that truth-conditions ascriptions are arbitrary. At the same time, we'll avoid identifying some aspect of the practice – such as utility – as the truth-conditional *fact* within those practices that constitutes meaning.

7.2 A Hegelian Solution

Chapter five mentioned that one of the risks of the sceptical methodology we were trying to develop was to endorse a kind of dialectical egalitarianism that would always make appropriate challenges against any justificatory claim or knowledge assertion. While those stances that endorse egalitarian positions find other ways – such as endorsing infinitism or epistemological foundationalism – to ensure that belief can be had, scepticism, by rejecting these options, is in peril of becoming a nuisance, instead of the *rational* side of philosophy. However, we also mentioned that this outcome would be mistaken and that scepticism defends *epistemological* egalitarianism but not necessarily its dialectical counterpart. Scepticism, developed as a question about rational belief, cannot reject a priori that there might be a level where some assertions are not arbitrary, at least not dialectically arbitrary. The sceptic is tasking us to prove that the reasons we do endorse for this purpose are not inadequate for their task. Therefore, it is possible to accept the sceptical point against the reductionist, meaning-determinist accounts of

norms, reasons, and justification while providing an account that manages to establish that our reasons for our beliefs, meaning-ascriptions, and intentions are not so arbitrary after all.

One of the merits of Kripke's solution, and the main reason we lent it so much support here, is that it attempts this path due to its encounter with scepticism. It arises out of it as a form of self-critical reflection brought to its completion. It motivates abandoning a certain picture that held us captive, providing the therapeutic impulse that we endorsed throughout this research. However, we've also seen that it possesses clear problems. It looks ultimately too much like a Humean solution to a bona fide Kantian problem. It relies on brute agreement, which might easily collapse into rule by consensus, and it doesn't really account for why we possess the reasons and beliefs we have and why we consider them any *good*. In essence, it fails to provide a dialectical foundation for our practices, except for a vague gesturing towards our assertional habits. It might be superficially correct as a final picture, but this doesn't suit the endpoint we are looking for in establishing a rational standing out of scepticism.

This is why we suggest here an amendment to the solution. Given the space left at our disposal, it cannot be more than a suggestion. Still, it should at least suffice to provide an idea of what it could mean to provide an account of normativity that accepts a fundamentally sceptical conclusion but manages to explain that the authority our reasons possess is not entirely arbitrary. This is why to supply a Kantian answer to a Kantian problem we turn to Hegel. In this chapter, we cannot analyse Hegel's complex and multi-faceted relationship with scepticism, both Pyrrhonian and Cartesian or Humean, but this is what Appendix II attached to this thesis is for. We gave some suggestions, especially in chapter one, that Hegel crucially endorses our view of scepticism as having a rational *and* therapeutic impulse on specific philosophical and ordinary ideas. For an attempt at a more thorough treatment, we refer the reader to the appendix. However, we can say something here as to why Hegel is an apt choice to provide a way out of the issues facing Kripke's sceptical solution.

Already in his Jena years, Hegel's idea was that scepticism acts as the free side of philosophy (1802:322-3), through which free thinking, unfettered from the shackles of

dogmatic philosophical assumptions, can establish its proper domain. In the *Phenomenology*, this is essentially carried over in an attempt that crucially converges with ours. It presents a path of sceptical despair (1806:§78), where the subject is taken through a sequence of epistemic determinations revealed to go beyond themselves in trying to provide cognition of the world. The Problem of the Criterion is one of the main issues within the *Introduction* (ibid:§§81, 84), which sets the tone of the overall work in rejecting the intelligibility of absolute oppositions between the world and the criteria we employ to investigate it. Finally, the whole of the *Phenomenology* is, in essence, an investigation whose goal is to establish the objectivity and authority of our normative and conceptual determinations and account for how they arise. One of the primary impulses behind Hegel's work was precisely to avoid the possibility that the standpoint of philosophy itself couldn't be legitimately established. It appears to tick most if not all the boxes of what we seek, in employing scepticism as rational and therapeutic, and which focuses not on mere problems of correctness or error but which is engaged in a distinctive *justificatory* enterprise of our standpoint. If we aim at suggesting a way out of mere sceptical nihilism while recognising at the same time the rational and therapeutic bearing of scepticism and that captures how reasons exert their objective authority on us, turning to Hegel appears a warrantable choice.

Of course, the problem here, at first sight, might be that Hegel's meta-philosophical distance from Wittgenstein's position is too great to be of any helpful insight by bringing his perspective on this topic. We also touch upon this aspect in the relevant appendix, but here, we can limit ourselves to remark that the problem we encountered in the rule-following paradox embodies quite clearly the variety of normative, semantic scepticism that engulfed post-Kantian German Idealism. In addition, the Idealist insights concerning the normative and conceptual engagements with the world and other subjects were mostly revived in 20th Century philosophy by Wittgenstein's later work (cf. Brandom 2019:649; Pinkard 2010:105). In both, we find the problem of understanding the constitution of normative statuses in experience and that our understanding of phenomena is a function of their role in actual epistemic activities (2004:274).[32] The idea that the *Phenomenology* plays out the same dialectic that we encounter in the rule-following paradox, and in Kripke's reading, is an idea that has had some currency for a

while.[33] While for Wittgenstein, this is developed less systematically than in Hegel, both are concerned with trying to make sense of human agency in the world through appeal to the actual – *in der Tat* – forms that our agency assumes. For both, the authority of reasons arises from our practical socio-historical dimension where we treat beliefs, concepts, rules, institutions as forming the background of how we engage and understand the world (2007:207-8). They endorse the idea of experience as being more than a merely passive occurrence but as an active mediation between presentations of objects and what we do with them. Meaning, for both Wittgenstein and Hegel, is *use* (Rentsch 2019:52), instituted by our intersubjective, social norms and practices that structure how we make sense of the world and how we feel compelled to act in a certain way.[34] Our engagement with reality is a matter of our work with other subjects that share our mindedness and whose forms of life can essentially agree with, judge together, and how things are (Brandom 2019:470).

7.2.1 Scepticism as Experience

Let us focus now on the goal of these concluding sections of our research. The aim is to explain why our reasons come to an end that avoids falling back into the stances that lead directly to sceptical impasses and which has learnt from the previous attempts at accounting for our use of concepts and norms. In the first chapters of the *Phenomenology*, Hegel investigates epistemological stances themselves as objects of inquiry (Sparby 2015:113). His general verdict is that the semantics they endorse ultimately reveal those same positions as insufficient for their task. The assumed standpoints of our relationship with the world all attempt to individuate the source or the grounding stone of knowledge and normativity into something particular, finite, but in doing so, they restrict themselves to their one-sidedness. They lack philosophical insight into the limits of the particular determinations they offer as essential, and by doing so, they open the door to sceptical refutation. These standpoints leave no space for a dialectical determination of their content; they do not allow for an account of how the authority and objectivity of what is considered as fundamental arises, with the result that these same determinations are the source of the scepticism they ultimately surrender to (Hegel 1830:§81; Heidemann 2018:436).

One of the main changes of the Hegelian perspective from his early Jena years to the *Phenomenology* is the realisation that the standpoint of philosophy cannot be simply assumed as already established (Bristow 2007:151, 167-8). In the *Phenomenology,* Hegel emits the verdict that all kinds of presuppositions and self-assured concept use should be considered as a "kind of deceit" because their only function is to dispense us from addressing our most important task, i.e., providing the concept from which everything else depends (1806:§76). However, this can only be done via a thoroughly self-critical perspective, one where the claimed assurance of our standpoint is met is with an equal assurance that things are otherwise. Natural consciousness regards itself as *real knowing* from the start, as granting us a valid understanding of both the world and our intentional states, but by merely inhabiting a self-assured standpoint, we enter a path where we are ultimately doomed to lose that purported knowledge (Hegel 1806:§78). By choosing the atomic fact or the Platonist understanding of norms arbitrarily as the principle upon which to make everything else turns, we make ourselves liable to the arbitrariness charge as "it is non-sensical to choose *any* one of two opposites" (Faraklas 2017:55). Why the atomic fact understood in *this* way and not in *this other* way? [35]

However, this loss of truth is not necessarily something with a purely negative outcome. It ought to become instead the "insight into the untruth of knowing as it appears". For Hegel, this path is one of a "self-consummating" scepticism, directed "at the entire range of consciousness" in its development, aiming to institute the possibility for consciousness to become authoritative concerning how things are and how she judges them to be. But this path should not be considered merely negative. That is the crucial mistake of the ordinary/natural standpoint, viewing the negation delivered by scepticism as nothing more than annihilating standpoints. This forbids natural consciousness from understanding that this negation has a specific content. It is a result of self-critical activity. It is a determinate nothing. It shows us where to go when we've unveiled our previous standpoint as inadequate for its task (§79). This determinate negation is what establishes the phenomenological path, not as a mere loss of what we claim, think, and believe, but as what allows us to move to a new successive standpoint from which our reflective and self-critical enterprise can continue. This negation erases our arbitrarily privileged determinations and authorises us to exercise new determinations of the contents of our

concepts. By registering a dimension of incompatibility between what the thought of things and how they appear to us now, we are led to progress in our investigations (Brandom 2019:96); the new object that arises "contains the nothingness of the first. It is what experience has made of it" (Hegel 1806:§86). We realise that things are not as we took them previously to be. The failures we experience could issue in a sceptical result only if we view the effect of scepticism as providing no new content, as merely formal negation. However, by being determinate negation, we obtain a new possibility of making sense of something that would otherwise merely appear as inconsistent. We progress along to the actual truth of the thing, as we've learned something new about it (Sparby 2015:114; cf. Brandom 2019:98).

In Hegel's words, "this exposition to scepticism … should not coalesce into an empty nothing, but rather must be necessarily grasped as the *nothing of which it is the result*, a result which contains the truth that the previous knowing has within itself" (1806:§87). When faced with the sceptical outcome of one's finite standpoint on knowledge and norms, there is a choice before the subject. They can either recoil in the radical sceptical conclusion that nothing is known and that nobody means anything, thereby succumbing to the utterly nihilistic side of scepticism or, as Kripke's solution tries – maybe haphazardly – to do, take this result as something positive to cure ourselves of the pictures that held us captive. Scepticism becomes reflective employment of the concept of determinate negation not on the particular knowledge-claim but on the very criteria and determinations we endorse in investigating how things are (cf. Brandom 2019:97; Sparby 2015:124).

The above should attest how scepticism does not merely need to result in a radical, nihilistic conclusion. However, this also means that the way we experience objects is structured along this sceptical activity. Scepticism is endorsed by philosophy itself as that which allows philosophy to progress, we need to "traverse the false and dwell within the negative" (Nuzzo 2013:12). For Hegel, knowledge is always knowledge of states of affairs that stand in relations of material incompatibility and consequence. If the content of our judgments were not structured along these relations, we couldn't understand it as the content of something that is the case in the world (Brandom 2019:63-5). This also means that the content of what is judged to be the case cannot be considered apart from this

very activity of judging, where the subject discursively synthesises tests, integrates and resolves relations of material incompatibility and consequence.[36] For our judgments to purport to be about something, we have to be responsible for what we judge to be the case. Otherwise, there wouldn't be an actual relation of rational grounding between our beliefs and how things are understood to be. This can only be achieved insofar as there is the possibility of actively engaging with the content of the state of affair. To grasp how things are, is a result of this engagement, not as something merely *given*. A state of affairs has to possess this kind of non-psychologistic conceptual articulation to act as the rational basis upon which a belief can be possessed and according to which the belief itself can be deemed justified or unjustified (ibid:73). If states of affairs did not possess such an articulation, they couldn't be what rational belief is about. They couldn't possess a content we conceive as being thus-and-thus, upon which we can agree or disagree with other subjects. Natural consciousness neglects that what constitutes the content of our norms, beliefs, and concepts can only be understood as being *determinate* if placed within a net of inferential relations in virtue of which they can be grasped as determinate in the first place. By uttering a judgment on how things are we endorse that particular content, we commit ourselves to determine something as belonging to that experience, and we also simultaneously identify what is inapplicable to it (Brandom 1999:174-6).[37]

For Hegel, this conceptual structure of our epistemic experiences is articulated as normative experiences of error. Experience is an activity where we learn how to endorse, revise, or relinquish previous commitments. In doing so, we master a technique, a normative practice that institutes the very content of the conceptual determinations we are trying to understand. We engage in an activity of endorsement, revision, and rejection of possible predicates applied to an object, as we have to redeem our claims to how things are. When we register an incompatibility in how our commitments play out, we learn to treat something like an appearance whose negative status determines how its new content must be understood as "presenting the corresponding reality" (2019:77). Hegel calls this the

> *dialectical* movement which consciousness practices in its own self (as well as in its knowing and in its object), insofar as, for consciousness, *the new,*

> *true object arises* out of this movement is properly what is called experience" (1806:§86)

The subject learns that the object is something *in-itself*, but at the same time also that this in-itself is for the subject, which alters how the in-itself is understood: "this new object contains the nothingness of the first; it is what experience has learned about it". This is the structure of determinate negation; sceptical negation understood as more than mere formal denial constitutes how we justify and support our claims about the world, it allows us to make ourselves responsible for how things are in the first place.

This not only allows one to understand how and why something can be held as a rational basis for a belief in a way that doesn't make it arbitrary, but it also offers a solution to what constitutes the adequate criterion for our beliefs. The criterion is not merely something assumed from the outside of experience as if it were a heteronomous, external constraint on how one judges an object. However, it becomes a criterion that is immanent, internal to the experience as negative experience of error. This is an investigation and testing of reality as it appears to the subject, and *it cannot take place without* some presupposed standard (Hegel 1806:§81). However, this is not merely the arbitrary assumption that we found in the dogmatic position,[38] as this criterion is given to consciousness by consciousness itself *in what it does*, in its experiential activity. It is therefore subject to radical changes, revisions, rectifications. For Hegel, "Consciousness *distinguishes* something from itself while at the same time it *relates* itself to it" (ibid:§82). In this distinction, we observe that the investigated becomes both something in-itself and *for-another*, and this duality introduces the essence of our activity as epistemic agents. At first, it seems to us that we are investigating directly what the object is in-itself, but we realise that what we are actually investigating is our knowing of the object, whose in-itself is something immediately for the subject [*für-uns*] as it is an occurrence of *knowing*. We then realise that our knowledge claim asserts something on what the object is for us, placing the criterion of knowledge within the experiential activity of the subject (ibid:§83).

As Hegel notices, this doesn't collapse into mere subjectivism. By providing oneself with its own "standard", the enterprise of knowledge becomes the activity of comparing what the subject presumes to have grasped as firm within the object – what Hegel calls the *moment* or the *concept* of knowledge –, and the object itself as the moment of *truth*.

However, if what we have to uncover is whether our concept actually corresponds to the object, to the truth, and we understand the object as it is the object for consciousness, then the question becomes whether the object corresponds to *its* concept, not merely to a concept applied to it as if it were something foreign to the object (ibid:§84). This means that both sides of this comparison can be held as the in-itself, and the activity of consciousness is to progressively erase the difference between what is merely taken to be true and what is conceived as the object's truth. Knowing something is a claim we make to how things really are, not merely as they appear to us, and in uttering this claim, we commit ourselves to the idea that what we claim to know is more than subjective impressions (Emundts 2018:64-5). In this activity of comparison, we will have to revise our criteria and concepts for investigating objects, but this will automatically entail that the object itself will change: “In knowing’s alteration, the object itself is, to consciousness, also in fact altered: for the knowing which is present was essentially a knowing of the object; along with the knowing, the object also becomes something different” (Hegel 1806:§85). The object and our knowledge of it belong to our inquiry. The criterion for testing how things are, is not borrowed from something external but arises within this encounter and undergoes modifications in accordance with our experience of the object (Bristow 2007:221-2). From the failures of the proposed criterion, the sceptical experience that denies the purported knowledge-claim, we obtain the content to improve the criterion we provided. The enterprise is self-reflective, and in being so, there is at least a basis to provide reasons as to why one commits herself to a specific knowledge claim, which means that there is the possibility of showing the commitment as not arbitrary.

For Hegel, this is the sense in which experience is essentially *work*, a normative activity we are continuously engaged in. One cannot redeem her knowledge-claims or beliefs such as ‘here is a hand’ or ‘this is what I meant when I used the sign +’ without at the same time appealing to the concepts and criteria that the subject herself proposes. This is what the subject does in an epistemic enterprise, where things are to the subject insofar as they are practically distinguished between how that thing is for the subject and what it is for itself (Brandom 2019:74; cf. 1994:92). This is a doing which incorporates the sceptical moment within the distinction between how things are and how they appear to be. In this way, the subject understands herself not as a mere recording device for how

the world impacts her senses but as possessing an authoritative, epistemic standing in her engagement with the world (Pippin 2011:26). To envision our relationship with the world instead as having a level which is ultimately bare, devoid of conceptual implications, of relations of material incompatibility and consequence that constitutes the content of what is claimed as known would make the subject end up in what Hegel calls the 'dogmatism about finite situations' (Hegel 1801a:104; 1802:330-2; cf. Sparby 2015:122).

7.2.2 Normative Authority and Mutual Recognition

The section above has argued how scepticism can become an integral part of our epistemic practices. It provides a structure for how we experience the world and on which grounds we conduct ourselves as epistemic agents. Does this bring us out of the woods? Not quite. At this point, we have made a case for not viewing scepticism anymore as a foe to epistemological inquiry. Still, it is unclear what exercises the required rational constraints that allow our practices to be objective and authoritative. What we said above threatens to collapse again in either blind externality or mere subjectivism. We highlighted that to assert a belief means to endorse a judgment, thereby undertaking a responsibility towards what we thereby represented in our judgment. However, if this responsibility is merely to something conceived as completely external to the practice itself, we'd be back into the same problems we encountered in chapters four and five, the pretence that our beliefs are always already world-involving. On the other side, to conceive this responsibility as expressing an internal grasp of something within our epistemic practices would lead us back towards the problems of rule-following scepticism. We also haven't given a measure of how Kripke's solution was on the right track in individuating the required constraints as a matter of public and communal assertability conditions.

However, this is also why our engagement with Hegel is not over. In the *Phenomenology* the integration of scepticism within the path to the philosophical standpoint is not the only crucial moment. After going through a series of classically epistemological determinations of knowledge, Hegel turns his gaze to the normative activity of the subject itself as the centre of what makes the possibility of determinate content possible. In the last sections of *Force and Understanding*, Hegel clearly lays out that in investigating reality, the subject is engaged in exercising conceptual distinction about what pertains to the objects of

experience. However, in this experience, the subject distinguishes also herself from her conceptual activity, thereby becoming immediately consciousness of itself, self-consciousness: “Not only is consciousness of things only possible for a self-consciousness; rather, it is this self-consciousness alone which is the truth of those shapes” (Hegel 1806:§164). This is the crucial discovery that the phenomenological consciousness achieves: understanding how we make sense of the world as something we claim to know and commit ourselves to means investigating and comprehending this very normative activity of the subject itself (Brandom 2019:219; 2007:129).

In integrating the sceptical problematic into our practices, we realised that the subject's activity consists of comparing the concept she has with how the object appears, giving oneself the criterion to investigate things. However, in this process, both poles of this relation are bound to undergo a series of changes. This means that to provide an account of what can be authoritative for us as a rational basis for our beliefs, we need to look directly at our activity as epistemic agents and not continue aiming to find the ultimate kernel of truth into something ultimately independent of this very activity. The empiricist, naïve realist conception of objectivity brought us only in paradoxes or into complete arbitrariness. Rejecting this picture as finally authoritative[39] allows us instead to understand our epistemic and normative practices as something that needs no constitutively external authority in order for us to bind ourselves to them.

All the forms of merely empirical consciousness saw their object vanish as soon as they tried to grasp its truth (Hegel 1806:§166). Hegel suggests that we cannot understand how we engage with the world if we abstract from our own purposiveness, what is relevant to us in taking things to be thus-and-thus. The move to self-consciousness realises what Hegel already revealed in the Introduction, that ultimately for consciousness, the object as it is in-itself and for another are the same thing. This unity is realised in the normative inquiring activity of the subject, and it is this activity that allows us to be properly self-conscious, epistemic agents. The source of the required authority becomes our reflective activity on our thinking, believing, and doing in specific ways; we ‘trace out’ how we take things to be (Pinkard 1994:46). Only our activity as normative, self-reflective beings, allows things to be experienced as having a determinate, authoritative content. The

possibility of providing reasons for one's judgments and the connected possibility of doing so on grounds held to be appropriately authoritative crucially depends on what the subject itself conceives as authoritative, acceptable, or simply apt to this task (Pippin 1989:149). Only in this way can we understand ourselves as 'human animals' and as 'rational animals'. We become aware that the only authoritative source that suffices for the task, as we presented in this research, is ourselves (Honneth 2008:77-8).

Hegel handles here a clearly Kantian theme; the manifold of appearances can only be an object if it is related to a self-consciousness; however, this cannot be merely considered in complete abstraction from its actual engagement with the lived activity of exercising judgments, beliefs, and applying norms. Otherwise, it would end up being "the motionless tautology of 'I am I'" (Hegel 1806:§167). When self-consciousness investigates the world, the sensuous dimension is for her maintained as something firm but at the same time related to her status as a normative, epistemic agent. This unitary status becomes essential to reach the truth, the objective and authoritative content experienced. The inquiring consciousness realises that to have authoritative and objective engagement with how the world is, she must picture herself within the actual world, as taking part herself to that world she is conceptually grasping and self-constituting (Honneth 2008:81). Self-consciousness becomes *desire* in general, and for this desiring self-consciousness, the empirical world is conceived as something *negative*, which only when related to herself can become actual, truthful content. By relating this negativity to herself, which means by carrying out the normative activities, the epistemic practices of comparing the appearance of the object with its truth for the self-consciousness, "the object becomes *life*" (Hegel 1806:§168).

These are passages that appear to drift away from the kind of analysis we were giving, but this is only a superficial appearance. Hegel means here that the object itself ceases to be a mere externality that we must grasp in a heteronomous manner. The immediate object of self-consciousness becomes the actual lived, experienced object related to the inquiring agent. What constitutes the content of experience is now the unity of self-consciousness that carries out these distinctions, differentiations that relate to the same subject. What becomes intrinsically authoritative is the practical activity of the reflective

subject itself. It is the self's own awareness of its conceptual activity in the world that she inhabits, her lived endeavours of her epistemic experience. The subject gives her own certainty to herself (ibid:§174; cf. Honneth 2008:83),[40] as we remarked in the section above discussing how consciousness realises that she herself is instituting meaning, conceptual distinctions and identities, rational and defeasible grounds for beliefs. The turning point is that here any purported 'view from nowhere' is abandoned. We can only comprehend things in the midst of our lives.

The agent understands herself not as a mere apprehending subject of something *given* anymore, but as a living self-consciousness, engaged in normative and epistemic practices from a self-conscious standpoint (Pinkard 1994:47-8). We cannot understand what it means to engage with the world, properly endorse claims, have intentions, and justify beliefs if we ignore human subjects' lived dimensions as actual beings with aims, purposes, and desires. Knowledge is "a function of human interests" (Pippin 1989:148). This is Hegel's crucial pragmatist idea; the only tenable conception of why things appear as having a specific determinate content, and that can allow us to defend and justify the claims we present is to conceive of ourselves as being self-conscious agents engaged in a progressive determination of what we think, believe, and do in the world. What determines our beliefs and intentions is how we conduct ourselves in the world, and the truth of this determination is established by what we conceive ourselves to be (Brandom 2007:128). It becomes a function of the exercised normative practical differentiations, and their negation, carried out by self-consciousness in the world. Experience is 'normative all the way down' (1994:625-6), even when lived as essentially immediate and certain. The only certainty that is intelligible to us as normative agents is self-certainty, knowledge of those determinations we commit to as meaningful, valid, true.

However, the level of mere desire is not by itself enough to establish our self-relation, our understanding of our norms and claims as having epistemic merit and value, because this authority cannot by itself establish its objective and universally valid status. Even if the normative determinations and distinctions we endorse come from us, Hegel isn't blind to the fact that our adherence to what we think and do, changes, evolves, and might end up contradicting a previous intrapersonal moment. We can always "alter norms for correct

perception, inferring, law-making, or right action" (Pippin 2011:25). This was a result we already found in Wittgenstein's reflections. The experienced logical compulsion might reveal itself to be a mere psychological impulse. But this is a problem that also concerns Kripke's solution. It fans the flames against the communal solution by objecting that the community itself is never wrong on Kripke's account, as it decides everything for itself as it proceeds.

The crucial problem for self-consciousness understood *merely* as *desire* is a quite Wittgensteinian point we already encountered in the previous chapter. The figure of desire is essentially one of assimilation of things under the concept established by self-consciousness. Things appear as something determinate exclusively for the subject's activity which relates them to herself (Hegel 1806:§170). Every object is reduced simply to this experiential dimension to be subsumed under self-consciousness. Something is understood as an externality only for this externality to be annihilated by the normative activity of the subject perceived as authoritative by itself. This is the whole process of the life of self-consciousness understood as desire. It is a cycle of "estrangement of itself into shapes", objects and criteria of investigations, and dissolution of this estrangement which is collapsed, consumed again by the conceptual activity of the subject (ibid:§171). What is experienced by the self-relating subject as an object is *mere negativity*, something completely at her normative and practical mercy. In analogy with animal life, what sets the constellations of aims, inferences, practices that self-consciousness adopts is a function of *satisfying* what it desires. Normative agency becomes a merely instrumental relation to the inhabited world, directed at satisfying what the subject decides for herself.

When in the later *Encyclopaedia,* Hegel would revisit the various stages of self-consciousness he would not hesitate to define desire as having merely the determination of primitive impulses towards external objects of which it is certain they possess no actual reality (1830:§426Z). However, given that this is a merely *destructive relation* to the object, there is an inner tension between the particular character of this appropriation of the object and the demand of self-consciousness to be universally authoritative and valid (ibid:§428Z). What the subject does is authoritative for herself, but in establishing everything from her own self, there is a lack of friction, a resistance that would be capable

of transforming the responsibility we commit ourselves to in our claims into real rational responsibility. Our desire-dominated normative activity can lead to endorsing incompatible commitments, leading to failure (Brandom 2007:133-4).

Ultimately, this lack of friction is revealed as the untruth of the very moment of self-consciousness as desire. For all of her efforts to give oneself the sought norms, criteria, and authority, self-consciousness discovers that reality resists this completely one-sided activity. The authority that the subject took herself to establish, the certainty of the nullity[41] (Hegel 1830:§426) of the object subsumed under one's own normative and discursive activities dictated by self-consciousness as desire, is voided by the resistance it encounters from its objects.[42] It fails to find satisfaction in her purely annihilating activity of reducing everything to her concepts (1806:§§174-5). The claimed objectivity grounded on the self's own authority was not genuine. What the self was committing herself to was again an arbitrary authority, even if it came from her own volition. Real responsibility to how things are, was still missing from the picture: "reality in its living totality remains untouched by the activity through which the subject merely satisfies [her] own needs" (Honneth 2008:85). Desire made true her view of the world while guided by contingent, empirical desires and goals (Neuhouser 1986:248). This is wholly inadequate to stake a claim on how things objectively are. Desire was ultimately a solipsistic exercise of concept-applications and normative authority, nothing else than mere private rule-following, something that dictated as right whatever appeared to herself to be right (Landy 2008:175-6), making it impossible to claim anything as objective, entitle herself to any concrete authority, or endorse any actual responsibility. In Desire's self-dictated agency, responsibility to one's own self is the only thing that remains, and we've seen in Wittgenstein's reflections on normative underdetermination how little weight can this perspective carry, given the paradoxes this idea leads to.

To overcome this impasse, Hegel suggests that the conceptual, normative activity of the subject, together with its claim of authority, needs something more than the encounter with mere objects. The tension that self-consciousness carries over from the previous forms of knowledge she endorsed is the idea that there is a world that is just there. Even if now the subject has realized that there must be no intelligibility gap between her side

of representing how things are and what is by her conceptually represented, she ultimately cannot understand the world as more than inert and something other from the conceptual determinations she produces. This leads to the failure described above. On one side there is a completely self-contained normative activity of the subject, which has no authority beyond itself but pretends at the same time to be authoritative on determining how the world is, and on the other side there is the actual world which has been revealed as utterly indifferent to this self-referring conceptual activity. Hegel proposes that the change is in the kind of entity that needs to be encountered for normative agency to be properly authoritative and objective. It has to encounter another self-consciousness, another normative, epistemic agent.

The key to our Hegelian improvement over Kripke's solution lies in this aspect. This is no mere life-saving raft to salvage a minimal conception of normativity after our encounter with scepticism, as in the Humean position where we substitute meaning-determining facts with brute intersubjective agreement and assertability conditions 'as-if' they were true. Normativity's reference to intersubjectivity arises out of a *demand* belonging to normative agents themselves. It is either this or *nothing*.[43] Either an encounter with an object that is not merely an object or the endorsement of a 'frictionless spinning in a void', making our realization of experience as doxastic and conceptual ultimately idle because it solves nothing. The choice is between intersubjectivity and complete arbitrariness of our beliefs, reasons, and claims.

The last sections of paragraph §175 introduce the theme of intersubjectivity, but they have a somewhat hermetic feel, especially in their abrupt statement that "Self-Consciousness attains its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness", which we have to unpack. The self-sufficient nature of self-consciousness can only be made real in the world via its activity in it, but for this self-sufficiency, the authority, of the subject to properly exist, it cannot be that the object is indifferent to these activities. What Hegel calls the negation of the object, its being assimilated and subsumed under norms and concepts which is what would satisfy self-consciousness as an exercise of its authority, must be 'effected' by the object itself, in itself in order to be really determined by the activity of the self-consciousness. But what can realize such self-negation is nothing else than another

consciousness. Only living, normative, epistemic agents can exercise normative differentiation, revise their belief, commitments, offer reasons, provide justifications for their claim, change which rules they follow and deem as appropriate. This is the negative aspect of epistemic and normative inquiry that structures knowledge and truth as processes in our social and historical lives which integrate scepticism within themselves (Nuzzo 2013:13-4). Determinate negation, the sceptical way integrated within our engagement with the world, which drives the way forward for us to properly understand the world, can only be exercised by self-conscious agents. Understanding our relationship with reality as an inquiry on mere inanimate objects would simply collapse it into a 'givenist' position. Maybe not the experientialist, 'mute' kind of Given anymore, but a conceptual kind of given that claims to be comprehending its objects fully and rationally while having no grounds to establish the authority of what it is doing.[44]

The encounter with an object which is not merely an object but another self-consciousness shows that one can be a real, authoritative agent only for another agent (Hegel 1806:§177). The self-sufficiency of the agent can only be realised in an encounter – and often a conflict from the start (Ikäheimo 2014:21-2) – with other agents which are self-sufficient in the same manner. For self-consciousness to make sense that the object she was applying her concepts to is independent of her and receptive to this activity, she must find satisfaction not in inert objects but in other rational and normative subjects recognised as such. Only something that can make the subject really responsible for her claims, beliefs, and reasons will allow her normative authority to be objective and authoritative, but this merely translates that this something has to be another subject that has achieved her own normative standing, not something given by nature as such (Neuhouser 1986:252-3; Brandom 2007:135).

This constitutes the embryo of what Hegel calls *Geist*, our spirit, our mindedness, our understanding things in a certain way and treating them as valid and objective. This is something that can only be realized as a collective, *social* achievement. Here Hegel's motto enters the scene: "The *I* that is *we* and the *we* that is *I"*. The responsibility of our commitments, the entitlements we claim, the intentions we purport to follow, the justification we offer in defence of our beliefs are all activities that have to be taken as

such *by another self*. Our claims and reasons must be *recognised* as valid, as possessing epistemic merit, and this is something only another epistemic, normative agent can do. This evaluative and authoritative activity does not collapse into mere play or a veneer of pretence as in Kripke's solution. In our practical commitments, in the authority we exercise, in the challenges we take up to defend and justify our claims, we refer to other selves with the same claims to authority, objectivity, and responsibility we claim to possess. The other subject cannot be immediately assimilated as with the objects of desire. We treat and recognise those subjects as having independent standing on how things are as much as we claim to have it as well. The initial self-consciousness has to be recognised as independent in turn. This is Hegel's concept of *gegenseitige Anerkennung*, mutual recognition: "Self-consciousness is *in* and *for itself* while and as a result of its being in and for itself for another, i.e., it is only as a recognised being" (1806:§178).

Recognition becomes the 'essence' of normative activity because only by engaging with other subjects and recognising them as epistemic and normative agents in the same way the subject conceives herself to be can the subject comprehend herself as a genuine normative agent (ibid:§179).[45] What the other does is what she does. By experiencing this independence, this resistance, the agent understands how her claims, commitments, beliefs can possess the authority we sought. Conceptual determination is not anymore the mere one-sided command over an indifferent reality. Our doing concerns another independent, active self-consciousness:

> this doing on the part of one self-consciousness has itself the twofold significance of being *its own* doing *just* as well as it is *the other's* doing, for the other is just as self-sufficient … Each sees *the other* do the same as [s]he does; each himself does what he demands of the other and for that reason also does what he does *only* insofar as the other does the same (ibid:§182)

This is not mere mirroring of an external occurrence such as brute agreement. In what we do as conceptual, normative agents, we encounter another being that does the same as we do. In order for our authority to be genuine, it must also pertain to others. Our claims must be recognised as such by subjects whose claims we recognise in turn. Our reasons, the justifications we provide for our beliefs and judgments, take place in the same space

of reasons inhabited by others who partake in these same activities. Practices are not simply shared nor rely on a *brute agreement*, the Humean habit that Kripke had endorsed. This recognitive space institutes what we can consider valid reasons, as determinations possessing objective merit and worth. In this intersubjective doing, the very content of what counts as a valid reason is *instituted* (Pinkard 2003:212).

Most importantly, for this to happen, the recognition must be *mutual*. I'm recognised by normative agents who in turn I recognise as agents as much as I am. This activity is social in the sense that the institution of agreement and the grounding of our reasons can only be realized by this encounter with other subjects. It must be intersubjective, or it cannot be. Only by being answerable to *others* and the world we inhabit with *others* can what we say and do possess any content.[46] What we endorse, what we acknowledge as valid, can only be objectively so when one recognises the authority of what we entitle ourselves to as genuinely binding (Brandom 1999:171). But if there were no other subjects around, we'd be back into the realm of desire or of the private diarist, where nothing ultimately is instituted as possessing genuine authority. Epistemic and conceptual practices acquire their content only insofar as other subjects can recognise what we do and say as valid, and in turn, their evaluation is recognised as valid by the agent.

In being competent rule-followers, one is taken to be a "subject of normative statuses" (2007:136); her commitments and entitlements are valid insofar as the subject can be responsible for what she claims and can entitle herself to the statuses she claims. This evaluation can only be played within a recognitive community, which is not to be conceived as a kind of external, über-arbiter that simply decrees what counts as valid and what is not. Normativity and recognitive community develop one another. There can only be normativity insofar as other subjects recognise me as a normative agent and are recognised back by myself as authoritative, normative selves. It is reciprocal recognition that institutes the normative statuses we claim and bind ourselves to (2014:61). Crucially, this is not a change in perspective that suddenly transforms our ordinary activities and behaviours in the real-world as something entirely foreign to how we envision our everyday practices. Hegel is quite clear that the structure and the processes which led the zetetic consciousness in its first stages of inquiry is repeated as well at this level

(Hegel 1806:§184). What has changed now is that the other, what was at first the object to be subsumed under one's own normative categories, is not simply an object anymore, it is another self-consciousness, we confront an individual, and we recognise her self-sufficiency, as we are recognised in turn as self-sufficient agents ourselves (ibid:§185). It is the normative activity of both, the dialectical interplay between each respective commitment, claim to authority, reason, that allows what we say and do to achieve an objective status. Genuine normativity is instituted by what we actually do and follow within a recognitive community (Stekeler-Weithofer 2014:210). Normativity is dialectical and pertains to experience as the public, social activity, the work we engage in with others, and whose content arises first and foremost out of this engagement.

7.3 Conclusion

We can now try to pull together the threads of this suggested Hegelian improvement over Kripke's sceptical solution. First of all, now the authority of what we do and say does not recoil into mere arbitrariness. What we do can be understood by others, recognised as correct or incorrect, as valid or misplaced. If I say that I mean thus-and-thus, now I have a rational basis to defend my utterances because I am aware, at least implicitly, other subjects can in principle agree with me. My normative and conceptual life already goes beyond itself in my being recognised by other rational and normative agents. This is valid not only for intentionality but for the categories of knowledge and justification as well. My belief can be justified, and this justification is not foreign or arbitrary to me, because I know that other epistemic agents can evaluate the rational basis for my belief as valid, as appropriate for its task. In this sense, this is not mere pretence as in Kripke's solution. What we say and do in claiming beliefs and intentions and recognising the beliefs and intentions of others as having determinate content is treated as objective because *it is objective*. This is what objectivity means. It does not take a criterion from the outside of our lived engagement with the world. It arises within this engagement. In what we do, assert, and believe, the criterion of correctness is already beside us; it is immanent in our practices. Otherwise, we couldn't even begin to assert something with any epistemic weight. If I form the belief "X is p", this belief is something that can have epistemic merit insofar as I treat it as something I can commit myself to, and I can expect other epistemic

agents to endorse the same judgment if they were in my shoes. This is what constitutes judging rationally: to assume responsibility for the judgments we make, and assign it to others judging agents (Westphal 2009:763).

This also answers a related worry: in all of this talk of assertability conditions and recognition, we ended up with some kind of community-level coherentism or subjective idealism, only transferred across more than one subject. This is to misunderstand the kind of content that is generated by our normative activities. In grasping the world via a conceptually structured practice whose authority is instituted by relations of recognition, we understand the content of our beliefs and judgments to be hylomorphic, along what Robert Brandom has called *bimodal hylomorphic conceptual realism* (2019:214). It is the view on conceptual contents that understands them as being treated by two different structural relations while pertaining to the same thing. The content of our concepts is treated as being about something independent of us, the world, thereby endorsing an alethic modal structure. For example, if, while believing that I am sitting at my desk, I were to commit myself to the belief that "I am on Mars right now", this belief would simply be ruled as false because the belief describes an occurrence materially incompatible with the proposition that describes my actual current situation. However, that very same content is understood insofar as it is for consciousness, along the structures of deontic statuses. It is this aspect the one that plays a properly discursive role. If I were to utter the proposition "I am on Mars right now", another epistemic agent wouldn't recognise it as an appropriate belief to be held, and by decreeing it as false through relations of alethic modality, she would also assign no authority to that belief. It wouldn't be recognised as justified, and I wouldn't be recognised as reliable. In this way, one can endorse the idea that the practical, discursive activity of giving reasons, justifying beliefs, adhere to conditions of assertability in a way that goes beyond the mere linguistic dimension without having to fall back into some form of a given element. This objectivity that has arisen is not simply 'there' anymore, yet it is not simply dependent on what an individual agent does or think (Nuzzo 2013:19).[47]

This also allows us to make sense of a crucial claim we made in this research. By being normative, mutually recognising agents, we inhabit discursive practices where certain

utterances *can be treated as basic*. We said that the perspective we were defending could agree with dialectical foundationalism without endorsing epistemological foundationalism. By recognising and recollecting how the content of our beliefs, intentions, and assertions arise and obtain authority, we also learn the conditions where such beliefs and assertions are appropriate and enjoy default positive status. If I utter "I am seated at my desk right now", I can take this utterance as authoritative without having to provide further grounds for it when confronted with *any brute challenge* because I recognise that what constitutes the content of that assertion would be accepted as valid by other agents which I recognise as authoritative. This does not set in stone that specific assertions will always be foundational. The lines of what must be defended and what can be reasonably considered as enjoying a positive default status can be shifted, but they are shifted by the same intersubjective, normative processes governing our recognitive space of reasons. Justification, and consequently knowledge, are dialectical practices.[48] They are out in the open for all epistemic agents to participate in, but every agent can reflectively appeal to the moves they made to establish their beliefs as justified and their reasons as not insular. What constitutes a non-insular basis is a function of what we treat to have a specific authoritative status in the specific practice we engage with other subjects. The picture presented is a kind of social externalism. Reasons and meaning are *out there*, but they can be appropriately made one's own via the practices and the work of normative agents in the world.

We can also answer Miller's objection that every solution to the rule-following paradox will succumb to the radical sceptical conclusion because it must provide truth-functional criteria of correctness. Normative recognition does not provide such criteria; those are left to the local dimensions of practices, which are fallible and revisable. Recognition constitutes instead the possibility of defending our beliefs and intentions as contentful and rational. It does not prescribe what constitutes the correctness of our reasons and beliefs. It does not provide a set of criteria that need to be fulfilled. The criterion that self-consciousness gave itself is one of action, practice and engagement with the world and other subjects. It does not state what it means for a certain practice to fail or for a certain authority to be disconfirmed. In fact, recognition *can fail* to properly occur,[49] and this is where the trajectory of the *Phenomenology* proceeds towards imperfect, even barely

identifiable forms of recognition. The Master/Slave dialectic, Stoicism, Scepticism are all forms of attempted recognitive authority which encounter a moment where they must proceed beyond themselves. The enterprise of knowledge and normativity, their being practices, *goes on*. The role of recognition explains the possibility of disagreement and the eventuality that their authority is challenged and overturned. This is why the position while allowing for dialectical foundationalism, is crucially epistemologically egalitarian. We do not ever complete our task of engaging with the world and, consequently, restructuring, revising, and re-negotiating the authority we entitle ourselves to and the content of our norms.

These last aspects also explain why, ultimately, this is a sceptical solution. Not only we've given *no determinate facts* as constituting what determines meaning, but the mere presence of recognition also does not eliminate the possibility of disagreement or conflict – Recognition itself is a struggle –. Additionally, in order to reach this perspective, we've had to integrate scepticism into our outlook. We rejected the Myth of the Given, we've rejected meaning-determinism, we realized that all such determinations are arbitrary and partial. The very possibility of exercising conceptual distinctions as meaningful and claiming authority based on such activity in a non-arbitrary manner has resulted from our sceptical work. Scepticism has proved itself as the rational aspect of epistemology and philosophy, making us realize what was problematic in our ordinary perspective on the world, and allowing us to re-capture what was valuable of those stances. As in the Hegelian Determinate Negation, scepticism ceased to be something merely formal. Its activity pointed out how to proceed once we've cured ourselves of our tendencies to reify experiences, norms, beliefs, and thoughts. It might be said that all we have offered here is a kind of *Unhappy Consciousness*, forbidden from getting at how things really are independently of our practices and condemned to swing between the poles of foundationalism and scepticism. But here is where the therapeutic, mostly Pyrrhonian aspect of this solution is unearthed. To long for a contentful, meaningful realm where things are determined in entire independence from our engagement with them is a relic of a constitutively metaphysical outlook on the world. We have realized that our assertions, beliefs, reasons do not suffer any kind of defeat or debasement by rejecting that outlook as a mistaken view of how we experience the world. This indeed ties what

we say and do to our practices and interactions with other subjects, which are contingent, even local. But in each of these occurrences, we will have the required basis as rational agents to understand why we think what we think and why our beliefs can be adequately supported and defended. We understand who we were and where we are directed. This is ultimately the *recollective* Hegelian lesson. Objectivity and authority can only arise from social, practical, historical processes, which are in turn largely sceptical roads. It required us to question what we held as most dear to us. The truth of scepticism consisted in making us realize – as Cavell himself argued (1979:241) – that our relation to the world is not in terms of what we naively thought before as a relation of knowledge. Scepticism made us aware that privileging certain concepts reveals they cannot bear this burden (Fogelin 1994:206); but it also reveals to us that how we understand the world is a matter of our social and normative histories (D'Agostini 2002:144).

Knowledge itself arises from the practices we take part in, which ground our reasons, meanings, and sense. Scepticism remains by our side here. As long as we inhabit a reality, there will always be the need for the kind of reflective, self-critical practice within the practices we already share and engage in. For whatever temptation of recoiling back into sheer dogmatism and obtaining authority via dominance, scepticism will always allow us to exercise our free thought. In viewing knowledge as an intersubjective practice that integrates scepticism, we might end this research with an exhortation to the wider epistemological community. Under the banner of scepticism, epistemologists of the world unite; you have nothing to lose but your dogmatic chains.

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[1] The fact that this paradox cannot be shrugged off as many would eagerly do with regard to veil of perception scepticism is probably the source for verdicts holding that no paradox is present *at all* in either Wittgenstein's remarks, or that it is solved before §198. Cf. Read 1995; Tait 1986; and Shanker 1984.

[2] Kripke refers to a passage in the *Investigations*, §304, where Wittgenstein suggests that the only way to break free of these paradoxes is to get reject the idea language's purpose is solely to convey fact-stating thoughts. This suggests a radical fallibilist notion: our world-involving practices need not have a factive status. Kusch (2010:222; 2011:19) has argued that the later Wittgenstein rejects factivity of knowledge – at least as a necessary element – due to his rejection of classical realism and the observation that 'to know' plays different roles in our ordinary practices (cf. OC:§§ 8, 18, 116, 174, 243, 260, 330, 349, 559).

[3] Cf. Kripke: "The paradox of the second part of the *Investigations* [§§138-242] constitutes a powerful critique of any idea that 'mental representations' uniquely correspond to 'facts'" (1982:85).

[4] The meaning in German of the word *Gepflogenheit* is also used by Kusch (2006:248-50) to argue against positions like Baker&Hacker's (1984:16-21) that allow customs and institution to be made intelligible relatively to an isolated individual.

[5] Keeping in mind the broadly deflationist meaning that these attributes have for Kripke and arguably for Wittgenstein himself, cf. Guardo 2018:88. Claudine Verheggen has argued (2000:200) that the reason why Kripke insists that the solution be sceptical is that he is employing an overtly-narrow conception of facts, allowing only the physical to count as such, not the intentional. This is mistaken: Kripke's argument targets the physical as well as the intentional, the latter conceived as the kind of 'mental event' that has to happen in one person's head in order to consider her as following a rule.

[6] Kripke doesn't restrict this to declarative sentences but he admits that the notion of assertability conditions is somewhat a simplification (1982:73-4). The solution aims at instituting general justificatory-conditions to make moves in language games (McNally 2017:126).

[7] For Kant reflective aesthetic judgments have no epistemological purport, in the sense that they are not judgments based on cognitive categories, it is a matter of *Gefühl*, sentiment, not *Begriffen*, cognitive ('*erkenntnistheoretischen*') concepts.

[8] As the German Kantian text expresses clearly, *Übereinstimmung* is in fact a kind of *Zusammenstimmung*, judging or evaluating 'together'.

[9] On the fact that for Wittgenstein the notion of agreement is in substantial part an *aesthetic* notion cf. Borutti 2005:98-9. Agreeing with other subjects it's at heart a matter of sharing a feeling, an awakening internal to the sense of the forms of life and grammars we share. This is connected with Wittgenstein's idea of *seeing-as*. Cf. PI:ix, §§171-6.

[10] Cf. also Borutti 2006:72: The reference is to paragraph §94 of *On Certainty*, which identifies the background upon which we judge things as either true or false as spared from this very same evaluation as a matter of practical intelligibility. This background is stable in the sense that its logico-grammatical function is what allows us to see things and the world in a determinate manner, our horizon of intelligibility (ibid:74). But as a horizon, its reaches and centre continuously shift and undergo modifications we can't foresee and exclude a priori.

[11] For the relevance of communication as a distinctive achievement of Kripke's solution cf. Guardo 2010:380-1; 2018:100-3.

[12] In both cases for McDowell the rules would be heteronomous for our proper understanding of them. At least in this regard he shares Kripke's (and Wittgenstein's) aversion to meaning-determinism, at least when construed as a kind of *last interpretation*. McDowell specifically mentions the grasping of patterns – regularism – further up in his analysis (1984:349).

[13] This is a point that is found in many others who attack the social solution on such broadly neo-Wittgensteinian grounds, cf. Minar 1991, and Gustafsson 2004. This defence of Kripke's reading should be valid for their objections as well.

[14] Simply relying on arguments from authority in this manner should make it less surprising that contemporary philosophy of mind hasn't actually followed Wittgensteinian tracks.

[15] On the link between how Wittgenstein came to see a way of understanding a rule which is *not* an interpretation and the *Investigations* as manifesting a trajectory through various plausible but ultimately mistaken ways of understanding meaning and norms cf. Schulte 2007:473-5.

[16] The problem is not that the rule, or our reasons, are inert. They provisionally assume this status when we realize how we understood them was an arbitrary rendition, consequently suspending judgment on their determination. Recoiling from the Myth of the Given brings us under the request of doing some positive philosophizing to regain the justificatory support lost in exposing the Given as a myth. Cf. Verheggen 2000:203 on how pointing towards the inert aspect of mental items is not enough for McDowell's accusation against the sceptic to work, and 2003:290-1 for the application of this point to rule-following.

[17] McDowell is quite explicit in defending customs and practices as being practices of *a community* (1984:345). Cf. on this Kusch 2006:222. On a general possibility of convergence

between the two stances, Kusch is optimistic (ibid:226-7), and some of our analysis here does indicate that a middle-way between Kripke and McDowell' position would provide a better answer than either of the two proposals by themselves.

[18] Which is not to say that the social solution offered ultimately rejects normativity, but that it makes normativity between community and world impossible, due to its either ending up in a regress of interpretation or the fact that at the level of the community there is no authority to be met, so it the normative *Gültigkeit* one hoped to find is fundamentally lost (cf. 1984:336).

[19] "The right response to 'How is meaning possible?' or 'How is intentionality possible?' is to uncover the way of thinking that makes it seem difficult to accommodate meaning and intentionality in our picture of how things are, and to lay bare how uncompulsory it is to think in that way" (McDowell 1992:47).

[20] Claudine Verheggen disagrees in viewing semantic Platonism as requiring interpretation (2003:292) It is true that an unrefined version of Platonism leads to a regress, but as we made clear in chapter six, Platonism can very well simply state that the ultimate graspable item is self-interpreting or immediately present before one's mind.

[21] Cf. on this Guardo 2018:78. Other neo-Wittgensteinians have acknowledged that *Lebensformen-normativity* ultimately expresses a form of Platonism, cf. Finkelstein 2000:72-3.

[22] Once one conjoins McDowell's treatment of rules and his wider picture presented in *Mind and World* and later works, where he argues that experience gives us an *indefeasible warrant* for judgment (2006:27-8; 2011:148; 2018:97), it becomes very difficult not to ascribe to him a rule-as-rails picture, which he however claims to reject.

[23] McDowell is clear in endorsing this dimension of perception as already involving objective content without any mediation in between, and in understanding the possible threat of the sceptical argument as a matter of illusion or inductive scepticism (1995:891-2). McDowell, notwithstanding his engagement with the Kantian problematic, views scepticism merely as a matter of error, as a *quid facti* instead of the *quid iuris* that it is motivated by (cf. Gabriel 2008:198).

[24] For example, he argues that the intuitional dimension of experience is not discursive, and its unity is a given. The only thing we have to reject is that the single components of this unity be thinkable separately from this unity as self-standing building-blocks (McDowell 2008:6-7). There seems to be in fact a *myth of the conceptual capacity* at play in McDowell's position in general, the idea that we are endowed with faculties whose mere operation is capable of giving us indefeasible warrant for our judgments and beliefs, whose credentials are contained already within that exercise, even if we are sometimes misled not to properly judge upon them (2018:91-2, 95; 2011:151). But whether our capacities do possess the required epistemic merit is precisely the kind of question raised by semantic scepticism. Asserting that no gap is present between us and the world cannot suffice to establish this point, as too much hangs from it.

[25] And in addition, there is no space here to get involved into questions about the metaphysics of truth, as a treatment of this particular node would arguably require. For the chances of a deflationist, and *non-projectivist*, construal of the sceptical solution cf. Davies 1988:135-6

[26] Kusch (2006:154-5, defends the soundness of Wright's charge, and allows the sceptic to retain a minimal form of factualism, of the intersubjective, deflationist kind (ibid:171-3). While what we propose here does not differ significantly from Kusch's idea, we believe it might be a misnomer to hold the intersubjective *facts* that determine conditions of assertability as instituting the contentious notion the sceptic is concerned with, semantic factualism (cf. Davies 1988:132-3 for an argument that what the sceptical solution inherits from the paradox is the rejection of *semantic* facts, not facts tout court).

[27] Cf. Boghossian 1989:525; Blackburn 1984:41-3.

[28] And as Sextus noticed, mere appeal to the majority is fundamentally idle (PH II.43; M VII.327).

[29] Cf. on this Zalabardo 1989:40; Geier 2021:218.

[30] Both Boyd (2017:9), and Miller (2010:181) argue that it does.

[31] McNally notices (2017:88) that Wilson has recently amended his position in response to Miller's objections, with the result that his proposal ceased to be a form of factualism. Verheggen (2003:296-9) holds that Wilson errs in understanding the problem as one of determination instead of regress, and in taking seriously the sceptic's demand. On Verheggen's criticism we side squarely with Wilson.

[32] Cf. On this Hegel 1801a:69-75, Wittgenstein Z:§309. Both are also crucially close on the theme of epistemological anti-foundationalism (Forster 1989:109-10; Perissinotto 1991:160-1), cf. OC:§§559, 563; Z:§§301, 314; Hegel 1812:49, 344-345; 1825:398; 1830:§§16, 42-44, 112.

[33] Cf. For example Taylor 1976:155-6, 163, Forster 1998:207-9, Pinkard 2007:206; Brandom 2007:137; 2019:653-54. See also the reference to the connection between autonomous agency and the impossibility of following rules about the self's own agency in Pippin 2011:22-3.

[34] Cf. Nuzzo 2010:64; Rentsch 2019:54; Brandom 2019:562.

[35] This is the main structure of the *Sense-Certainty* chapter of the *Phenomenology* (Hegel 1806:§§90-110), targeting immediacy, singularity, and positivity of empirical knowledge-claims as the principles incapable of performing their assigned cognitive functions, to which *mediation, universality,* and *negativity* are contraposed (cf. Kozatsas 2017:86; Heidemann 2011:90-1).

[36] This is what Brandom calls Hegel's 'pragmatic-functionalist' idea (2019:69-71). On reading Hegel as a pragmatist cf. also Emundts (2015:621), who argues that for Hegel knowledge is always established "by a procedure of testing different claims".

[37] Cf. Stekeler-Weithofer 20144:227.

[38] In fact, for Hegel the crucial question is precisely what we're allowed to assume in order to begin our investigation (Emundts 2018:67-8). This is also shown in his criticism of *a priori* approaches to knowledge, such as Kant's, that pretend to discover what constitutes real knowledge before engaging in actual epistemic practices (cf. Hegel 1830:§10)

[39] Hegel is not proposing merely an alternative to the empirical forms of knowledge encountered before. The turn to self-consciousness is *their result* (Nuzzo 2013:17-8).

[40] Normative activity becomes determining what counts as what (Landy 2008:174).

[41] This term has been defined as the *erotic* (Brandom 2007:133) or *orectic* (Pippin 2011:30) significance of the object, in the sense of the subject being conscious ultimately only of *herself* in her experience of the object (Hegel 1830:§427), cf. Ikäheimo 2014:20.

[42] This can generate an infinite repetition of this movement, as desiring self-consciousness continues striving for something which *as desire* it cannot satisfy (Hegel 1806:§175; 1830:§428Z, cf. Pippin 2011:49).

[43] Cf. Nuzzo 2013:18-9; Westphal 2009:776.

[44] This is the limit of McDowell's conceptualist position. McDowell provides an answer as to how experience can provide rational constraints on justification by establishing natural reality as conceptual in itself. By neglecting to a significant degree intersubjectivity, he endorses 'naturalised Platonism'. On this blindspot of McDowell, and his understanding of Hegelian idealism, cf. Testa 2009:345.

[45] See Testa 2010:36-9 on the properly *epistemological* weight of the concept of *Anerkennung*.

[46] Cf. Hegel 1806:§440, §641. This is the concept of the *Reich der Sittlichkeit*. Cf. Pippin 2011:61; Testa 2010:38; Pinkard 2003:216.

[47] Cf. Hegel 1806:§344. Consciousness no longer wants to *find* itself immediately, but engender itself by its own activity. This can only happen as constituting a shared understanding, it exhibits something *universal* (cf. Ibid:§§416-7; Forster 1998:221; Nuzzo 2013:23).

[48] Cf. Lammenranta 2011a; Wieland 2013; Williams 2015; and Brandom 1994:ch.4.

[49] See Westphal 2009:755 on this process being *fallible*.

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THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

The Truth of Scepticism: on the Varieties of Epistemological Doubt

APPENDICES

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Premise

The following are two Appendices to the thesis submitted for evaluation. Their role is to analyse and make clearer to the reader two moments of the thesis, which could not take place within the main text of the research due to word-limit constraints as illustrated in the Degree Regulations of the University of Edinburgh.

They are included because they cover two turning points which the reader might find themselves requesting more guidance as to why certain investigative lines are undertaken.

The first appendix refers to a debate in contemporary epistemology concerning the relationship between the closure principle and the underdetermination principle as distinct sources of scepticism. In chapter five, the underdetermination principle is employed to generalize the sceptical dialectic that arose out of the Agrippan Modes. This is done for two reasons: the underdetermination principle seems to be a relatively intuitive principle that any standard theory of knowledge would want to adopt. Additionally, it also provides the answer to a lingering question that had begun in chapter two. There we found that the closure-based argument essentially relied on its minor premise to have a prima facie plausibility over its modus ponens alternative. Underdetermination is offered as the basis for the contention that we do not know the denial of the sceptical hypothesis. However, we had glossed over the question of what makes underdetermination the fundamental principle of the two. Why is closure the principle the one that relies on underdetermination to engender sceptical doubts, and the inverse relationship does not subsist? The debate on whose principle takes precedence is a fairly complex and scarcely researched field. In the appendix, we offer an analysis of the debate *and* an argument for the pre-eminence of underdetermination. This will be in the form of a counterargument to Stewart Cohen, who first provided a perspective that viewed closure as fundamental. It is quite a niche debate, but it underlies a crucial moment in our thesis. We believe that the counterargument offered can advance the debate by showing how Cohen's understanding of the sceptical problem suffers from the same defects the ordinary perspective on doubt endorses.

The second appendix tries to provide something more in terms of a constructive proposal than what we could present in the last chapter of the thesis. While investigating Kripke's sceptical solution and the Hegelian amendment we proposed, we analysed how scepticism ends up integrated with the idea of knowledge as a practice and experience as work, something the subject actively engages in. However, we did not have enough space to properly develop the idea that integrating the sceptical perspective makes the proposed standpoint on knowledge a distinctively Pyrrhonian one. The appendix tries to amend this issue by investigating how the sources of the preferred sceptical solution, Wittgenstein and Hegel, can be considered as endorsing substantial Pyrrhonian insights and converge, notwithstanding their dramatic distance on the meta-philosophical spectrum – or at least, their *alleged* distance in the general philosophical pantheon –, on providing a philosophical therapy directed against most ordinary philosophical theorizing. Originally this appendix was projected to come in the thesis before the solution chapter. Still, it may also be read as an addendum to that solution, one that ought to make clear how the position we reached at the end of our sceptical journey can still be considered an appropriately sceptical one, albeit not of the formal, merely negative kind of scepticism both Hegel and Wittgenstein fought against.

Appendix I

I.1 On the Relationship Between Closure and Underdetermination

The role of this appendix is to illuminate a section where the reader might have found a crucial transition left unexplained. We presented the standard epistemological argument as being based on the closure principle, together with its minor premise of ignorance to give at least an intuitive motivation for proceeding with the sceptical modus tollens route instead of the neo-Moorean modus ponens. However, in chapter five, we established a different principle, Underdetermination, which can also structure a sceptical argument. We only briefly mentioned that underdetermination motivates the ignorance premise of the closure argument. By replying to charges of infallibilism, we integrated this ignorance requirement, suggesting that it is how scepticism should be understood generally. Not, as many do, simply by thinking it as establishing uneliminated scenarios of deception, but as raising a question about the epistemic merit of our beliefs. However, the notion that underdetermination underlies closure scepticism is not a trivial statement, and not everybody agrees with this idea. Stewart Cohen has offered a quite elaborated argument to show that the situation is opposite to the one we have been trying to present. It is closure that is necessary for underdetermination problems to arise. This is quite important, because if closure is viewed as *the fundamental principle* of the two to generate scepticism, this might expose a weak side in our understanding of scepticism as motivated by an attack against rational belief, rather than by mere uneliminated possibilities. This is because closure establishes a material implication between evidence and a certain state of affairs which should obtain if the evidence can be claimed as known, as reporting not what merely seems to the subject but an actual fact. This means that the sceptical prowess of closure is ultimately predicated on the possibility of uneliminated deceptive scenarios.

That there is a tension between closure and its minor premise, at least in terms of epistemic priority, is something we suggested as well when we investigated the relations of epistemic priority between a proposition H and the denial of the sceptical hypothesis in chapter two, analysing Klein's question-begging charge. We ultimately agreed with Klein that there is a privileged epistemic relation between knowledge of the denial of the sceptical hypothesis and the possibility of using evidence as valid.

This did not make the closure-based argument useless or question-begging, but it showed that closure needs something more to get the sceptical argument going.

In this appendix, we will defend the idea that it is underdetermination the fundamental principle of the two for generating scepticism. It is a relatively underdeveloped debate, probably owing to the complexity of the issue primarily as analysed in Brueckner 1994 and Cohen 1998. We propose a counterexample to Cohen's argument, which shows how his application of evidential support relations as proving the fundamental character of closure is misplaced. Cohen's strategy is apt for the realm where the underdetermination principle is ordinarily employed as a common currency, namely, underdetermination of scientific theories. But it is out of place when faced with the sceptical problem. The reason for this mistake, on which we will not elaborate here, is rooted in Cohen's understanding – following Robert Nozick (1981) – scepticism as instituting a problem of explanation of evidence. The sections presented in chapter five that tie underdetermination to a problem of ignorance ought to support our implicit claim here that Cohen's explanationist understanding is mistaken.[1]

The appendix is structured as follows: the next section introduces the two principles and the corresponding skeptical arguments. Section 3 presents Brueckner's arguments for fundamentality and logical equivalence. Section 4 will detail Cohen's counter-analysis. One of the reasons the debate on these roots of skepticism hasn't been the object of an extensive debate is arguably due to the proposed arguments' rather technical and abstract nature. Therefore, it is paramount to present the two key contributions to the issue in a perspicuous way. Section 5 will target a specific aspect of Cohen's argument upon which much of his stance relies, proposing a counterexample concerning how the evidential support relation is conceived across ordinary contexts and concerning skepticism. More specifically, it is argued that the way evidential support is conceived in ordinary cases of justification cannot be applied seamlessly to skeptical scenarios due to how these affect the evidential support our beliefs can enjoy. This aspect allows a refutation of the crucial element of Cohen's argument. In Section 6, this result will be applied to the issue of logical equivalence between the two principles, Brueckner's insight that Cohen and Pritchard failed to capture. Finally, section 7 will reply to some objections that can be raised against one of the argument's main consequences.

I.2. Closure and Underdetermination

The Closure principle for knowledge can be stated as follows

CK) For every S, p, q, if S knows that p, and S knows that p entails q, then S knows q

This formulation is called competent-deduction closure. The requirement that S knows the relevant entailment is necessary if we want to avoid the principle to express an implausible kind of logical omniscience, where if S knows p, then somehow S knows all that is entailed by p. This is obviously absurd and would miss the primary intuitive support for this principle, namely that we can expand our knowledge via competent epistemic deduction starting from what we know.

Given that the framework in which the debate is ordinarily couched in is an evidentialist one, what is at stake is whether the evidence S has available can *justify* the belief that p. We can assume here that justification is at least necessary for knowledge; hence the closure principle for knowledge can be reformulated in terms of justification:[2]

CJ) For all S, p, q, If S's available evidence [E] justifies p, and S is in a position to know that p entails q, then S's E justifies q

The above principle can also be stated in terms of incompatible propositions, which is of particular importance when dealing with skepticism:

CJ*) For all S, p, q, if S's E justifies p, and S knows that p and q are incompatible propositions, then S's E justifies ¬q

We are not interested in whether the principle can be repealed, as those positions endorsing a sensitivity condition on knowledge argue. What is relevant for us is the skeptical argument that exploits it. Defining H as any ordinary proposition we can have justification for, and SK as the skeptical scenario which by definition is incompatible with possessing justification for any H, we have:

Closure-based skeptical argument

1C) If S's E justifies H, and S knows that H and SK are incompatible, then S's E justifies ¬SK [CJ'][3]

2C) S's E does not justify ¬SK

3C) S's E does not justify H [1C, 2C, mt]

The minor premise allows the skeptic to run the modus tollens argument instead of the corresponding modus ponens. While we'll present some support for this choice in the next section, a simple appeal to traditional skeptical scenarios should suffice for now. Dreaming,[4] or the BIV possibility, both postulate at least the lack of introspective indistinguishability between cases that would be required to claim that S's E justifies H.

The Underdetermination principle expresses instead the following conditional:

UP) For all S, p, q, if S's E for p does not favor p over an incompatible alternative q which S knows to be incompatible with p, then S's E does not justify p

The main idea behind this principle is that the evidence one grounds their belief p on should have enough epistemic *merit* to grant it some degree of support against some belief q that the subject knows to be incompatible with p. The principle is an intuitive requirement of any belief we lay claim to as justified. Otherwise, our claim to justification would be nothing short of arbitrary, at least in an evidentialist perspective. If one's belief is revealed as arbitrary on the score of the rational support it enjoys, it cannot be something the subject herself can consider justified, and it will trivially fall short of knowledge.[5]

The skeptical argument based on the underdetermination principle runs as follows:

Underdetermination-based skeptical argument

1U) If S's E does not favor H over SK, then S's E does not justify H [UP, H and ¬SK are incompatible by definition]
2U) S's E does not favor H over SK
3U) S's E does not justify H [1U, 2U, mp]

Notice how this is the same conclusion the closure-based argument formulates (Pritchard 2005a:41), and in this instance, the modus ponens is run. The intuitive support for running this argument against its modus tollens possibility is that the skeptic can maintain that as long as no argument is given as to how our evidence can support or justify H over ¬SK, we must remain agnostic on this score. Therefore, the

only inference we can draw for now is that H enjoys no evidential or rational support. Hence E does not justify H.

For our purposes, it is helpful to make the contrapositive form of the principle explicit:

> **UP*)** For all S, p, q, if S's E justifies p, and S knows that p and q are incompatible propositions, then S's E favors p over q

This formulation not only helps us capture the *positive* rendition of the underdetermination principle, but it also permits us to realize that UP* shares the same antecedent as CJ*. In this sense, the two principles express plausible axioms concerning the relationship between evidence and the belief it purportedly supports. In terms of H and SK:

> **P**) S's E justifies H, and H and SK are incompatible [common antecedent]

This becomes via CJ*

> **PC**) S's E justifies ¬SK

And via UP*

> **PU**) S's E favors H over SK

The corresponding skeptical arguments both deliver the same result, namely that S's E does not justify H and operate via these respective minor premises:

> **2C)** S's E does not justify ¬SK
> **2U)** S's E does not favor H over SK

Now, UP* appears to be the logically weaker entailment of the two as having rational support does not entail by itself that the subject knows the denial of the sceptical hypothesis (Pritchard 2015:47). The consequent of CP* offers discriminating and conclusive support, as opposed to UP* which grants merely favouring support. This means that if one knows ¬SK, this entails having favouring support for ¬SK, but the inverse does not necessarily obtain. Hence Closure entails Underdetermination, but not the contrary, making arguably a solution to UP a solution to CP, but not the inverse. However, this is not for Pritchard a reason to argue that a treatment of UP would entail a treatment of CP in general (ibid:47-8). The idea is that logical equivalence between

the principles is compatible with the two arguments, posing different epistemological challenges (ibid:54-6).

What we will argue now is that there is reason to doubt the idea that having evidential reasons favouring the denial of the sceptical hypothesis falls short of conclusive knowledge of that denial, at least insofar as global scepticism is concerned, because in case this knowledge isn't granted one ought to doubt whether these reasons really were able to grant any rational support in the first place.[6] However, this ought not be taken as a reason to reduce the closure problem to underdetermination straightforwardly. The goal is instead to argue for how CP requires UP to get its sceptical argument going.

I.3. The Argument for Underdetermination's Pre-eminence

The above should suffice for a reasonably comprehensive presentation of the principles and associated skeptical arguments. We can at first notice an intuitive inference to be drawn. Both in the non-skeptical and skeptical use of these two principles, the closure principle appears stronger. In its anti-skeptical employment, it entails justification for the denial of the known incompatible proposition. At the same time, underdetermination states the relatively mundane fact that if any p is indeed justified, then we have available evidence which favors p over a known incompatible proposition. In its skeptical usage, the minor premise again states something stronger in the closure-based argument. We possess no justification for the denial of the skeptical hypothesis; hence we possess no justification for any entailing ordinary proposition. Underdetermination instead opts for a less committal realization that ordinary empirical evidence fails to favor H over the incompatible alternative SK unless proven otherwise. This means that an argument whose target is to refute the closure-based argument might leave the underdetermination-based unscathed.

The weaker status of the underdetermination-based argument can also be appealed to in order to present it as the more defensible argument of the two. While the closure-based argument – considered *on its own* – establishes as its minor premise that our evidence does not justify the denial of the skeptical hypothesis, the underdetermination problem argues that our ordinary evidence fails to favor ordinary propositions over it. This is a less committal, less definitive thesis. Lest the skeptic fall prey to a kind of negative dogmatism, the underdetermination argument offers the

possibility for the anti-skeptic to provide some positive argument as to how our evidence is capable of favoring any H over SK.[7] In this way, skepticism allows for the possibility to provide some reasons for how we can claim to be justified in believing H. Were it otherwise, we could question whether we should ever engage with a position that cannot be refuted a priori. However, until such positive reasons are not provided, our beliefs are left unsupported by other ordinary reasons or evidence we would appeal to in everyday contexts. The support enjoyed by our beliefs is left as merely *insular* (Pritchard 2015:55) and cannot possibly suffice to make a case against skepticism and for the justification of any H.

In turn, the recognition of how the underdetermination problem issues an agnostic stance on the quality of the evidential support enjoyed by our beliefs can support the statement that, given how things stand for now, our evidence fails to justify the denial of SK, which is the minor premise of the closure-based argument. This doesn't mean it *cannot* do that in principle, only that no adequate reason has been established so far that warrants us that our evidence justifies ¬SK. The skeptical argument can work perfectly well even if the minor premise has a promissory rather than definitive status. This is one of the intuitive reasons why underdetermination has been conceived to provide crucial support for the minor-premise of the closure-based argument. The rationale expressed by the underdetermination principle captures two crucial insights. First, to refute skepticism and claim justification for ¬SK, some positive reason needs to be adduced so that the modus ponens route of the closure-based deduction can be run over the modus tollens.[8] However, as long as the evidence we ground our beliefs on lacks this warrant which would allow the belief to possess positive support over and against SK, then we cannot claim that that evidence justifies the denial of SK.[9] This gives us a prima facie reason to run the closure-based entailment with the skeptical modus tollens.

This reasoning should attest to the intuitive idea of how the stronger, closure-based argument is at least dependent to some degree for its minor premise upon the underdetermination principle and corresponding argument.[10] Anthony Brueckner (1994) has provided two arguments to show not only that closure-based skepticism requires an appeal to underdetermination, but that skepticism only requires underdetermination to bring home its point and that the two principles express the same insight at least vis-à-vis the skeptical problem. Thus, the general idea would be

not only that closure-based skepticism is parasitic on underdetermination but that the closure argument is ultimately superfluous, the skeptical point being already made once our lack of justification for the denial of SK is reached.[11]

The first argument is quite simple. It merely constitutes the recognition that the skeptical argument formalized here as 1U-3U in the previous section does not require an appeal to CJ*. The argument, Brueckner contends, shows that S does not know H without any antecedent appeal to lack of knowledge of ¬SK (1994:833). Given that the ultimate conclusion of the skeptical argument is that we lack knowledge of any ordinary proposition H, this recognition attests to the pre-eminence of the underdetermination formulation, at least in the sense that closure is not necessary for skepticism to make its case.

The second argument concerns the purported logical equivalence of the two principles, at least with regard to skeptical hypotheses. This argument is infamously contentious. It didn't help that Brueckner only gave it in a footnote (ibid:832), possibly because he took it to establish a platitude stemming from considerations about underdetermination and the quality of evidence that grounds our beliefs. Nevertheless, it is necessary here to present the argument in a detailed manner, given that the objections to Brueckner focus on this argument, not only concerning the purported equivalence of the principles but targeting the fundamentality of the underdetermination argument as well.

Brueckner's argument starts with the principles formalized here as UP* and CJ*. This is because, in this way, it is explicit that the two principles share the antecedent, namely that S's E justifies p, and S knows p and q to be incompatible. It is then shown how CJ* entails UP* and vice-versa to establish logical equivalence.

The first direction of the equivalence is traditionally considered the sound part of the argument:

CJ*→UP*

I) Assume CJ* and the antecedent of both CJ* and UP*

II) S's E justifies p [assumption I], and it justifies ¬q [1, mp]

III) Assume that the consequent of UP* is false, i.e., S's E does not favor p over ¬q. This would mean that S's E does not justify p [CJ*, mt], but this contradicts step II [reductio]

IV) The consequent of UP* is true. UP* is true as well, and the conditional is demonstrated

The second direction is less perspicuous:

UP*→CJ*

I*) Assume UP* and the antecedent of both UP* and CJ*

II*) S's E favors p over q [I*, mp]

III*) Having assumed the common antecedent of both UP* and CJ*, we know S's E justifies p

IV*) Given that p and q are incompatible, and we have assumed p as justified based on E, S's E justifies ¬q, which is the consequent of CJ*

To an attentive eye, it should be already clear where the problem lies. Given that II* cannot establish by itself that S's E justifies ¬q, Brueckner appeals to the assumption that p is justified based on E. However, to obtain the consequent of CJ*, one needs CJ* itself. Otherwise, the entailment EJp→EJ¬q won't be available to be run. The idea that evidence can favor p over q without entailing justification for ¬q is precisely Stewart Cohen's lever against underdetermination, to which we now turn.

I.4. Cohen's Arguments Against Underdetermination

Cohen's strategy is to argue both against the equivalence claim and against the idea that underdetermination is the fundamental skeptical problem. This would mean that a different motivation for the minor premise of the closure argument is needed, and of course, it cannot be assumed that the only way to motivate it is to appeal to UP*.[12] Nevertheless, if Cohen's argument succeeds, this would provide support against this relatively widespread intuition.

The argument itself is structured in three steps. Firstly, Cohen establishes that UP* might be false while CJ* is nevertheless true, while the inverse is not the case, casting doubt on the pre-eminence of UP*. Then Cohen states the point we ended the previous section with: CJ* cannot be established by UP*. Finally, Cohen shows that every refutation of the CJ*-based skeptical argument will entail the refutation of the UP*-

based argument. Taken together, these three results amount to the rejection of both Brueckner's theses.

Let us start with the first argument. Cohen (1998:148) focuses explicitly not on general incompatible propositions but on propositions employed in the skeptical arguments – H and SK. The focus is in particular on the minor premises of the arguments, 2C [S's E does not justify ¬SK] and 2U [S's E does not favor H over SK]. Cohen understands each respective skeptical argument as proceeding via 2C and 2U. Crucially, he argues that 2U can be false while 2C can be true, and 2U cannot be true without 2C being true.

2U can be false while 2C can be true

1) Assume the truth of 2C and the falsity of 2U, i.e., E favors H over SK

2) These assumptions do not entail that E can justify either H or ¬SK. It is possible for example that Pr(H/E)=0.5 and Pr(SK/E)=0.4

3) If this is consistent, then 2U can be false while 2C is true because notwithstanding favoring evidential support for H, we don't necessarily have justification for ¬SK.

2U cannot be true if 2C isn't true

1) Assume for reductio the denial of 2C, i.e., E justifies ¬SK

2) If E justifies ¬SK, it means that every H will be favored over SK, because we have justification for its denial. But S's E favoring H over SK is simply the denial of 2U

3) If 2C is denied, then how could 2U not be denied? This could only be possible if E were still incapable of favoring H over SK.

4) But if E justifies ¬SK *and* E is still incapable of favoring H over SK, then this is only possible if E justifies ¬H as well (Cohen 1998:149). However, it is implausible that E can justify both the denial of the skeptical hypothesis *and* the denial of any ordinary proposition.

5) Therefore, it is not possible for 2U to be true if 2C is false.

Notice two crucial aspects of Cohen's argument, which we'll exploit in our counterargument. The first horn of the above reasoning appeals to the possibility of favoring evidential support, which falls short of a justificatory basis. The second horn must appeal to the character of the skeptical hypothesis. This is because otherwise, it

is possible for evidence to justify the denial of two incompatible propositions if they are both false while not favoring either of them over the other. For example, the two propositions: “My body temperature is 45° C” and “My body temperature is 50° C” are incompatible because if a body temperature is 45°, it cannot be 50° at the same time, but they are both false because if either one were true I’d be dead, and I couldn’t assert either. Thus, my evidence favors neither over the other and justifies their denial. This is a clear case where 2U is true, but 2C is not. However, if we place it in the context of skepticism, evidence cannot justify the denial of any H while simultaneously justifying the skeptical hypothesis's denial. This is because these two not only cannot be both true at the same time, but they also cannot be both false at the same time by definition. It is only by taking into account what the skeptical problem establishes that Cohen’s argument can succeed. This will be a crucial point of the argument we’ll propose in the next section.

Cohen’s second argument (1998:151) builds on the reasoning against logical equivalence we closed the previous section with. Cohen registers that assuming UP* and the antecedent of CJ* fails to deliver the consequent of CJ*, E justifies ¬q, and we can only have the consequent of UP*, E favors p over q. However, he also recognizes that the consequent of UP* not only forbids one to claim justification for ¬q, but, given the result of the first argument, one cannot even claim justification for p. After all, we just saw that evidence could favor a proposition but fail to justify it at the same time, or so Cohen contends. Brueckner had available justification for p based on E only because he assumed as part of his derivation the antecedent of CJ*, but this cannot establish that S’s E justifies not-q without assuming the whole principle CJ*. Therefore, logical equivalence between the principles is hereby rejected.

The last argument aims at closing the deal concerning the pre-eminence of closure that Cohen defends. Given the results established thus far – that the principles are epistemically distinct and that UP* requires CJ* to be true but not the inverse – Cohen argues that every refutation of the CJ*-based argument will entail the refutation of the UP*-based argument. To bring this point home, he argues that it is impossible for the premises of the UP*-based argument to be true if the closure-based argument is undermined.

1) If S’s E does not favor H over SK, then S’s E does not justify H [1U]

2) S's E does not favor H over SK [2U]

3) S's E justifies H and S's E does not justify ¬SK [reductio, denial of CJ*]

4) S's E justifies H [3, simplification]

5) S's E does not justify H [1U, 2U, mp]

6) ⊥ [4,5]

We reach a contradiction if we assume the premises of the underdetermination argument but deny closure. Again, given that lack of justification does not entail a lack of favoring support from evidence, the premises of the closure-based argument do not entail the minor premise of the underdetermination-based argument. This means that while a rejection of the closure-based argument will entail the failure of the underdetermination argument, the inverse won't happen. Closure-based skepticism can resist a refutation of the underdetermination-based argument.

I.5. Evidential Support and the Peculiarity of SK

Cohen has seemingly refuted both theses that Brueckner advanced. The two principles are not logically equivalent, and it seems that closure is the more fundamental problem of the two.

Our goal here is to argue against Cohen's objection and to defend the intuitive idea that CJ* is a bona fide defensible principle of epistemic deduction, which on its own should not lead us into skeptical pitfalls. Instead, the real problem seems to be the request for non-arbitrary rational or evidential grounds that UP* expresses. As long as it is left unanswered, our reasons remain insular, and this cannot warrant justification for any H nor the consequent application of CJ* in the modus ponens direction. The thesis we will present is that Cohen's arguments are cogent for ordinary contexts, where it is indeed possible for some evidence E to favor some proposition over an incompatible alternative without licensing justification for that proposition nor for the denial of the incompatible proposition. However, this is not so when skeptical scenarios are taken into account. Given that a crucial insight of Cohen's first argument, later exploited in the other arguments, relies on the character of skeptical scenarios,[13] Cohen must bind his whole reasoning to the character of skeptical scenarios. We will shortly see how this is the core issue.

Before, we have to individuate what makes the difference in Cohen's reasoning, and such a result can be delivered by addressing something rather odd in Cohen's third argument. The first aspect is that it is not clear why step 3, the reductio of CJ*, can prove that any refutation of the CJ*-based argument entails the refutation of UP*-based arguments. This is because step 3 is merely a rejection of CJ*, the closure principle, which does not really count as a refutation of the *skeptical argument* based on it. It would be at most a dissolution of the argument. A refutation of skepticism ought to show that our evidence justifies us to believe the denial of the skeptical hypothesis, but closure-denial forbids us from claiming such justification. A denial of CJ* on its own doesn't seem to establish a refutation of the underdetermination-based argument. If evidence for H does not entail the heavyweight implication ¬SK, it appears reasonable to argue that the UP*-based problem still works. Available evidence still cannot favor H over SK, and to maintain that H is justified notwithstanding this result comes at the very least with a defensible accusation of arbitrariness.

All that we've managed to show via this reasoning suggests that if we deny closure, we still have a question about whether evidence can offer non-insular support to our beliefs.[14] Cohen's argument creates the illusion that by denying closure, one contradicts the underdetermination argument, but this is only because he assumes that denial of closure *means* having justification for H. But if S has justification for H based on E, it is trivial that it will contradict the UP*-based argument. It will contradict any skeptical argument simpliciter, as radical skepticism argues that we do not, at least for the time being, possess justification for any H (Pritchard 2005a:45).[15]

This should at least create some suspicion about the cogency of Cohen's fundamentality claim concerning the skeptical arguments, but there is also the possibility that Cohen's proposal, to some degree, can live with this result. The other two arguments are still in place, contesting the equivalence claim and maintaining that evidence can favor H over SK while falling short of justification for H or ¬SK. The latter especially attests that the underdetermination problem might be solved and yet leave the closure-based issue untouched.

Except that there is one additional element in Cohen's third argument that appears suspect at first. The argument against logical equivalence established that CJ* could not be derived from UP*, not at least without assuming CJ* first. However, Cohen's

third argument assumes UP* and its antecedent and then proceeds to purportedly show that this is inconsistent with a denial of CJ*. This appears as a derivation of CJ* from UP* if there is one. The only one to have recognized this in the literature is Pritchard (2005a:45), and by using his own words, via Cohen's argument, "effective logical parity between the two principles is restored."

Cohen, who otherwise does not seem to recognize this consequence of his third argument, has a possible answer at his disposal, and it is this answer what allows us to identify the real culprit we must target in Cohen's overall stance. The possible reply to Pritchard's charge of having reestablished logical parity draws from Brueckner's original argument. If we trace Cohen's third argument following Brueckner's formulation of the equivalency argument, we see that assuming UP* and its antecedent is compatible with the denial of CJ*. However, now this compatibility supports both that the principles are not logically equivalent and that CJ* might resist a refutation of the UP*-based argument:

1) If S's E justifies H, then S's E favors H over SK [assumption of UP*]
2) S's E justifies H [Common antecedent of UP* and CJ*]
3) S's E justifies H and S's E does not justify ¬SK [denial of CJ* per reductio]
4) S's E does not justify ¬SK [3, simplification]
5) S's E favors H over SK [1, 2, mp]

No contradiction is in sight among what can be legitimately inferred here, and this result confirms the main points of Cohen's first and second arguments. Entailing the consequent of CJ* [S's E justifies ¬SK] from UP* is forbidden if we cannot appeal to CJ*, so the principles are not logically equivalent. Lines 4 and 5 are nothing else than the first half of Cohen's first argument, namely that S's E can favor H over SK while at the same time S's E does not justify ¬SK.[16]

This answer available to Cohen allows us to place our main target in the crosswire. Most if not all of Cohen's reasoning hinges on the idea that Evidence can favor any p over an incompatible q while forbidding justification for either p or the denial of q. The question now is, is this contention really applicable to skeptical scenarios? We argue in what follows that it is not.

Surely this will seem an absurd claim at first because, in ordinary non-skeptical contexts, Cohen's contention seems unassailable: if I were to roll a six-sided die which lands out of sight before I can look at it, I have evidence which favors the proposition "the die did not land on 1" because the probability of this happening is five out of six. However, this does not justify me to believe "the die did not land on 1". How can this not apply to skeptical scenarios?

To defend this idea, our strategy is to compare a case of underdetermination of scientific theories by data with the skeptical case of underdetermination to show how what can be considered genuine evidential support differs in the two cases. The reason for selecting a case of underdetermination of theories by data as a comparison to skeptical underdetermination should appear rather mundane. The debate around evidential underdetermination began concerning the support enjoyed by scientific theories, and the choice of a context of scientific theories allows the analysis to avoid straddling across a too vast theoretical gulf that would weaken any drawn conclusion.

A case of clear evidential underdetermination can be drawn from recent scientific theorizing concerning Dark Matter. In the 70s, observations by Vera Rubin concerning the orbital speed of stars in the outer arms of galaxies discovered that it did not match the expected values predicted by Kepler's third law. This led to the suggestion that there was unaccounted mass in those regions of space that would explain these results, what is now called Dark Matter, which does not interact with other particles via either the electroweak or the strong nuclear force, but only via gravity. Several cosmological phenomena registered in the past decades seem to support its existence, such as gravitational lensing and the observation of the so-called 'bullet cluster,' where two clusters of galaxies colliding with each other have produced gravitational lensing in areas where no ordinary matter is to be found. However, the Dark Matter Hypothesis [DMH] isn't the only explanation of these phenomena available. Its principal competitor is a family of theories called Modified Newtonian Dynamics [MOND], which postulate that there is no excess mass unaccounted for, and argue that in certain regions of space where gravitational acceleration is low enough, violations of Newton's law of universal gravitation occur. In its most advanced form, Tensor-Vector-Scalar Gravity, it accounts for all the evidence which originally supported DMH.[17]

This is a clear case of evidential underdetermination by data. While most of the scientific consensus selects DMH over MOND, this can be due to the naturalness that DMH offers compared to MOND. It is more parsimonious to hold on to the repeatedly confirmed tenet that physical laws are invariant and postulate additional mass to solve the discrepancy rather than arguing for universal laws undergoing tiny modifications under specific parameters. However, DMH itself is not conceptually pristine. It seems like an ad hoc solution to label as misleading what would otherwise be evidence against Newtonian dynamics. Recent failures by colliders to find any trace of the most promising candidate for DMH, supersymmetric particles, have also cast some doubts upon the cogency of DMH. Additionally, recent observations concerning the formation and behavior of dwarf galaxies seem more in line with MOND than with DMH (Kroupa et al., 2012).

However, breakthrough observations of gravitational waves by the LIGO observatory have provided evidence that directly contradicts a central tenet of MOND. The observations are consistent with a predicted speed of gravity equal to that of light. MONDs ordinarily predicted a lower speed of gravity.[18] We can sum up the evidential situation with the following table:

Supporting Evidence for DMH	**Supporting Evidence for MOND**
Galaxy Rotation Curves	Galaxy Rotation Curves
Gravitational Lensing	Gravitational Lensing
Bullet Cluster	Bullet Cluster
Speed of Gravity	Dwarf Galaxies

Notice how this case of evidential support agrees with Cohen's contention that DMH can be favored by evidence while lacking the required support to claim justification for DMH and the denial of MOND. This is because while LIGO's observations are clear evidence in favor of DMH, nothing in principle forbids formulating a MOND theory which agrees with DMH on this particular supporting evidence. Notice this additional peculiarity of the listed evidential items: even if overall E favors DMH over MOND, many items of evidence grant genuine evidential support to both. Gravitational lensing is a fact that is explained by and supports both theories. The fact that it cannot on its

own adjudicate or favor one over the other doesn't neutralize its being actual evidence in favor of both.

However, what if we carry out the same analysis in the case of skepticism? What could be pieces of genuine evidence for either ¬SK or SK in the sense described above? We can draw something like the following table:

Evidence for ¬SK	**Evidence for SK**
Factive experience of external objects	Illusory experience of external objects
State of Wakefulness	State of Dreaming
Real World Hypothesis	BIV
Reliability of the Senses	Flawed Human Cognition

This list is not meant to be all-encompassing with regard to skeptical possibilities, but it should suffice for our purposes here. Notice immediately one critical element. No item is shared between the two lists, and this was not the case in the comparison between DMH and MOND. Why is it so? Well, what could be a piece of supporting evidence that supports both ¬SK and SK? One answer is, for example, mere phenomenal experience, which is accounted for in both cases, and one of the intuitive insights of the skeptical problem is precisely that experience could be the same even if SK were true. However, in what sense would this be *supporting evidence for either*? It seems that precisely because both account for it, it fails to provide genuine support to either.

This is not what happened in the scientific underdetermination comparison. Why this difference? It is due to the shared empirical evidence between DMH and MOND being external world facts, such as galaxy rotation curves and gravitational lensing, which can support both the claim that there are non-interactive missing particles – i.e., DMH –, or the claim that gravity behaves differently at low-enough accelerations, i.e., MOND. Instead, if left unqualified, mere indistinguishable phenomenal experience does not support either ¬SK or SK. It doesn't possess any epistemic merit capable of supporting either alternative[19] To provide epistemic support, it would have to be qualified as either factive experience or an illusory one, which is the first row of our ¬SK/SK table. This is why we mentioned Vogel's rendition of the principle in chapter

five [UPA], which captures the idea that the rational support for a belief must be non-arbitrary, i.e. it has to have some genuine epistemic merit in its favour. This is not merely a matter of indistinguishability. Indistinguishability is the epiphenomenon of the question concerning rational support.[20]

If the above is correct, there is an additional weighty consequence. If any of the listed pieces of evidence were to be confirmed as valid, they wouldn't accrue to merely favoring support for the corresponding possibility. Instead, they would constitute instances of bona fide justificatory support. Why didn't this happen in the DMH/MOND case? Because, as we've already mentioned, the fact reported by LIGO's observations could be theoretically accounted for an accordingly revised MOND theory. Most importantly, this could be done without this revised-MOND ceasing to be a MOND theory.[21] However, this cannot be so for the ¬SK/SK pair. If S has actual evidence that she has factive and not merely illusory experience, this fact cannot be accommodated by the skeptical scenario without it ceasing to be at once a skeptical scenario about experiential evidence. If I had genuine evidence that I'm not dreaming, then that evidence cannot be accounted for by the dreaming possibility without it at the same time ceasing to be a skeptical possibility. If S has genuine evidence for any ordinary anti-skeptical proposition H, this evidence automatically entails the denial of SK and justifies belief in ¬SK.[22]

When the peculiarity of the skeptical problem is taken into account, the consequence of our argument is that when one possesses genuine evidence favoring any H that is incompatible with SK, there are two possible alternatives:

> **A)** that evidence can, in principle, be accounted for by SK. Hence it is revealed as offering merely *misleading supporting evidence*,[23] not genuine favoring evidence for that H
>
> **B**) it cannot be accounted for by SK

If A is the case, in what sense is that evidence still favoring H over SK? It would be akin to phenomenal experience, which supports neither because, in the skeptical context, its status as evidence is voided. However, if B, this means we have on our hands genuine supporting evidence for a proposition known to be incompatible with SK and, given that it cannot in principle be accounted for by SK, it directly *falsifies* SK.

Belief in both H and ¬SK becomes justified, not merely favored by this genuine piece of evidence.[24]

Ultimately this means that within the skeptical context, evidence cannot lend favoring support to ¬SK over SK without this evidence entailing at the same time justified belief in ¬SK. Cohen's contention, which motivated his first argument, collapses when the peculiarity of the skeptical problem is dutifully taken into account. Given that the second horn of his first argument *explicitly* relies on the peculiarity of skeptical scenarios, as we've mentioned in section 4, Cohen cannot defend his point by disentangling his usage of evidence from narrow skeptical concerns. It would make the other part of his argument collapse.

The mistake made by Cohen was to assume that something can function as evidence in skeptical contexts in the same way it functions in ordinary or scientific ones.[25] While in the latter overall evidence can grant differing grades of support to incompatible alternatives without warranting justification to either, the peculiarity of radical skepticism does not allow this possibility to be carried over skeptical contexts. Radical skepticism targets the general, basic sources of rational support that grounds our beliefs. It raises the issue that, as long as we do not provide positive reasons to the contrary, ordinary evidential sources do not provide us the information we need to believe, for example, Pr (H/E)=0.7 and Pr(SK/E)=0.3. The very idea that we can engage with skepticism in this way is implausible. If we take ordinary evidence as valid, the probability that I'm currently dreaming is quite low, if not outright minuscule, but this distribution of probability is conditional on ordinary evidence being assumed as already valid. To take it as valid unproblematically would spectacularly beg the question against the problem posed by underdetermination which targets the *epistemic merit* of such evidence. Non-arbitrary acceptance of its merit is necessary for justification (Vogel 2004:432).[26] It is reasonable to suggest therefore that the only legitimate probability distributions of propositions over evidence in skeptical contexts are [(H/E)=1, (SK/E)=0], [(H/E)=0, (SK/E)=1], or [(H/E)=(SK/E)=0.5].[27]

Ultimately, this shows that Cohen's contention that "E does not favour H over SK" can be false, while "E does not justify ¬SK" is incorrect, refuting the left-hand side of his first objection. While Cohen's contention is intuitively true concerning empirical hypotheses,[28] Gettier cases, local scenarios, etc., it fails concerning radical scepticism

because radical scepticism targets rational support. Scepticism leaves no safe islands of rational support if none is available beforehand. If actual rational support is effectively available concerning radical sceptical hypothesis, it ought to be *conclusive* and warrant the denial of the sceptical hypothesis.[29]

I.6. Principle Equivalence

Let us take stock of the results established in the previous section. We saw that Cohen's third argument is suspicious: his contention that denying the closure-based argument implies denying the UP*-based argument relies on the denial of the closure *principle* and the negation of a premise of the UP*-based argument. It is unclear what conclusion should be drawn from this. Most importantly, however, Cohen's first argument appeals to a conception of favoring evidential support that, while adequate for ordinary or scientific contexts, cannot be held valid vis-à-vis skepticism. The fact that the other half of that argument works only when applied to skeptical scenarios makes it inconsistent. In what remains of this analysis, we will briefly apply the above results to the still lingering feeling of uneasiness that strikes one when reading through Brueckner's argument for the equivalence of UP* and CJ*.

If our argument holds, having genuine support for an anti-skeptical belief cannot fall short of a justificatory relation. However, Cohen and Pritchard's objection to Brueckner's claim of equivalence between the principles is grounded on something very intuitive. UP* expresses a weaker epistemic claim than CJ*. This is clearly seen when we focus on the minor premises of the two skeptical arguments, 2U and 2C. The former states that we have no favoring support for H over SK, while 2C expresses something stronger, that one is *not justified* in believing the denial of SK. Coupled with the fact that if S's E justifies H, the entailment to ¬SK requires endorsing deductive closure, the outcome is that the two principles must be distinct. To argue otherwise seems to commit the evident fallacy of conflating absence of evidence with evidence of absence (Wang 2014:1133).

Can the peculiarity of the skeptical scenario save the day for Brueckner's claim? We contend that it can and that this is the insight that motivated Brueckner's original argument for equivalence, even though he did not bother explicating it as he should have to clear away possible misunderstandings. A first reply to the above accusation stems from the recognition that, concerning skeptical scenarios, the two expressions

2U and 2C might not differ as much as presumed. They *appear* to differ because 2C seems to issue the more definitive statement, E does not justify ¬SK full stop, while 2U issues the temporary assertion that total evidence E at the moment does not favor H over SK. But nothing forbids us from intending 2C to have a provisional status as well. Given that E does not favor H over SK, we can only register that E so far does not justify the denial of SK because it lacks the required *merit*. This might change. If the charge of insularity of reasons could be proven wrong, then we'd have evidence that favors H over SK, and given the peculiarity of skeptical scenarios, we'd be licensed to claim that E justifies ¬SK. Notice how this is also a formulation the skeptic would approve of, as it would avoid an implicit endorsement of a negative dogmatic thesis concerning the *impossibility* of any E ever to justify ¬SK.

However, the crucial aspect of the criticism against Brueckner was that to derive CJ* from UP*, an endorsement of CJ* is required. This is what stifles the equivalence argument. It also blocks the possible, but ultimately circular, reply which appeals to the logical equivalence between CJ* and UP* to justify the endorsement of CJ* in the entailment from 2U to 2C: "of course the entailment endorses CJ*, after all UP* and CJ* are equivalent!".

How can the entailment be made less suspect and saved from this accusation? The idea is that if we take into account what we said in the previous section about the specificity of evidential relationships in skeptical scenarios, then it might not be so certain that the entailment from 2U to 2C is as suspect as portrayed.

Remember Pritchard's insight concerning the trouble with Cohen's third argument. Not only it seemingly reestablished principle equivalence, but it was construed so that it would *trivially* imply the negation of SK, hence trivially imply the refutation of the UP*-based argument. Trivially is the keyword here. Once one has justification for any H, this implies on its own justification for ¬SK.[30] In objecting to Brueckner, it has been assumed that mere implicit assumption of the logical deductive operator commits one to the closure principle (Wang 2014:1135). We mentioned in section 2 that closure could not be understood as a merely logical principle as it would become implausible. It rather expresses a principle of *epistemic* deduction to *expand* our knowledge, not a merely logical relation. However, the entailment H→¬SK, at least in an radical skeptical context, does not represent an example of deduction that expands our

knowledge. It is a trivial logical consequence that if I'm justified to believe that here is a real hand, then I'm not in a virtual or dreaming world. Take the example of seeing a red table. If I genuinely see a real red table, then it is a trivial entailment that that table is not white but redly illuminated. But this has hardly expanded my knowledge; it is just a consequence of what seeing a real hand or a real red table means. The result is that entailments such as H→¬SK are instances of *a priori knowable inferences*[31] based on understanding what it means to 'see' something as it is. There is no required implicit endorsement of the more substantial epistemic principle of deductive closure, but the mere endorsement of a logical entailment which is trivial in skeptical contexts. We contend that this triviality of the entailment is what ultimately upheld Brueckner's argument. Therefore, at least concerning skeptical matters, the two epistemic principles appear to be reducible to a single one. Given the broader character of the UP*-based problematic, there is reason to endorse it as the main skeptical formulation.

A possible objection is that if H→¬SK is merely a logical entailment, how can it be used to derive the substantial, skeptical hence epistemic, CJ*-based argument? There are two possible answers here: while the entailment itself is logical, the skeptical modus tollens based on it does tell us something weighty on the epistemic level, namely that we lack justification for ordinary propositions. However, the skeptic as we are presenting it here can also bite quite happily the bullet by replying: "you're right, the closure argument is not a genuine skeptical argument, after all its minor premise already establishes that we do not know the denial of SK, and that skeptical conclusion is motivated by UP*".

I.7. Equipollence

In this last section, we briefly address some objections to one of the consequences of the analysis given in section 5: if we're forbidden from justification in either H or SK, then the support enjoyed by incompatible skeptical and anti-skeptical propositions is equipollent.

One objection is as follows.[32] Imagine God appears to you, and tells you that you are not in a skeptical scenario. God orders you to draw a ball from a lot of 100 balls. 99 of these balls will leave everything as it is now. One will land you in a skeptical scenario that you won't be able to discriminate as such. After you've drawn a ball, it seems that you have evidence supporting ¬SK that is equal to 0.99 and evidence for SK equal to

0.01, but this evidence does not allow you to be justified in believing ¬SK. This directly contradicts what we said about the peculiarity of skeptical scenarios and agrees with Cohen's original contention.

However, the problem of this objection is that it conflates two time-slices which should be kept rigorously apart. At t_1, God is present to you, and you know by definition that you are justified in believing ¬SK. At t_2, you've drawn the ball from the lot, and you remember what God told you. We have to assume God isn't present at t_2, otherwise this would defeat the possibility of SK being true. The issue is that at t_2, you are left with the question of what validates the evidence, your current memory, that grants you that those favoring probabilities were in place. Appeal to what God told you comes under doubt itself at t_2 because for all you know now *you could have drawn the skeptical ball*, so it cannot function as the reason to hold that Pr(¬SK/E)=0.99. It seems that the evidence for SK and ¬SK are again equal because you lack reasons to uphold a different probability distribution.

This idea that underdetermination expresses our ignorance of what our purported evidence can support allows a reply to a related objection against equipollence brought on by Dylan Dodd. Dodd argues that equipollence might seem intuitive because we implicitly endorse the *Principle of Insufficient Reason,* which "says that when we have no basis for preferring one hypothesis to another, we should assign them equal probability" (2012:345). However, the application of this principle is not always consistent. Dodd's example to this extent is borrowed from Bas van Fraassen. A machine is instructed to build a cube with a side-length chosen at random between 0 and 1 foot. When queried about the probability that L<0.5ft, we should assign this probability 0.5, and the same goes for the probability that L>0.5ft. However, when queried as to the probability that the surface area of one of its squares is $<0.5ft^2$, it seems by the principle that we should assign the probability again of 0.5. However, this is not consistent with the fact that, given that Surface=L^2, the probability 0.5 should instead be assigned to $S<0.25ft^2$.

However, this objection won't hold. Underdetermination-skepticism undercuts the ground to consider valid any probability distribution that is not an equipollent one because we lack the *information* required to consider valid a specific probability distribution. Our answer to the previous objection hinged precisely on this aspect.

There is in fact an illusion of inconsistent application of the insufficient reason principle between the two probability distributions. The first is a length-distribution determined by an arbitrary occurrence we have no further useful information about. However, the surface-distribution is not only conditional on what the first distribution turns out to be: it is also constrained by the formula $S=L^2$, which is information we do possess. Nothing in principle forbids us from saying that the equipollent probability for the surface area holds not between $S<0.25ft^2$ and $S>0.25ft^2$ because a square's surface area must be in any case L^2, which is information available even if the determination of L between 0ft and 1ft is random. While the length-distribution probability has no information we can rely on, the surface-distribution does at least have one piece of information we can appeal to, namely $S=L^2$.

The above aligns with Roger White's defense of the Principle of Insufficient Reason (2010). Our application is consistent, but troubles arise when our evidence lacks the required qualitative support because we lack the required information to ascertain to which degree a certain proposition is supported. Dodd (2012:346) has replied that if this is so, then there is a problem for UP*-based arguments: how do we know E doesn't favor H over SK? However, the skeptic can happily agree with this statement. She can maintain that we do not know this either but, as long as something conclusive in favor of H or of SK is not provided, this does not make the corresponding skeptical argument unviable. The possibility of refuting the insularity of reasons, which is the outcome of the UP*-based argument, is compatible with the UP*-based requirement of possessing genuine evidential grounds for our beliefs to be justified (Wang 2014:1139). This also allows us to counter a complaint against the overall underdetermination-based strategy. Why should we accept that E doesn't favor H over SK? It is held – for example, in a forthcoming paper by Martin Smith – that any anti-skeptic should reject this premise a priori because it just equates to skepticism. However, this is not only untrue, as its acceptance can very well be provisional, but it would also jettison the requirement to provide positive evidence or reasons for why we presume our belief H to be favored over SK, a harbinger of dogmatism. What is up to the epistemologist is instead this very task. To show how our evidence can break the tie instituted by the UP*-based problem. But this is not a rejection of its premises, nor the intuition behind them. It would amount instead to a solution of the radical skeptical problem. Any anti-skeptical proposal worth its salt must live up to this task.

[1] This might be one of the reasons why in Cohen's Easy Knowledge problem, Cohen at times seems to miss that the problem is at heart a matter of underdetermination, and focuses more on what arises out of the application of closure to easy knowledge cases. Inferring via closure that the table is not white-but-redly-illuminated from the fact that the table is red, is epistemologically trivial, as we argued for at the end of chapter three by arguing against Moretti's objection.

[2] For some support in the extant literature for this assumption see Dodd 2012:338; Briesen 2010:224.

[3] David & Warfield (2008) argue against this application of the closure principle because, they maintain, the entailment $H \rightarrow \neg SK$ is not something an ordinary subject would know. Even if this seems a dubious claim, we can agree that for our purposes here skepticism is a problem mainly for epistemological accounts of knowledge.

[4] The classic reference on this score is chapter one of Stroud 1984.

[5] For the formulation of the principle in terms of *epistemic merit* cf. Vogel 2004:427. Pritchard defends its intuitive nature by arguing that UP is for all relevant respects equal to the *Rational Ground Principle*, i.e. that to have a rationally grounded belief in p, S must lack a rational basis to believe $\neg p$ (2015:49).

[6] This might seem to contradict directly what Pritchard says, but he himself notices that radical sceptical scenarios would render the favouring/conclusive distinction unhelpful if not embedded within something like disjunctivism. For example, appealing to background beliefs in the face of BIV scepticism, even though it would as a matter of fact offer favouring support for the belief that one is not a BIV while not granting knowledge of this, this favouring support would be epistemically vain and not an actual form of support at all. To enforce the possibility of favouring-not-conclusive support in face of radical scepticism one needs to introduce the factivity of these very reasons. See Pritchard 2015:137-8

[7] The underdetermination-based argument simply shows that as long as we don't have any evidence or supporting reason of the required quality, we can't rationally claim justification for any H. This however doesn't restrict the kind of moves that the skeptic can make if such reasons are proposed by the epistemologist. A reasonable route for the skeptic would be to draw from the conceptual arsenal of Agrippan skepticism and counter every attempt by the epistemologist to tilt the evidential support in favor of H. That the underdetermination argument embodies an essentially Pyrrhonian strategy has been noticed in the literature (Yalcin 1992:14; Pritchard 2005a:39; Walker 2015:220; Axtell 2008:559).

[8] Notice how it is pointless to reply that the skeptic too needs to adduce independent reasons for pursuing the modus tollens. The one advancing the justificatory claim is the non-skeptic. The skeptic can heartily accept that her position is parasitic on the claims made by the non-skeptic. After all, if no claims to justification are advanced why should the skeptic ever enter the picture? If the underdetermination principle is accepted, and it seems an option the anti-skeptic should select if she wants to avoid a much simpler skeptical charge – that of arbitrariness– , all the skeptic is doing is turning it against the anti-skeptic.

[9] For some support in the extant literature for underdetermination expressing these two insights see Boult 2013:1128; Huemer 2000:407; Yalcin 1992:8; Brueckner 1994:830.

[10] An available alternative in the literature is to argue that the minor premise of the CJ*-based argument appeals to the so-called *Argument from Ignorance*, which establishes the following conditional 'If S's E does not justify $\neg SK$ then, S's E does not justify H" (see DeRose 1995). However, this seems little more than the contrapositive of CJ*, and as Mikael Janvid has argued (2006:67), considerations of ignorance draw their strength from and are in all respects equal to underdetermination.

[11] The claim that closure is parasitic on underdetermination can be found in Greco 2018:57. The second claim seems close to Peter Klein's idea that the closure argument is *virtually question begging* (1995, 2004), i.e. that the conclusion of the skeptical argument is accomplished via a sub-argument for one of its premises. In this case the underdetermination argument is the sub-argument for the minor premise.

[12] The traditional alternative source of motivation is Nozick's sensitivity requirement that states how we'd still believe ¬SK even if SK were true. This however entails rejection of CJ* as well, and the question of what motivates CJ*-skepticism becomes moot (Brueckner 1994:830; Boult 2013:1127). Cohen's own motivation is taken from considerations of explanatory simplicity. For criticisms of the strategy see Briesen 2010:231; Dodd 2012:348; Boult 2013:1130.

[13] The already mentioned impossibility of E justifying both ¬H and ¬SK.

[14] That idea that anti-skeptical proposals that rely on externalist conditions on knowledge or justification run into trouble addressing the underdetermination problem can be found in Pritchard 2008:453.

[15] As Pritchard remarks, denial of closure can also be in place by allowing for the possibility of the co-existence of justification for H and lack of justification for ¬SK, while suspending judgment on whether any justification for H is indeed obtainable due to the standing issue of underdetermination.

[16] So line 4 is the term defined as 2C, and line 5 is the denial of 2U. Cohen's argument started precisely by proving that 2U could be false while 2C is true. It is true that by the denial of 2U itself we shouldn't be able to confer justification on H either, but here justification for H is assumed, and closure is denied for reductio.

[17] It is not our intention here to defend MONDs over DMH, as we agree with the current scientific consensus that finds MOND less plausible than DMH. What is of interest for us here is that their relationship can be understood as one where favoring support is available from evidence which however falls short of justification for either theory and for the denial of the alternative. The Bullet Cluster evidence was initially conceived to be a 'slam dunk' against MOND and in favor of DMH, but this is far from a settled debate, see for example Lee & Komatsu 2010 and Angus & McGaugh 2008.

[18] This result has been read as *falsifying* MOND (Boran et al. 2018).

[19] This is why one could argue that what matters really to skepticism is not a problem of mere subjective indistinguishability, which in order to establish a skeptical problem would require appeal to some principle such as a general impossibility of telling reality and appearance apart (see for instance Mizrahi 2016). Such stances are notoriously weak. They either are a form of *skepticism on the cheap* (Brueckner 2011:86) or open themselves to self-refutation. The skeptical problem of underdetermination asks us to provide a positive piece of evidence that could attest genuine epistemic support for our beliefs. This also is in line with Underdetermination establishing the *Pyrrhonian* point of undecidability between alternatives, not mere indistinguishability (See Sextus PH I.165, 170; Sienkiewicz 2018:162).

[20] Lammenranta remarks (2008:20), correctly, that the Pyrrhonism which underlies the disagreement at the heart of underdetermination expresses a distinction between appearance and reality. However, this can be accepted while maintaining at the same time that this element is not enough to engender genuine scepticism. The *criterial* claim one stakes upon the appearance *as* reality is the real culprit, and this goes beyond a mere impossibility in principle in telling apart what is and what seems to be. The problem is the defence of one's own claiming that things are such and such; the Pyrrhonian core of underdetermination is a matter of undecidability (PH I.165, 170, cf. Sienkiewicz 2018:162). For an opposing perspective, which argues that relativity cuts deeper than undecidability see Williams 1988a:572, 577)

[21] This doesn't mean that it would be demoted to merely *misleading evidence*. Its status as evidence would still be intact. However, it would cease to count as favoring evidence for DMH over MOND.

[22] Thanks to Matthew O'Dowd for pressing me on making this crucial aspect clear

[23] If one subscribes to the idea that evidence cannot be false, then this simply means that it wasn't evidence of anything epistemically relevant to begin with.

[24] If the reader is at this point wondering whether for this connection between H and ¬SK an appeal to CJ* is still required, the next section about logical equivalence should answer their worries.

[25] This could suggest that in skeptical context, evidence ought to be factive. Cohen by not specifying in his argument what can count as actual evidence vis-à-vis skepticism is blind to the crucial weakness of his argument. We thank [Redacted] for this suggestion.

[26] This hasn't deterred some recent attempts in this direction, see Kung 2011 and Huemer 2016.

[27] The last distribution neatly amounting to Pyrrhonian equipollence. It might be said that to assign equal probability to every proposition might lead to trouble (cf. Pasnau 2015:264), but it must be remembered that this situation holds only for rational support available for either ¬SK or SK. It is agnosticism on general anti-sceptical rational support, not concerning individual propositions. Maybe it could also be of help to understand the relationship in terms of defeaters. Both items in the two columns are rebutting defeaters for the item they're paired with (and undercutting defeaters for the general entailment up to either alternatives). Either cannot therefore have less justification than the other, as otherwise one of them would actually be defeated and we'd have a resolution of the disagreement in either direction (Lammenranta 2011a:6). This is the heart of the Pyrrhonian Problematic. One of the two alternatives must be right, yet we lack means to ascertain *who is* right (cf. 2008:21).

[28] And even this might be contested, see Elgin 2017:293 who briefly considers a case pertaining precisely to observation of gravitational waves and rules that suspension of judgment is the reasonable option.

[29] For one of the few statements in agreement with this understanding of radical scepticism, albeit placed in a different context – Lewis' Rule of Belief – see Vogel 1999:173-4, For a misunderstanding concerning this insight, by making it look like an argument against scepticism, see Alspector-Kelly 2019:54

[30] For a similar argument based on the notion of *propositional* justification see McCain 2013:297.

[31] For this notion see McBride 2017:57; Klein 2004:178.

[32] We owe this objection to Chris Kelp.

Appendix II

A Pyrrhonian Therapy

In chapter six we analysed Wittgenstein's underdetermination thread and Kripke's establishment of the corresponding sceptical paradox. The goal of the last chapter of this research is to provide an answer that does not simply forget the analysis carried out so far, from the traditional external world problem to the semantic core of epistemology and the experiential basis it tries to make sense of and which creates a fundamental sceptical paradox. To achieves this goal the plan is to supplement Kripke's solution with an authoritative intersubjective framework where normative relations can be established and made intelligible. The goal is to preserve the idea that our rule-following is *rational* because it constitutes what we properly understand as correctly following a rule.

However, in order to do so, we will have to engage first in this chapter in a bit of conceptual therapy to prepare the ground for the proposed conclusion. This therapy here briefly outlined will focus on those stances whose conceptual arsenal draw from in order to build upon Kripke's sceptical solution. The conceptual arsenal is drawn from the work of Hegel and Wittgenstein. The reason for this appeal is threefold: firstly, their philosophies both ultimately engage with the semantic questions arising from Kantian scepticism that we outlined in the previous two chapters. Secondly, while they are both opposed to traditional external world scepticism as being little more than the consequences of mistaken conceptions of philosophizing, they both have a different relationship with the kind of philosophical therapy engendered by Pyrrhonism. The aspects of such therapy are entwined with the semantic question, which ultimately motivate external world scepticism. Thirdly, they both endorse a conception of normativity based on our intersubjective, social practices and reject the idea that we require any transcendent principle, separate and blankly external to our actual engagement with the world order to make this very engagement meaningful and intelligible.

The choice of employing Hegel for explicating an intersubjective account of normativity is bound to come with its own distinctive criticisms, due to its ultimately endorsing a variety of the much bedevilled *non-metaphysical* or pragmatist Hegel. Interpretive or exegetical goals about Hegel's philosophy are beyond the concerns of the research itself. The task

is rather to identify a genuine theoretical problem and try to provide an improvement over the available answers. On the topic of normative authority, Hegel seems a prime choice to show us the way out. The problem of normative scepticism lies at the heart of the dialectical engine of the *Phenomenology*, and Hegel offers an analytic path that does not rely on any particular, atomistic fact or entity in answering this problem but takes into account how the content and objectivity of concepts is entwined with our normative, self-conscious agency as developed and carried out in the world. That these properties are a central aspect of Wittgenstein's later stance as well is the ground for our making them converge here and outline a broadly Pyrrhonian methodology that constituted a kind of the background of the sceptical solution.

The convergence of two philosophers having distinct metaphilosophical commitments such as Hegel and Wittgenstein is bound to elicit unwelcome reactions. However, specifically on the problem of the determination of our concepts and how we make the world intelligible to us there seems to be adequate ground for this (mis)use of their positions. Wittgenstein's reflections have led – through Kripke – to a distinctive Kantian problem, but the source of this reflection was a clearly Kantian point itself, the intelligibility of binding ourselves to a rule, which is the problem of determining our conceptual commitments (Brandom 1999:167). Wittgenstein's turn to the practical character of our normative agency within the domain of this question enters the same grounds upon which Hegel tries to tackle this question too: the institution of normative statuses as being essentially *social* as the strategy to address the question of normative *authority* (2014b:7, 2019:12-3). Both held the search for a particular fact that could by itself intrinsically solve the conceptual paradox at the heart of normativity as essentially fruitless, and both did not conceive of this failure as compromising in any substantial manner the possibility of understanding normative agency in a satisfactory manner (Pinkard 2012:6). This practico-social realm of investigation is the same that Kripke's sceptical solution engages with in a distinctively incomplete manner. If the insight that Hegel and Wittgenstein share – that normative statuses properly belong to what we do and do not rely on anything that goes beyond these very practices – is the one to be pursued in order to resolve semantic scepticism, their differences on wider metaphilosophical stances can be reasonably given pause.

Let's take stock of the analysis conducted in chapter six. Wittgenstein's remarks about normative underdetermination constitute a genuine sceptical problem about the intelligibility of our normativity and the authority of normative ascriptions to ourselves and others. No dispositionalist attempt manages to satisfy the intensional and extensional requirements without ultimately transforming our normativity as a kind of mystery. The only thing it manages to achieve is to push the motivating issue of the paradox in the background. The threat is that no one ever means anything by their words, and this is due to the semantic, Kantian character of the problem uncovered by the paradox. Two objections arise here. The first concerns whether the idea that meaning is normative is ultimately tenable given this outcome, and if so the possibility is open that by rejecting the idea, the paradox will dissolve. A second question is even more pressing and it is the one we will engage with here. Maybe the whole problem arises from a skewed conception of normativity itself, or more specifically, what is countenanced to appear in a satisfactory explanation of normativity. Robert Brandom has aptly presented this issue:

> Kripke's sceptic is willing to countenance *modal* vocabulary – for instance the invocation of dispositions … But I think it is clear that Kripke's sceptic is *not* willing to countenance the use of *normative* vocabulary in describing the past use. For if one acknowledges that applying a concept *correctly* or *incorrectly* is also something we *actually* do and have done, then the problem takes on a very different shape. It becomes the problem of projecting future properties from past properties, of saying what it is for us to be bound *now* by a *prior* decision about what was correct and incorrect, about how an expression ought to be used. Such a question invites certain kinds of philosophical explication, but does not threaten to yield a paradox (Brandom 2001:605)[1]

Brandom's observation gets at the heart of the problem. What if we allow the use of normative vocabulary in order to make our normativity intelligible? Would the sceptical paradox still be in place?

As a first step, we have to amend the picture Brandom gives slightly because, in the analysis that has been provided so far, it does not seem that it is *the sceptic* the one restricting the vocabulary to the non-normative sphere. It is rather the ordinary idea that rule-following can be reduced to some particular state of mind, grasp of non-mental items, or behavioural regularity, that which has proven itself incapable of delivering a satisfactory picture of normativity, establishing a paradox without apparent solution. And the choice

of this approach cannot be faulted to the sceptic, at least not entirely. The sceptic is reacting to a picture whose legitimacy is at least prima facie endorsed in the ordinary, low-brow conception of normativity we possess, where the content of a rule is specified and specifiable in unambiguous ways by recourse to facts that are ultimately independent of what we do or think about them.[2] The intuitiveness of this idea should not come as a surprise because it is a direct consequence of the idea that our mental states are transparent to us, a distinctively Cartesian idea where "the full character of the state is exhausted by its occurrent properties" (Luntley 1991:186).[3] This idea allows the paradox to be established in an untenable fashion, but it is not *the sceptic* the one who forces on us this conception. In addition, the Kantian question outlined above seems to concern directly the issue that Brandom agrees to be still on the table once normative considerations are allowed, namely the questions pertaining to the perceived authority and rational compulsion that an account of normativity ought to account for. The paradox arises when we realize that we are normative agents, but we cannot make sense of how the determination of normativity, which we unreflectively experience, is made possible. We do indeed follow rules, but no account of how we do this makes sense to us in a way that does not just make everything a normative mystery.

However, Brandom suggests that normativity has to go down all the way (1994:625-6). This might be precisely what is required in order to explain what it means to be normative agents. The conditions for normativity might not be necessarily searched in non-normative domains but can be investigated and understood as immanent conditions, aspects belonging to our very normative agency that do not require external support to be valid and intelligible. This is a crucial change of direction in the inquiry, and the one we exploit in the second half of chapter seven. If what grounds normativity is perceived as something external to normativity itself, then the possibility of a logical gap where the Kantian puzzlement will arise is guaranteed. If this externality is re-internalized in our normative practice, there might not be space for this kind of problem anymore. This is where an answer to the possible rejection of the normativity of meaning is also available. The idea that meaning is a matter of external truth-conditional criteria has to be rejected. Semantic normativism, the idea that at the bottom if we mean something, we are following rules whose content is fundamentally truth-conditional, has shown itself incompatible with

the intelligibility of meaning and normative agency. However, it would be a mistake to simply throw away the baby with the bathwater and endorse an anti-normativist view of either the naturalistic or Fregean kind. Instead, the alternative is to understand normativity not as semantic, i.e. as arising out of truth-conditions in our use of words, but as something constituted by intersubjective practices. The solution we aim at providing in chapter seven applies Hegel's conceptual arsenal to Wittgensteinian reflections, and allows us to understand intentionality and normativity as being instituted via our intersubjective social practices. The connection with Hegel might appear surprising due to the perceived distance between the two philosophers on a metaphilosophical scale. The insight we are pursuing here is that it was Wittgenstein the main contemporary philosopher who managed to pick up the Kantian insight that our engagement with the world and with other subjects is normative all the way down, without sliding into some form of relativism or doing away entirely with notions such as objectivity and truth (Brandom 2019:649, 654; Pinkard 2010:105).

Additionally, in chapter seven, we tried to provide a sceptical solution to the question identified in chapters five and six. It is of paramount importance to understand whether both our sources for that solution – Hegel and Wittgenstein – can integrate central sceptical insights in their stance. Therefore, the purpose here is to analyse the relationship to the form of scepticism that can help us set things straight with regard to the Kantian problem and constitute the background for regaining the intelligibility of our world-involving practices and concepts, i.e. Pyrrhonian scepticism.

II.1 Hegel and Wittgenstein on Pyrrhonism

Couldn't we endorse what appeared to be Wittgenstein's original reply to the problem of normative underdetermination and regress of 'grasping', the idea that we have an intuitive and immediate conception of following a rule in the forms of life we inhabit, thereby ceasing to see the problem as a bona fide theoretical problem? It would allow both for the idea that ultimately we are already within a normative dimension, and arguably one where we follow rule, form beliefs, assess things together with those with which we share a language. This is a serious possibility and one that would also allow to have some bite as an anti-sceptical manoeuvre. Against the sceptic, it can be retorted

that once the pretence to dogmatic or meaning-determinist objectivity is shown as unattainable, then the problematic core at the heart of the sceptical disagreement and of the question of authority ultimately dissipate, and we simply have to look at how we do solve particular disagreements in our ordinary lives. This is precisely the kind of objection that can be levied against the dialectical *diaphonia* that ensnares any position in a sceptical contention. By showing that the problem is one of undecidability between rival authorities, we can simply recognize the relational character of concepts, criteria, beliefs and reject the idea that a permanent answer must be found (Striker 1983:122).

As a general perspective on what to do next after the sceptical paradox has shown its strength, this might very well be unobjectionable but notice two crucial aspects. One is that even when accepted as a conception of our rule-following, it does not say much. If there is a way – no matter how queer – of immediately grasping a rule, this property cannot be endorsed without at the same time acknowledging that this immediacy has a specific authority on us, no matter how particular and contingent. We follow the rule because we recognize it as correct, and we commit ourselves to it. However, gesturing towards our mere habits and customs leads us to the second problem, namely that this is covertly a crucially sceptical outcome, found both in Hume and in the urbane understanding of Pyrrhonism. We simply follow what comes naturally. We follow *appearances* and customs, but then we find ourselves stuck again in a normative, conceptual life that is completely mechanical and heteronomous. Leaving things like this we did not simply remove the question of disagreement; we removed the possibility of rational assessment as well. We cannot claim anymore that we are *right* in doing things as we do, and we lose the reflective element of correcting, adjusting, improving our normative conduct towards the world. Even if this does not amount to the radical sceptical claim that nothing means anything ever or that nothing exists, we confide that this is not a result we can comfortably walk away with. It sits too close to comfort to the Pyrrhonian idea of forced assent, simple mechanical conduct, involuntary (PH I.21-2).[4] Our challenge is therefore as follows: maintain the sceptical insight against any dogmatic standpoint on how we engage with the world and with other subjects, without dispensing at the same time of the idea that what we do is rational, that we have justification even if purged of any substantial metaphysical or epistemological claims that this would engender. The

possibility of this connection between scepticism and the very possibility of rationality is the one that Hegel identifies precisely as – of all places – the lesson, or the truth, of dialectical, as opposed to merely Cartesian or Humean, scepticism

> [This] scepticism is not concerned with doubting these truths of the understanding which cognizes things as manifold … and which makes objective assertions of that kind; rather it is intent on the complete denial of all truth to this sort of cognition. This scepticism does not constitute a particular thing in a system, but it is itself the negative side of the cognition of the Absolute, and directly presupposes Reason as the positive side (Hegel 1802:323)[5]

> This scepticism that comes on the scene in its pure *explicit* shape in the *Parmenides*, can, however, be found *implicit* in every genuine philosophical system; fir it is the free side of every philosophy; if in any one proposition that expresses a cognition of Reason, its reflected aspects – the concepts that are contained in it – is isolated, and the way they that they are bound together is considered, it must become evidence that these concepts are together sublated (ibid:324)

Given the above, we should turn to Hegel's employment of scepticism as an integral part of philosophy; our amendment to sceptical solution draws heavily from his concept of mutual recognition established within the dialectical and negative methodology of his *Phenomenology*, and investigating his relationship to Pyrrhonian scepticism will help make this employment hopefully clearer.

II.1.1 Hegel's Pyrrhonism

Hegel's appraisal of scepticism throughout his years in Jena was predicated on the idea that the ancient form of scepticism – which for him encompassed the whole of the dialectical thread within Greek and Hellenistic thought from Plato's *Parmenides* to Sextus – was a higher form of philosophical doubt than the Cartesian and Humean varieties that had taken hold in modern philosophy. While what Hegel identifies as modern scepticism selects as foundational and incorrigible certain internal facts of the mind and doubted their capacity at getting at how things really are, ancient scepticism in Hegel's eyes manages to establish a much more radical problem in raising to every claim a countervailing proposition. For Hegel, every genuine philosophy must contend with this radical attitude in order to properly stake a claim at how things are, and this confrontation itself with proper scepticism is the engine of philosophy itself. Ancient scepticism, by

attacking every dogmatic claim predicated on the idea that specific finite aspects could be elevated to the principle of philosophy and knowledge in general – against all forms of unreflective Given –, managed to represent the beginning of actual philosophical thinking (Hegel 1802;321, Kozatzas 2017:82, Vieweg 2003:132). It constitutes the genuine element of true philosophizing due to its demand for completely unconditioned knowledge without prejudices (Hegel 1802:322-5, 1830:§78, Vieweg 2003:139).

The kind of philosophy Hegel understands as constituting the privileged target of ancient Pyrrhonism embodies the dogmatic reaction that arose as a response to Kant's transcendental idealism. The main culprit of his polemic was the Reidian-influenced commonsensism of Gottlob Ernest Schulze,[6] who endorsed a kind of scepticism against metaphysical knowledge while endorsing the immediate facts of consciousness and defending the truth of common-sense against philosophical speculation – but he also directed his criticism against the subjectivism of Fichte and other early idealists. All of these stances are tainted by an infinite, absolute opposition (1802:335) in arbitrarily selecting a bare assurance as the starting point of understanding how we engage with the world. At the same time they identified the existence of something over and above our standpoint from which we are mysteriously excluded (1801a:62).[7] Schulze's perspective endorses the undeniable actuality of facts of consciousness through which everything else philosophical must go through, while at the same time casting doubt on anything else that is supposed to reach or postulate facts beyond this internal sphere of consciousness (Hegel 1802:318). In addition, this perspective is conceived as a completion and improvement upon the ancient sceptical stance as for Schulze the ancient sceptics did not attack sense-perceptions themselves but only what philosophy postulated behind such perceptions (ibid:320-1).

This is something that Hegel vehemently denies as a fundamental misunderstanding because the ancient tropes did not hold sense-perceptions and appearances as sources of truth either.[8] Schulze's position is for Hegel representative of the stance that came to be defined as '*veil of perception scepticism'*, which endorses a kind of subjectivism and executes a clear distinction between our concepts and the world they should be about.[9] The most detrimental aspect of this scepticism, however is its dogmatism *as a kind of*

scepticism. It defends a selective doubt about traditional philosophical matters while fully endorsing empirical and natural science (ibid:339). More than Descartes,[10] what lies in the background of this conception is Hume's standpoint, and the idea the source of our concepts is at bottom merely our sensible experience:

> *Humean* scepticism, from which the preceding reflection chiefly proceeds, … makes the *truth* of the empirical, of feeling and intuition its foundation, and from there contests the universal determinations and laws on the grounds that they lack justification through sensory perception" (1830:§39)

This kind of approach for Hegel is symptomatic of an attack against the whole of philosophy; he views it as escaping from the concept of philosophy itself (1802:323) as it simply refuses to engage with rational scrutiny by casting doubt over the capacity of rational scrutiny itself. This is natural, immediate and unreflective consciousness that elevates itself as real and knowledge, ruling out philosophical insight as unsuitable for its task. In a sense, it is irrefutable (1826:359). Once representationalism in this guise is endorsed, it becomes a variety of what we called in this research scepticism on the cheap which institutes a fundamental opposition between appearance and reality and then proclaims the impossibility of closing the intelligibility gap that it itself created (1802:339, 1830:§81-Z2; Bristow 2007:144, Daskalaki 2017:22).[11] It becomes sterile negative dogmatism that destroys any chance of philosophical understanding of reality and knowledge in general. It becomes the *death of reason* (Hegel 1802:352).

Hegel's strategy is to challenge this understanding, starting precisely from the character of Pyrrhonism so mistakenly presented in this perspective. Ancient scepticism is not an imperfect variety of this veil of perception scepticism. Instead, it reaches down to the dogmatism of common sense, showing the instability and dogmatism of any position – such as the neo-Moorean ones investigated in chapters three and four here –, and "nullifies ordinary dogmatism which belongs unconsciously in the context of particular customs and laws" (Hegel 1802:332). The sceptical tropes exemplify this verdict, but they are not understood as a weapon against philosophical reason; they instead properly belong to the rationality of philosophical investigation. (ibid:335). Scepticism is philosophical rationality consequently established and developed, not stopped in its tracks when it reaches common-sense certainties as Schulze or neo-Mooreans do. In this

sense, ancient scepticism is *thinking* scepticism. It is the instantiation of proper rational argumentation against all presuppositions and unjustified claims we endorse (Quante 2011:60). Truly genuine scepticism, which embraces the whole domain of knowledge, leaving nothing out, is for Hegel conceived as already embodied in the dialectic of Plato's *Parmenides*, conceived as the highest achievement of this task of self-reflective inquiry (Hegel 1802:322-3, 1806:§71; 1812:33-4).[12] In simple terms, it is the more honest of the two varieties of scepticism Hegel is engaging with. The Agrippan tropes are codified in the argumentative structure of the *Parmenides*. There we find an attack against every claim to immediate and genuine knowledge that aims at the same time to subtract itself from the task of actually providing reasons for why one endorses a certain ground as adequate for our knowledge claims (Vieweg 2007:30).[13] At bottom, it is an attack against any form of givenness, whether it be empirical or conceptual. However, in the dialogue, this does not issue in simple nihilistic silence. Parmenides himself exhorts Socrates in continuing the investigation, thereby embodying two fundamental aspects of genuine Pyrrhonian scepticism.

In this sense, Hegel's reflections endorse a conception of therapy against the pictures of common-sense that hold us captive. Via sceptical attacks against such positions by raising opposite propositions with equal force as the dogmatic assertions presented, scepticism becomes the viaticum to actual non-dogmatic philosophizing. More specifically, the logico-discursive exposition of untenability of such dogmatism through the help of Pyrrhonism individuates a way out of the antinomies and paradoxes of modern, epistemological thinking because it allows no presupposition to go unchecked uncovering their 'untruth', their being arbitrary, partial, one-sided (1802:332).[14] Ancient Pyrrhonism ultimately declines intuitive commonsensical ideas that appearances are an accurate representation of how things are. In resisting such arbitrarily privileged claims – whose authority is treated as merely something Given and obvious – it raises thought over and above any purported epistemic necessity arising from particular facts or principles (ibid:333). At heart for Hegel, scepticism is an eminently self-reflective endeavour and not a mere doctrine of doubt; it is the dialectical moment of philosophy, the reflective awareness and investigation of the categories we use and hold as valid (Hegel 1825:371, 388; 1830:§81-Z2, Faraklas 2017:42).

However, this is also where scepticism itself needs to be integrated within philosophy, as the question of where we are allowed to begin in thinking and understanding our knowledge of the world is a pressing one. If scepticism is not brought in as a legitimate part of philosophy, the outcome would be to end up in the dead-ends that characterized Schulze's outlook. It would become a kind of subjective idealism that would turn against philosophy, descending into dogmatism (1802:332).[15] It would allow no actual resolution of the question of how can we begin understanding how we know of the world and how can our norms and concepts be authoritative for us. This is where we see a shift in the Hegelian philosophical perspective from his early writing in Jena to the Phenomenology. While in Jena he endorsed, sometimes uncomfortably, Schelling's idea that we are always already within the principle of philosophy – the Absolute –, and took one of the lectures of scepticism to be that this principle need not be justified or grounded itself (1801b:94, 1802:94, cf. Forster 1989:110). However, in his progressive distancing from Schelling's strictly speculative philosophy, Hegel came to accept a need for a critical, self-reflective inquiry that has to determine what it means for our concepts and norms to be authoritative without falling into either dogmatism or subjectivism.[16] We need to outline a path from the ordinary ways in which we engage with the world to a self-conscious understanding that does not simply presuppose what we are supposed to find. Every positive claim must defend itself in front of the tribunal of reasons (Bristow 2007:212).

Scepticism has a crucial role in this post-Kantian undertaking. Only by sceptically investigating the forms our understanding of the world takes can we avoid a simple re-statement of whatever we take for granted in our contingent cultural, or intellectual dimension. We have to produce an account of how a theory of knowledge can be authoritative (Pinkard 1994:5):

> Scepticism, as a negative science applied to all forms of knowing, would present itself as an introduction in which the vacuousness of such presuppositions would be exposed … the demand for such a consummate scepticism is the same as the demand that science ought to be preceded by *doubting everything*, i.e. by the complete *absence of any presupposition* [Voraussetzungslosigkeit]. This demand is actually fulfilled in the resolve *to engage in pure thinking* and through the freedom that abstract from everything and grasps its pure abstraction, the simplicity of thinking (Hegel 1830:§78)

What Hegel calls dialectical thinking, which can be stated as the transformation of finite determinations of knowledge into something they are incompatible with, to show how their internal grammar or logic essentially dissolves their explanatory power, is what properly constitutes scepticism (ibid:§81). Scepticism in the Hegelian sense is acquiring awareness of one's own categories, thinking through them why and how they can explain what we think about the world and what we do. Therefore, scepticism as dialectic becomes the weapon against Kantian semantic scepticism; it plans to solve the problem of the purport of reasons, evidence, and rules that we highlighted from chapter five onwards. The resolve to think purely in the above quotation is the will of investigating any proposed determination of knowledge, norms, concepts, grasping their internal structure and coming across those points where their internal consistency breaks down or they reveal themselves to be only a partial outlook on our dealing with reality.[17] In this sense, scepticism does not threaten philosophy; it is its dialectical moment (1802:325, 330, Heidemann 2011:81). This also indicates that the general epistemological stance of trying to provide anti-sceptical arguments by arguing that they rely on unwarranted assumption or are inconsistent is fundamentally misguided if viewed as something *anti-sceptical*.

As we have hopefully made clear in this research, scepticism is crucially parasitic on philosophising and emerges as recognition of paradoxes or inconsistencies that issue a legitimate philosophical question about reasons. This was Hegel's own intendment (1825:350) The attempt to think through what can be retained and what not of a certain stance is a properly sceptical moment of philosophical reflection. Pyrrhonism's counterbalance and dialectical behaviour is conceived as the element that institutes human rationality as such (Heidemann 2010:168). Anti-sceptical attempts are a part of such dialectic. By trying to provide answers to a sceptical question recognized as legitimate, we integrate its concerns. It becomes an impulse for improving our epistemology, our understanding of the world, and of the norms we endorse and feel compelled by.[18] This also reveals the character of the sceptical demand. Veil of perception scepticism, Humean scepticism,[19] is born out of a problem of inference, from the idea that there should be incorrigible internal foundations of our knowledge of the external world that should be immediately intelligible us. In contrast, the world itself is only derivatively intelligible in this sense. Kantian scepticism is the realization that this very

semantics is what dooms us to failure. Pyrrhonism is then what undercuts this problem by pressing us to re-structure our semantic in order for our epistemology not to go astray (Pippin 1989:95-7, Brandom 2019:95-6). It confronts us with the question as to how we can establish undogmatically the ground of what we claim. The Agrippan trope of assumption is particularly relevant for Hegel[20] as it allows the enterprise to establish rationality via scepticism to be set in motion (Forster 1989:104).[21]

This is what we can understand as a properly phenomenological investigation, in the sense that we do not rest on preconceived notions of the mind or knowledge, and we attempt at finding this out by observing how the concept of knowledge appears on the scene and gets developed.[22] Hegel's *Phenomenology*, aptly described as a way of doubt and of desperation (Hegel 1806:§78), essentially proceeds by adopting a broadly Pyrrhonian methodology, which targets the foundational criteria of a series of attempts at getting our engagement with the world right. The 'self-appointed task' in the *Phenomenology* is to think through this scepticism which targets the semantic determination of each and every attempt or theory to make sense of how we obtain knowledge of the external world. Only through this path is a philosophical justification of how we engage with the world (1812:48, Pippin 1989:94). The various forms of knowledge under scrutiny – immediate certainty, perception, Kantianism, – fail because they individuate in a particular aspect of this engagement the lever or the hinge upon which everything else turns. Each reductive foundation is at every step of the way revealed to be incapable of providing what it purports to account. There is a givenness in each of these forms, the *finite* aspect of these forms of knowledge, whose epistemic authority already goes beyond what the selected feature or property of our engagement with reality can make sense of.[23]

Immediate experience as a source for knowledge is revealed to rest upon conceptual foundations that cannot be reduced or explained away by reference to mere experience itself.[24] To do so would be to commit a plainly dogmatic and arbitrary move[25] and ultimately postulate items that would make our acquisition of knowledge utterly mysterious. The proof of the pudding for every shape of knowledge encountered is not a strictly epistemological – Cartesian – problem of deception or indistinguishability, but the

semantic problem we labelled Kantian scepticism. In fact, each of the various shapes investigated leads to scepticism due to their specific underlying semantics, as they reduce everything to a particular, finite facet of our engagement with things that possess mysterious, intrinsic intelligibility that all other aspects lack. This ultimately institutes the gap that precludes us from the possibility of knowing things as they really are (Brandom 2019:44). To think through scepticism means to reach an epistemological position whose semantics does not bind us already to the merely negative outcome that radical scepticism conceives as the only possible outcome due to a perceived 'gulf of intelligibility' between appearance and reality (ibid:96).[26] At heart for Hegel, the problem on this score does not lie with objects themselves, but, given that no object can be thought apart from its determination, it is a matter that pertains to how we construe the determinations we endorse. It is a matter of presuppositions considered as immediate and made bear on the objects as independently fixed predicates (Hegel 1812:743, Faraklas 2017:53).

II.1.2. Wittgenstein's Pyrrhonism

The analysis above of Hegel's employment of scepticism applies to a significant extent to the investigation presented in chapter six, through the various attempts at getting rule-following right. At every step of the way, the proposed explanatory items – immediate grasping of a norm, mental images, interpretation, Fregean Platonic ideas – could not account for the actual phenomenon of following a rule. A decisive convergence which we exploit in chapter seven is that for Hegel – as much as for Kripke and at heart for Wittgenstein as well – a crucial moment is the realization that in order to go beyond the succession of finite, dogmatic explanations of our engagement with reality, we need to take into account the fact that we make sense of what we do together with other subjects. Suppose the way out of the problem of Kantian scepticism adumbrated in chapter six was that we had to substitute the idea of semantic normativity for one of intersubjective normativity. In that case, there is therefore at least a prima facie case for applying the Hegelian turn from consciousness to self-consciousness to the problem of rule-following.

The idea that these reflections on how scepticism is an integral part of philosophy and that it allows our knowledge claims to be authoritative and objective in the first place might seem foreign to Wittgenstein's thought, who is ordinarily read – not without right – to view

scepticism as non-sense.[27] This is an impression that comes most starkly out of his distinctively epistemological remarks in *On Certainty*.[28] For example, Wittgenstein is explicit in reminding the sceptic that doubt can only happen within a language game (OC:§24), and that doubting gradually loses its sense as the language game "just is like that" (§54). However, as Michael Williams has convincingly argued for (2004b:76-8, 94-5), in the first 65 sections of *On Certainty* from which these slogans originate, there is a distinctive difference of focus compared to the rest of the work. Specifically, it targets the kind of Berkeleyan idealism that functioned as the implicit opponent of Moore's proofs. This opponent raises the possibility that external world objects might simply not exist and this betrays its commitment to a form of epistemological realism, of relations of explanatory priority between experience and belief (1996:52).[29] If we look beyond those sections, Wittgenstein's relationship with scepticism in all relevant respects changes, because it shifts to the kind of semantic problem we identified as Kantian scepticism. A few passages can be mentioned to bring this shift of attitude more in focus:

> If a blind man were to ask me "Have you got two hands?" I would not make sure by looking. If I were to have any doubt of it, then I don't know why I should trust my eyes. For why shouldn't I test my *eyes* by looking to find out whether I see my two hands? *What* is to be teste by *what*? (Who decides *what* stands fast?). And what does it mean to say that such and such stand fast? (OC:§125)

This paragraph is quite important in setting the tone for Wittgenstein's confrontation with scepticism because it can be read both as meaning that in order to doubt that I have hands, I need to possess a stronger basis for doubting the reliability of my eyes than for doubting the existence of my hands straight away. It can also be read in the other direction, namely that to ground knowledge of my having hands on my visual perception, I need stronger certainty for the belief that my visual perception is reliable than for the belief that I have hand here (Kusch 2010:218-9, Pritchard 2011:194; Forster 2004:38).[30] If we remember the kind of discussions we engaged with in chapters two and three, we see here Wittgenstein adhering to a principle that has made much of closure-based scepticism appear intelligible

Wittgenstein's focus in *On Certainty,* however, does not stop short of the semantic issues we are contending with here, and it can be seen already from a series of paragraphs that immediately follow:

> I am not more certain of the meaning of my words than I am of certain judgments. Can I doubt that this colour is called 'blue'? My doubts form a system. (§126)
>
> This is how I learned to judge; *this* I got to know *as* judgment (§129)
>
> But isn't it experience that teaches us to judge like *this*, that is to say, that it is correct to judge like this? But how does experience *teach* us then? *We* may derive it from experience, but experience does not direct us to derive anything from experience. If it is the *ground* of our judging like this, and not just the cause, still we do not have a ground for seeing this in turn as a ground (§130)[31]

This section is crucial in Wittgenstein's reflection because it shifts the problem from the merely Cartesian/Berkeleyan question of whether all there is just is a matter of *esse est percipi*, as the Cartesian sceptic would have us believe,[32] to the issue of what constitutes the authority of what we're given in experience, of what it means to judge things to be so and so as something immediate and intuitive for us. If we recall our brief presentations of Hegel's introduction to the *Phenomenology*, and the relevant section of chapter seven, there are striking resemblances in the questions presented, of whether it makes sense to acquire a kind of external criterion for our beliefs and the justification we strive for our judgments of experience. What we would recognize as a justified belief belongs already to a conceptual determination of what it is for a belief to be justified, in the same way an empirical judgment already takes place within a certain shape of spirit.[33] These shapes of *spirit*[34] or forms of life are, as Hegel himself says, shapes of a world (1806:§440), ways in which we are already directed towards things, whose language games we play in are fundamentally imbued with a specific normative and conceptual dimension. This conceptuality of experience allows us to recognize certain things as properly belonging to our engagement with the world, and what appears instead as foreign, or inappropriate. There is an implicit connection between what ought to be and what informs our beliefs and whether these beliefs can be justified (Pinkard 2008:114); it establishes an implicit normativity without which we could not really assert claims.

These Hegelian suggestions do find a distinctive parallel in specific sections of *On Certainty*. Wittgenstein remarks that "evidence is that we *accept* as sure, it is evidence that we go by in *acting* surely, without any doubt" (OC:§196), and when presented with the question of whether we are entitled to basic features of our engagement with the world which we unreflectively endorse – such as evidence of memory and of senses – he is quick to notice that Moorean propositions go beyond a simple statement of what is before us. Instead, they amount to a declaration that "we have a right to rely upon this evidence" (§201-2). This only adverts to the fact that the very enterprise of justifying beliefs is a dialectical matter, a practice we play *with* others, where the possibility of disagreement arises.[35] This entails a fundamental tension that Wittgenstein is quick to acknowledge

> One says 'I know' then one I ready to give compelling ground. '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 such of a kind that the grounds that he can give are no surer than his assertion, then he cannot say that he knows what he believes (§243)

It is indeed a fundamental part of this practice that giving grounds comes to an end thanks to our *acting* (§204), but this by itself is not a really an anti-sceptical conclusion. What it does instead is to make us aware that what we find intuitive, or completely natural, is only so due to the contingent circumstances that constitute our language games and what we do in them. What Wittgenstein calls the scaffolding of our thought (§211) – which belongs to those language games that trace the basic features of all the other language games built on them – is also what gives us the feeling of confidence that we experience when justifications run out, and we are left with the feeling that *this* is what we understand as believing, calculating, claiming. However, the contingency of these ways we inhabit makes it vivid that there is a legitimate question about why should we follow these inclinations in one way or another.[36]

> If a Child asked me whether the earth was already there before my birth, should answer him that the earth did not begin only with my birth, but that it existed long, long before. …. In answering the question, I should have to be imparting a picture of the world to the person who asked it. If I do answer the question with certainty, what gives me this certainty? (§233)

The presumption at heart of the Kantian problem is our feeling that we are in the right concerning what we claim to know with certainty and without hesitation – a presumption that even Moorean propositions manage to establish –, and it is what makes us sensitive to the Pyrrhonian stifling of what we expect from this confidence.[37] Even if we allow for basic entitlements – like the non-evidential variety envisioned, for example, by Crispin Wright (2004) – there must be the possibility of placing them under scrutiny or question, lest we simply fall straight back into dogmatism (Brandom 1994:204). But it should now be clear that this questioning is not of the simple error-based Cartesian variety but pertains to the unexplained, and perhaps unexplainable, status and privilege they enjoy within our whole structure of beliefs and judgments. In this sense, we can understand Wittgenstein's hermetic remark that what we identify as the foundations are "carried by the whole house" (OC:§248). Without what is placed around them, they would not play such a role.

In fact, Wittgenstein's position itself can reasonably be understood as ultimately endorsing substantial Pyrrhonian points, more specifically about the fact that there is a certain level of epistemological questioning that is at heart unsolvable in the way a realist, meaning-determinist conception would require it to be answered. The famous paragraphs on the groundlessness of our believing as that which is most difficult for us to realize (§166) – a difficulty that those who tend to simply present Wittgenstein's word as the ultimate remedy we seek should keep in mind more often[38] – and the idea that at bottom of *well-founded* belief lies a belief that is not so (§253) should be read not as an effective dissolution of scepticism in all of its forms. They should be read as an integration of the Pyrrhonian dialectic in engaging with the semantic problem at the bottom of our making sense of things. That something like a Pyrrhonian impetus is alive at the heart of Wittgenstein's later thought should not come as too much of a surprise. Too many among those who quickly reduce Wittgenstein's engagement with scepticism to a verdict about its senselessness tend to forget the opening remarks of his comments on Frazer's *Golden Bough*, which not only resemble Pyrrhonism but they are essentially moving at the same beat of Hegel's conception of *Erfahrung*:

> One must begin with error and transform it into truth.

> That is, one must uncover the source of the error, otherwise hearing the truth won't help us. It cannot penetrate when something else is taking its place. To convince someone of what is true, it is not enough to state the truth; one must find the way from error to truth.
>
> Again and again I must submerge myself in the water of doubt. (RFGB:32)

Stanley Cavell has been one of the most responsive philosophers to these aspects of Wittgenstein's thought. For him, Wittgenstein's reflections highlight a distinctive *disappointment* with human knowledge (1979:44) in the same way scepticism makes us aware that something is amiss from what we expect, even in ordinary parlance, from our engagement with reality. Cavell does not view Wittgenstein as aiming to provide a refutation of scepticism, but it rather affirms that the problem is insoluble, with the upshot that this should change, as in the Pyrrhonian purgative tropes, how we conceive of our relationship with the world (ibid:45).

That the later Wittgenstein's reflections are amenable to a significant extent to sceptical doubt when Pyrrhonian considerations are taken seriously is a verdict endorsed by Fogelin.[39] Notwithstanding the importance that language games have for the very possibility of doubting something, Wittgenstein recognizes that to engage in a certain language game, the possibility of this game existing is ultimately a matter of *trust* (OC:§509). Therefore it is not some intrinsic authority of the game that dictates its being compelling or compulsory for us, but this very authority is an internal matter; the logic or the grammar that govern the correctness of what we do in the game is a matter to pertains to us, players in the very game (Fogelin 1994:93). This has quite significant repercussions on the status of the game we play itself because it shows how what is relevant and what not, what can be made sense of and accepted, or what can be doubted as opposed to being immune to doubt it is a matter of what in our activity we do not as a matter of fact doubt (ibid:200). Wittgenstein uses in *On Certainty* the pivotal metaphor of propositions that lie apart from "the route travelled by inquiry" (OC:§88), but this judging specific propositions to be outside the dialectical marketplace is a consequence of our way of judging itself, which is a matter of *acting* (§232), of what we do. These reflections establish Wittgenstein's idea of *hinge propositions*, those fundamental certainties which cannot really be put up for grabs and whose privileged status makes them *in deed* untouchable by doubt (§342). We cannot here go into detail in the contemporary thread of analysis of

knowledge that relies crucially on these paragraphs, called *hinge epistemology*,[40] but we can question what institutes certain propositions as those upon which everything else turns. Wittgenstein recognizes that this is, after all, an intelligible question about the authority of these hinges:

> "Do I know or do I only believe …?" might also be expressed like this: What if it *seemed* to turn out that what until now has seemed immune to doubt was a false assumption? Would I react as I do when a belief has proved to be false? … Would I simply say 'I should have evet thought it!" – or would I (have to) refuse to revise my judgment – because such a 'revision' would amount to annihilation of all yardsticks? (§492)
>
> So is this it: I must recognize certain authorities in order to make judgments at all? (§493)

While Wittgenstein does not deliver a clear answer to this question, there is a sense in his remarks that there is a recognition of authority at play, for example, "Something must be taught us as a foundation" (§449, cf. also Z:§419), and that he learned a whole lot of things from human authority that were then put to the test (OC:§161). A central paragraph, often neglected, says directly that "Knowledge is in the end based on acknowledgement" (§378), and this acknowledgement cannot but be something constructed out of an interaction with both the world and other subjects. In the beginning was the *deed*, quoting Goethe's Faust (§402). To understand what we do, we have to look at the practice of what we do (§501) to understand its logic, its authority, the weight of its semantics, the conceptual and normative force of what makes sense to us. What counts as being such and such for us normative, epistemic agents is not merely something we stipulated as true without further support, *but it is* a way of treating things that doesn't rest upon anything else than this very practice (§110). This is essentially the same lessons that Hegel's *Phenomenology* delivers and that we only hinted at in the previous section. Any determination happens only within a background of demonstrative and determinative practices, and only this background of practices can account for the normative force that what we do and say possesses (DeVries 2008:73).

The idea that knowledge, belief, justification are at bottom elements of a practice is an idea that fundamentally resonates with Pyrrhonian scepticism, as it ties the perceived authority and necessity of what we do to a radical contingency.[41] We as rational epistemic

agents might end up having to turn everything we presume ourselves to know fundamentally upside down, and there is no *a priori* way, no transcendent logic of language games, that can rule this event from the outset. It is part of a therapy, but this is no ordinary therapy where we simply go back to where we thought we belonged. A sense of uncanniness has pervaded us from which we cannot really escape anymore. Realizing the possibility of meaninglessness opened up by semantic scepticism makes us realize that what we hang on to does not possess the absolute – in the sense of transcendent – character that would be able to ease our worries once and for all. We come out the other side experiencing a *vertigo* (Pritchard 2020:101) that made us recognize the contingent character of what appears to us as possessing the utmost necessity.[42] The Sextan metaphor of the ladder (M VIII.481) is a useful comparison because it pictures the fact that, even if we can throw the ladder away after it has been used, it has brought us *somewhere*.

This uncanniness[43] is the one we experience in engaging with reality in finding out how the meaning-determinations we raised as sufficient and necessary are only partial, incomplete, groundless, and our investigative task continues. Following Cavell's vocabulary, the uncanniness is "epitomized by the possibility or threat of what philosophy has called scepticism ... the capacity, even desire of ordinary language to repudiate itself, specifically to repudiate is power to word the world, to apply to the things we have in common or to pass them by" (Cavell 1988:154).[44] In Hegelian terms, this is the 'labour of the negative' or of the concept mentioned multiple times in the *Phenomenology* (1806:§§19, 33, 38, 78, 113, 167). It is sceptical activity which brings normative determinations into actuality and creates the 'despair' of the loss of the immediate determinations of objects and rules we thought had grasped (ibid:§109). However, this sceptical activity does not nullify what we can understand or know. Instead, what it does is make us realize how what we can get from the external world is at bottom a measure of what we can do *in* the world. It is *Determinate Negation.*

II.2 A Combined Therapy

What is the outcome of the readings we developed in the previous section? The main result, we take it to be that for both Hegel and Wittgenstein, crucially sceptical

insights are what drives forward the enterprise of knowledge of our world. They show us the local, restricted purport of any finite determination of concepts and rules, as the meaning-determinist would have had them. It results from the impossibility of possessing a ground that anticipates everything that we do and believe, and that is capable of self-justifying itself independently of what we make of it.[45] This impossibility is also what allows semantic, the Kantian question to become intelligible, requiring from us that reasons be given to defend our entitlements and ordinary beliefs and to explain their status as authoritative and rational. In both Hegel and Wittgenstein, the realization of this problem doesn't issue an empty result, but transforms how we understand and conceive of our practices. Both establish varieties of philosophical therapy against the bewitchment or finiteness of our ways of understanding the world,[46] starting from taking the Pyrrhonian possibility seriously that what we believe and think might be radically otherwise. Pyrrhonian therapy makes us aware of the finitude of epistemological discourse (Gabriel 2008:126), via recognition that the authority our epistemic practices and methods enjoy are a function of what we can require of them in particular circumstances and contexts.[47]

However, Pyrrhonism is not limited merely to the realization and acknowledgment of our finitude; Pyrrhonian therapy establishes that in searching for what constitutes the criteria for objective engagement with reality, we establish a comparison between what we do with *what we take to be true* (Hegel 1806:§84, Heidemann 2018:432). We do not discover criteria as if we discovered the mark of truth or the Platonic realm that somehow eluded us from the dawn of time; we establish them in accordance with the form of life we inhabit and the language games we engage in. Knowledge is the result of a practice, something we enact, carry out, develop. Pyrrhonism viewed action and not theoretical thought as the heart of our engagement with reality. But in doing so there is no collapse into mere subjectivism, as what is produced has an objective content, something we as epistemic agents can all lay claim to as rational agents (Hegel 1806:§87). In this regard, some Pyrrhonian aspects traditionally linked with Sextus would obviously not fit the solution we are trying to provide, such as the relevance of appearance-talk or the role of persuasion that dominates the unreflective assent what appears true.[48] What instead properly belongs to the Pyrrhonian aspect of philosophizing that is alive in both Wittgenstein and Hegel is the dialectical, reason-giving engagement with reality that both cures us of the

illusion of a transcendent, sideways-on grasp on the world, and at the same time actualizes how we make sense of it. Knowledge is an *achievement*, a normative, conceptual activity that produces its own criteria of adequacy and meaningfulness and institutes the determinations and the content of our beliefs as being about *something* objective. These practices are not fragments of subjective fictions we simply come up with independently of our environment, nor are these mere representations of how things are.[49] These are instead the institution of our 'logico-linguistic' reality, the world as something that can be understood with determinate content. They institute what is represented and believed.[50]

In Hegelian terms, our practices are self-conscious activities that rationally constrain what we think, believe, give reasons for, and justify. Their reality is their affecting us, providing a rational authoritative constraint on what we think is the case and why we think that is the case. This constraint is not external to the activity we are trying to make sense of; it belongs in this very practice to us as normative agents, to our social and historical reality that we share and engage in. Wittgenstein, by understanding that at the bottom of language games lies this practical dimension which constitutes our form of life came the closest to Hegel's idea that the reality of our conceptual forms we engage objects through is instituted by our *Geist* (Nuzzo 2010:64), our historical and communal spirit, how we agree and disagree on what is around us.

This is a fundamental result of the lesson of scepticism: reason and experience are not the only sources of how we can gain knowledge; there is a linguistic, historical and normative dimension that presents to us the world in a determinate manner (D'Agostini 2002:144). Our engagement with reality is at heart a practice, normative all the way down, through which we become *geistig*, normatively minded in the same way as those other normative agents that underwent the same historical, material, and social process we ourselves underwent (Brandom 2019:470). Hegel and Wittgenstein share the verdict that *meaning is use*, as what constitutes the possibility of saying something about the world depends on our conceptual determination and reflection (Rentsch 2019:52). Only the actual, concrete use of language can allow for the actual constitution of epistemic normative attitudes and statuses such as believing, judging, justifying, inferring. Our

epistemic activity constitutes meaning in the world. This result is at odds with standard foundationalist epistemology or ordinarily Cartesian understanding of the relation between mind and world.[51]

The lesson of Pyrrhonism for both Hegel and Wittgenstein is that experience is *work*;[52] knowledge, belief, and justification are all normative endeavours that institute statuses and attitudes that allow us to make sense of what happens around us, as opposed to simply receiving sensations from the outside in a *mute* way. Experience in the sense of *Erfahrung* is a mediation between how things are presented and how they are comprehended (Hrachovec 2019:84); in encountering an object, we adapt our understanding of it and in this adaptation, the object itself has changed (Hegel 1806:§85). This is the dialectical, normative, and conceptual character of experience that Pyrrhonism taught us in making us look away from the idea that objective knowledge can depend on an independent *given*. To rehearse Wittgenstein's question "What is to be tested by what?", the only answer can be that what establishes the authority of being the criterion and what has to be subjected to it as its object can only be determined within a specific inquiry.[53] Fitness to one's environment is not a measure of just being in the right place at the right time; it is a matter of *doing* the right thing, but doing the right thing is not an external, heteronomous command that ought to be able to compel us to do as we're told magically. How the right thing to do or think or believe, is constituted by our activity is the question that arose from the rule-following considerations and it is still up to us to solve.

The above convergence between Hegel and Wittgenstein on their integration of Pyrrhonian insights should not blur the areas where the two continue to constitute unlikely bedfellows. Even on the aspect of their proposed therapy, distinctive differences remain. Wittgensteinian therapy is bound to direct our gaze at how we actually engage with the world in our ordinary ways. Albeit the uncanniness of the ordinary has shaped how we view these activities, specifically what we hope we can extract from them in terms of theoretical philosophizing, the ordinary is still the dimension we inhabit and cannot really bootstrap our way out of. What we have to heed is the rejection of *bad* philosophizing that led us in the boggle in the first place. While Hegel does at times endorse this idea concerning specific philosophical problems,[54] it seems that his therapy is directed to a

very large extent against common-sense itself, in the assumptions that it covertly makes and in implicitly staking a claim to philosophical validity (Quante 2011:52).[55] Hegel is particularly explicit concerning his attack on common-sense in his earlier writings, as he sees the common understanding as establishing the dichotomies – contradictions, paradoxes, antinomies – from which the need for philosophy arises (1801b:89)[56]

> What the so-called common sense takes to the be rational, consists similarly of single items drawn out of the Absolute into consciousness … they serve as correct standpoints from which one takes off and to which one returns … As soon as one takes these truths of common sense by themselves and isolates them as cognitions of the intellect, they look odd and turn into half-truths. Reflection can confound common sense. When common sense permits itself to reflect, the proposition it states for the benefit of reflection claims to be by itself knowledge and valid cognition (ibid:98-99).

The idea that common-sense standpoints already include implicit theoretical claims that go above and beyond what they can legitimately defend is a point we have encountered already in chapters four and five. The unspoken philosophical baggage that common-sense tries to smuggle in is, for Hegel, the target of Pyrrhonian scepticism, whose importance lies precisely in showing the finitude of ordinary understanding. The Aenesideman tropes[57] are considered as attacking the "dogmatism of ordinary common sense" and "nullif[ying] ordinary dogmatism which belongs unconsciously in the context of particular customs and laws" (1802:332).[58] Most importantly however for his difference with Wittgenstein is that for Hegel it is only a piece of legitimate constructive philosophizing that that can bring us out of the sceptical boggle. This can only be done by modifying the common-sense standpoint and develop it properly beyond its own bounds without making it fall back into dogmatism and arbitrariness (Quante 2011:57).[59] There seems to be a central conflict in therapeutic stances here due to the character Wittgenstein and Hegel assign to the proper enterprise of philosophizing. For Wittgenstein, the therapy ought to resolve our worries and anxieties in order to make us realize what was already there all along. It is not a matter of resolving contradictions but of dissolving the philosophical conceptions that generate them (PI:§125). This could not be farther away from Hegel's therapy which views contradictions and aporias as embedded in our ordinary conceptions and to solve them targets the foundational

constituents of our forms of life to show how they *fail* us. The 'path of despair' of the *Phenomenology* is a path that takes away with itself the forms of life which generated this negative result, the impossibility of satisfying the very criteria of the various forms of common-sense understanding of the world.[60] The kind of tranquillity that Wittgensteinian therapy would provide use would, in Hegel's eyes, merely deliver a temporary resolution that would prove to be ultimately hollow (Giladi 2015:256)[61]. Wittgensteinian quietism seems irreconcilable with Hegel's therapy and his understanding of Pyrrhonism.[62]

We might then question whether the Pyrrhonian therapy we are trying to endorse manages to institute a coherent position, and the usual Pyrrhonian replies to charges of inconsistency will not be of much help here. We are not endorsing criteria that an opponent presents us, we are trying to identify a genuine meta-philosophical stance to avoid semantic scepticism. However, this verdict of incompatibility might be too quick because there are significant overlaps concerning their outlooks on common-sense, and philosophical theorizing. One intuitive difference between the two is that Wittgenstein's practical normative dimension is historically flat; there are no privileged language games, and the fact that we engage in the language games we play is an uneliminable contingency about us. Hegel instead is engaged in an enterprise of rational recollection, *Erinnerung*; from the standpoint we reached progressing through the various stages of our understanding of the world, we reconstruct the path we have underwent as displaying an internal rationality, a Whiggish history of how we came to comprehend correctly the world (Brandom 2019:102). But it is incorrect to view Wittgenstein as completely uninterested to the dimension of our history as that which originates the way we ordinarily conceive and think of the world. To quote Brandom on this aspect: "A great deal of the later Wittgenstein's writing can be read as pointing out genealogical antecedents of our reason-giving and reason-assessing practices." (2019:562). Wittgenstein's brief remarks on the genealogical character of our normative and linguistic behaviours (PI:§25), lend themselves easily to be understood as placing the familiarity and naturalness of our practices as being the result of our own natural histories.[63] Hegel would surely add that this is not a merely superficial fact, but it crucially determines the very concepts and criteria that we find ourselves with when beginning our inquiries (Pinkard 2015:5).

It is a widespread assumption that Wittgenstein is at heart sympathetic with common-sense philosophy, as otherwise, there would be no point in trying to recapture the ordinary picture, befuddled by centuries of philosophical speculation. However, this does not always seem to be the case, especially if we look at *On Certainty* as a whole. There is a deep disquietude in Wittgenstein's handling of concepts whose origin – of the concepts – is unmistakably commonsensical. Even the motto that opens up the reflections: "If you know here is a hand we'll grant you all the rest" indicates that there is some inner source of confusion and contradictions already at the start of the commonsensical standpoint, otherwise why should we *grant* to Moore that here is a hand? The knowledge-claims we stake upon evidence or reasons appeal to substantive pieces of philosophizing that we try to pass off as completely natural, but they only lead us to antinomian situations that make a mystery of our world and of ourselves in it. Rule-following is a case in point. What could be more natural for us than immediately understanding what it is to follow a rule we followed countless times? However, as soon as we try to place our finger on it that determination disappears.[64] This realization comes straight off the sections in the *Phenomenology* on determinate negation. When we try to locate the meaning or the essence of what we do in a particular aspect of that thing – a disposition, a phenomenological presentation, the Given, a cognitive mechanism – that very content vanishes into thin air. And here Wittgenstein heartily agrees:

> Is my understanding only blindness to my own lack of understanding? It often seems so to me (OC§418)
>
> Am I not getting closer and closer to saying that in the end logic cannot be described? You must look at the practice of language, then you will see it (§501)[65]

However, this disappearance, this description that escapes us, is not a mere empty result, but the beginning from which to build a new understanding of objects and norms, one where it is not a formal determination, rule, inner disposition that gives us its content. Modern philosophy instituted a gap between subject and world, as does the modern scepticism predicated on it (Quante 2011:62). There is an impulse of liberation from this idea of philosophy in both Wittgenstein and Hegel[66] – both of their philosophies can be reasonably described as philosophies of freedom – and in trying to understand ourselves as we engage with the world, in the ways we think and speak of the world, in how we

realize that true intellectual freedom can only arise when we recognize how these very ways are what constitutes what we are (Kolb 2019:96). By integrating Pyrrhonian scepticism in the enterprise of rationally recollecting how we engage with the world, we are freed from any pre-established necessity in nature or ideas. This indifference towards external, alien, heteronomous necessity is in fact, the first step towards human rationality for Hegel (1802:333, 1825:359, 365), establishing *freedom of thought* (Vieweg 2007:47-8),

This is where a crucial point of contact of the two therapies is reached: both their therapies establish that the structures we take part in, with its contradictory goals, unspoken assumptions, determinate but vanishing contents, are instituted by social and intersubjective self-consciousness (Rentsch 2019:54). We try to understand ourselves and the environment we inhabit, and if we conceive of such structures as essentially external to us, we will not be able to pull ourselves out of this labyrinth, a maze of streets which aimlessly wander in all directions. Freedom of thought can only be reached if we reject this fundamental alienated picture. What Wittgenstein tries to undo of this maze is the fact that some directions do have a grip on us that we can't explain and which we are led to reify into essences, inner determinations of things, experiences, rules. This is by no means an easy task:

> [Wittgenstein] saw the temptation to see a demonstration of the parochiality of the content of a norm – its dependence on or reflection of certain kinds of contingent features of the practitioners and their practices – as undercutting the intelligibility of that norm as genuinely binding, as being a real norm, as having normative force … the issue arises for Wittgenstein because he sees both that there is nothing but the prior use of an expression that can be understood as determining the meaning that it has … and that any such use is shot through and through by contingencies of all sorts that affect that content, while not providing *reasons* for it to be one way or another (Brandom 2019:567)

Hegel is no enemy on this front. His battle against the one-sidedness of dogmatic determination stems from the same source: the rational need to make sense of what we are and the environment we inhabit and not confine ourselves in endorsing a world we're imprisoned in. For both, this cannot be achieved without taking into due consideration the fact that in trying to do so we are not alone, and that this is also the origin of the fractures

we experience in trying to make sense of this, the loss of authority we experience in seeing the privileged explanations we relied upon dethroned (Pinkard 2019:195). The constitution of meaning is a social endeavour, a social achievement, which does not reach a fixed end-point; it develops along its own vicissitudes and we cannot expect the discovery of a transcendent kind of truth anymore.[67] Knowledge – that we identified as *work* – is an intersubjective enterprise. The evidence we rely on, the reasons we provide, can only play this function when recognized as such by those who can agree on what they are.

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[1] A similar, in spirit, if not content, objection is raised by Wright (1989:176-7), who says that Kripke's challenge endorses an unacceptable reductionism in requiring as a possible solution only some 'independently characterized fact' which must not beg the question against the existence of facts about meaning. If the challenge is like this then it is unanswerable, but it merely reflects a prejudice against the ordinary notion of meaning and intension. It is not clear however whether Wright is countenancing the use of normative vocabulary as Brandom does. As we'll see in the section on primitivism, Wright is rather non-specific on what kind of vocabulary constitutes for him the ordinary notion of intention.

[2] "The idea of the objectivity of meaning cuts immensely deep in our ordinary thinking" (Wright 1987:122), see also 1989:183 where he ascribes the very sceptical paradox to what he calls *intuitional epistemology* of rule-following.

[3] Luntley views this idea as making up what he calls the *contractualist* model of norms, i.e. that "the normativity that governs an experience is external o the experience" (1991:177). Platonism is a variety of contractualism. However, rejecting Platonism doesn't entail rejecting the idea that the content of a norm is stable and is already present in the moment we grasp a particular norm or utterance (ibid:182). This comes together with an injunction of silence on what constitutes these mental states of grasping. Luntley's position is in a precarious balance between mysterianism a-la Colin McGinn, and the *Lebensform* approach – a form of naturalized Platonism – that belongs to John McDowell's response to Kripke's paradox. Given what we said so far neither seem very promising approaches.

[4] As Hankinson notices (1995:254), the sceptical criterion substitutes the normative dimension with a practical one, and in this sense it would go in the direction of what we are looking for, namely a conception of belief and justification *as a practice*. However, the Pyrrhonian perspective does away with normativity as a whole, not with just the *semantic* meaning-determinist aspect of norms. While the picture we are trying to offer in this chapter is amenable to Pyrrhonian scepticism of an urbane kind, it does not rest content with simply 'going with the flow'. We can observe that the tension here between the impulses of Pyrrhonian scepticism and making sense of what we do as rational normative agents traces a tension at the heart of Wittgenstein's philosophy itself. On one side Wittgenstein tells us that *there is a way of grasping a rule* which satisfies the ordinary conception we have of norms, but on the other hand he tells us that we have to get rid of the disease of searching for explanations. The ordinary conception of norms is not the Pyrrhonian one, notwithstanding the fact that Pyrrhonism would have us behave as we always did. In the ordinary standpoint there is already a claim that a norm can be followed in a correct and in an incorrect manner.

[5] Throwing in at this point something like Hegel's *Absolute* might be considered as a curveball, and rightly so, by the reader. For our purposes, we will endorse the non-metaphysical

understanding of the term within Hegelian scholarship. Absolute Spirit, is to be intended as *absolute reflection*, the practices of self-understanding of a community via its history and institutions. Reflection which is authoritative for that very community (Pinkard 1994:221-2). Absolute spirit, or knowing, is what results from our making sense of what we do and why we do it, self-reflection of the community unmediated and not dependent from any external entity outside of the community itself (1991:319-20). This non-metaphysical interpretation is quite debated and of course contested, cf. Lumdsen 2008 for a brief overview.

[6] This characterization is due to Bowman 2003:120-9. Others such as Forster (1989:33) and Bristow (2007:110) have depicted Schulze directly as a Cartesian sceptic, but this is a too simplistic way to present Schulze's position.

[7] Hegel held that even Kant and Fichte belong to this kind of modern, detrimental scepticism, as they defend varieties of subjectivism which cut us off from access to the actual world, while revelling in a kind of empirical psychology (Hegel 1801a:63-4, cf. Pippin 1989:92; Bristow 2007:165; Bowman 2013:113).

[8] Compare M VII.190-200, Forster 1989:14-5, 24; Bristow 2007:155-6. See also the later view from the *Lectures on History of Philosophy*, where Hegel holds that what Pyrrhonism targeted was precisely the certain reality of such internal appearances (1825:357).

[9] Cf. Hegel 1802:317, 341, Forster 1989:26, Bristow 2007:139. Forster and Bristow's interpretations differ on some specifics which shouldn't be too much of a concern here.

[10] Whose position is not really captured by the Schulzean brand of scepticism, as the *Meditations* present a much sounder doubt which doesn't simply believe deliverances of the senses, and suspends judgment even on the epistemic import of the Cogito (AT VII:35-6, cf. on this Bristow 2007:153, Bowman 2013:129, Heidemann 2007:211). In fact, Schulze's scepticism is quite narrow and permissive on certain features of cognition (Bristow 2007:137). The analysis we carried out in the first chapter noticed quite a few lines of overlap between Descartes' methodological use of scepticism and Hegel's understanding of philosophical doubt. More specifically they substantially converge in a rejection of formal abstraction, of common-sense philosophy, of thinking conceived as something passive, and in understanding scepticism as embodying a distinct *free* aspect of thought. Cartesianism however, understood as the kind of two-stages representational understanding of intentionality, with immediate intelligibility on one side and merely opaque reference on the other (cf. Brandom 2019:40-7), is another matter entirely and a legit target of Hegelian philosophy.

[11] And this is therefore the aspect of this scepticism that befalls Kantianism itself, in separating the phenomenal and noumenal into irreconcilable spheres (cf. Bowman 2013:132). Bowman understands Hegel's rejection of Kantian transcendental idealism as an establishment of *genuine* scepticism towards natural epistemological knowledge in general (ibid§102, 126, 135). In this reading we are offering Hegel's reflections do not entail a complete rejection of the Kantian project. This is of course one of the main points of debate in the controversy over the 'non-metaphysical' Hegel.

[12] For this reading of Hegel's understanding of ancient scepticism cf. Heidemann 2011:83, Bristow 2007:159, Vieweg 2007:29, Daskalaki 2017:27; Sparby 2015:122. Fogelin is also of the idea that Pyrrhonian scepticism would deem modern varieties of scepticism as 'not sceptical enough' (1994:193).

[13] For Hegel the Parmenides is therefore an instance of real ancient scepticism, which is essentially identical with Plato's dialogic method, in the idea that every hypothesis must undergo dialectical investigation (Hegel 1802: 323; 327-8; cf. on this Heidemann 2010:162, Vieweg 2007:29, Gadamer 1971:8, Faraklas 2017:52). Hegel's idea of a connection between Plato and the Pyrrhonist is certainly idiosyncratic (cf. Harris 2000:258), but what's important here for Hegel is that the Parmenides embodies the ideal of showing the self-contradictoriness of the claims of finite dogmatism (Forster 1989:36-8), what Hegel calls *Verstand*, finite understanding, opposed to *Vernunft*, Reason understood as that which does not limit itself in its domain of scrutiny. In

addition, the idea that Plato was not a dogmatic philosopher, at least as much as some would portray him to be, was already noticed by members of the Academy such as Arcesilaus, who noticed that Plato even in later dialogues employs a seemingly sceptical way of investigation, cf. Sextus PH I.220-22, Vogt 2012:122.

[14] While such statements might seem equally dogmatic to us, and even obscure to a degree – what does it mean for a principle to be 'one-sided' for example – we can help illuminating this by anticipating here our appeal to Brandom's diagnosis of where traditional representational theories go astray. They all ultimately endorse a principle of 'strong differential intelligibility' (Brandom 2019:42). In order to stop a regress of interpretation or mental states, one side of the representational relation is identified as privileged and immediately intelligible – the representing –, while what is represented is only derivatively so. If we recall the problems of the dispositional theories of normativity, and of the sui generis Platonist answers, we can see that they fall squarely within this arbitrary one-sidedness.

[15] In particular, Pyrrhonism itself would end up retreating from actual philosophical engagement and lack general philosophical validity, just as Schulze's scepticism about speculative philosophy (Forster 1989:41-2, Vieweg 2017:8-12)). This is also the understanding of Pyrrhonism presented by contemporary scholars of ancient scepticism such as Myles Burnyeat (1982:37, cf. Bristow 2007:157).

[16] This understanding of Hegel's development is mainly due to Bristow (2007:204-210), but it seems to me to decisively support the idea that Hegel ultimately remain wedded to a fundamentally Kantian project, which is the main contention of the readings defended by Robert Pippin and Terry Pinkard which has come under attack from more traditional readings of Hegel, such as Frederick Beiser's or Brady Bowman's.

[17] Cf. Düsing 1990:168; Daskalaki 2017:32, Vieweg 2007:31-2.

[18] This is what Markus Gabriel has called 'integrative anti-scepticism' (2008:18), the assumption of sceptical concerns as motivation for our theories of knowledge, which at the same time makes us aware of the limit of the chosen determination of what constitutes knowledge.

[19] At this point it should be rather clear that Humean scepticism in this sense is not what Crispin Wright and Annalisa Coliva have called Humean scepticism, and that we raised in chapter three. It would probably be more accurate to understand that concern, which led to the problem of the criterion, and from underdetermination to Kantian scepticism, as a particular aspect of the Kantian problematic. We remarked on this nearness between that Humean scepticism and the justificatory problem of rule-following in the previous chapter.

[20] A difference from our perspective here is that Hegel, at least in his initial writings, took the relativity concerns embodied in the Aenesideman modes as the most genuine form of scepticism, but he seems to have shifted his understanding of Pyrrhonism in his later writings more towards the problem of arbitrariness and presuppositions. See for example the sections of the Three Standpoints of thought towards objectivity (1830:§26-77), or the relevance that the Problem of the criterion assumes in the introduction of the *Phenomenology* (1806:§§84-7).

[21] On the overall relevance of Agrippan Pyrrhonism for the whole of German post-Kantian Idealism and for their *derivatio monism* project – the project of deriving the architecture of thought from a single principle, see Franks 2005:53, 163-4, 206; 2014:49-50. The arbitrariness trope is especially important for Maimon (1790:57-9; 1794:165-6).

[22] We become thereby conscious of how these forms compel us in a certain manner, how they become authoritative for us, and we are engaged in a process of revision and recollection of what appears to us as true, a process of rational reconstruction of why we do and believe what we do and believe (Brandom 2019:102; Sparby 2015:116-7, Pippin 1989:93-4).

[23] The aporetic character of every form of finite cognition is what Hegel endorses in order to avoid being dragged back in Agrippa's tropes. If the goal were to simply amend and correct these finite shapes of knowledge while nevertheless continuing endorsing their structural character, the whole attempt would be pointless. By endorsing scepticism against finite forms of cognition, Hegel

can instead entirely shift the perspective on how we engage with the world (cf. Heidemann 2007:174-5, Bowman 2013:130-1).

[24] The main lesson of the Sense-Certainty section of the *Phenomenology* that is carried over to the Perception chapter (1806:§113) is precisely that "the possibility of every determinate empirical apprehension requires an ability to 'think' or conceive certain events, episodes, properties together as a unity" (Pippin 1989:135).

[25] And this is at heart the issue with all finite standpoint on knowledge, they attempt to use relational or relative concepts in a way that abstracts from this very relativity, and the role of scepticism is to show how this use is illegitimate and arbitrary as it establishes an opposition between belief and world which cannot be reconciled (Hegel 1801b:101, 114, cf. Faraklas 2017:55)

[26] This is the assumption that every *finite* form of epistemology, from internalism, to evidentialism, to experientialism, to reliabilism, makes, the assumption of a gap between the idea we have of an object and the object itself (Pippin 1989:111-2). This is crucially exemplified by Hegel in what he calls *the fear of error*, which simply becomes the error itself, fear of truth (Hegel 1806:§74, §80). The idea that epistemological scepticism is born out of a fundamental fear due to an ontological distance from or inaccessibility of the world from us is also found in Cavell (1979:145).

[27] Baker&Hacker (1984:4-5) explicitly refer to *On Certainty* as the locus where Wittgenstein proclaims this unassailable verdict.

[28] The presentation of *On Certainty* that follows will no doubt appear as partial to the well-informed reader. Due to the space constraint we cannot follow the text in all of its turns, of which there are quite a few given the presence of an inner tension in Wittgenstein's perspective therein contained (cf. Fogelin 1994:221-2). We focus here on those elements that support the kind of sceptical, social and practical solution to the Kantian problem we are striving for here. However, the spirit of Wittgenstein's remarks is arguably preserved.

[29] Kusch (2006:240) argues that Wittgenstein is rejecting *epistemological scepticism,* while the constitutive problem is very much alive for him. Given that one of the points we are defending in this research is that the semantic/constitutive point underlies the epistemological problem, one might say that Wittgenstein is rejecting the idea of scepticism as a matter of deceiving scenarios, the error-based template we criticized in chapters two and five.

[30] Cf. for further passages where this idea is endorsed OC:§§111, 240, 243, 250, 429, and of course, its very opening: "If you *do know* that here is a hand, we'll grant you all the rest".

[31] See also Z:§309 "How do I know that I shall get a series of numerals that is right when I count them? And here *what* is a check on *what*? Or how am I to describe the important empirical fact here? Am I to say experience teaches that I always count the same way? ... *This* is how we think. *This* is how we act. *This* is how we talk about it". That the distinction between adequacy criteria and experiences is a normative one was already one of the main points that Hegel made in his earlier articles in Jena, cf. 1801a:69-75. In both Hegel and Wittgenstein, we can find the idea that "the difference in normative status between concepts and appearances is to be understood in reference to their different *functions* in an epistemic activity" (Pinkard 2004:274, own translation).

[32] Cartesian scepticism is therefore a language-game itself within our conception of reality and the possibility of making mistakes, of being deceived, and Wittgenstein asks what it would mean to make a mistake on the scale envisioned by universal deception. The sense of making a mistake in the way the Cartesian sceptic envisions puzzles us (OC:§32). It is the possibility that no external things exist in the way we conceive them to be, and once this is a possibility that is entertained, no Moorean proposition would be able to dissipate it (Williams 2004b:85). Notice that this is not simply to label the Cartesian question as unintelligible in the sense of a disease, as Pryor or Williamson do, nor that the problem is merely one of *convincing* the sceptic. Those

perspectives maintain a semantic claim they can't properly ground in face of such a possibility, and they do partake – unwittingly and implicitly – in a language-game they cannot win.

[33] It is remarkable to notice that *Gestalten des Geistes*, the term Hegel uses to identify the various transitions within the Phenomenology only rarely appears before the *Phenomenology* itself, and in his Jena years, Hegel used the term *Lebensform*, cf. Pinkard 2008:112.

[34] An important distinction is here at play. When Hegel talks about such shapes in the earlier section of the *Phenomenology*, he has in mind what we'd call shapes of consciousness, of intellectual scrutiny. Shapes of spirit properly intended begin only in Chapter six with the discussion of Greek ethical life, and establish what he calls a *Reich der Sittlichkeit,* a kingdom of ethical life, of intelligible customs established by self-conscious communal activity (cf. 1806:§349, §464). The latter is the dimension where the properly conceptual and normative features of our lives can take place. Shapes of consciousness are still fettered by a dogmatic, one-sided outlook.

[35] And this reaches down to very basic epistemic statuses such as reliability of perception or cases of knowledge that are taken to support a purely externalist outlook such as chicken-sexers or mathematical insight. Assessments of reliability construed as a mere occurrence of correctness are liable to the very same gerrymandering problem we identified in chapter six: "Appeal to regularity and irregularity can do normative explanatory work only if there is some way of privileging some regularities over others-some way, in other words, of saying what the correct regularity is" (Brandom 1994:208).

[36] See also on this aspect Wittgenstein's observation that what stops us from supposing a table to change shape or colour is merely a feeling a weirdness when confronted with this supposition, but this immediately leads him to recognize that we are not 'agreeing with reality' in expressing such a disbelief (OC:§214-5)

[37] "'Here I have arrived at a foundation of all my beliefs'. 'This position I will *hold*!' but isn't that, precisely only because I am completely *convinced* of it? – what is 'being completely convinced' like?" (OC:§246).

[38] And this is mostly where the difference lies from the kind 'Pyrrhonian' quietism that neo-Wittgensteinians such as Cora Diamond, John McDowell, Stephen Mulhall and Jim Conant defend. Their quietism does not pertain merely to the given answer to a question, but to the question itself. The Pyrrhonism we are trying to expand upon here recognizes instead that the issue is intelligible, and might very well lead us to rethink central conceptions of our epistemic agency and practices. While Stanley Cavell is usually appealed to as the forefather of this reading, it seems to us that the sceptical question is much more vivid in his writings on Wittgenstein than in those that claim lineage from his work.

[39] Both Fogelin and Michael Williams (especially in his 2001) view the sceptical distinction as being between Cartesian or Pyrrhonian (Agrippan for Williams) varieties. However, they do smuggle significant aspects of what we have been calling Kantian scepticism in the perspective of the latter, in terms of the Agrippan tropes establishing a problem of authority and objective purport.

[40] Whose main representatives are Duncan Pritchard (2015), Annalisa Coliva (2015), and Danièle Moyal-Sharrock (2004). While Pritchard is one of the most outspoken defenders of the idea that these Wittgensteinian reflections constitute a kind of Pyrrhonism (2011, 2020), Coliva has avoided connecting the stance to Pyrrhonism (2015:201) and Moyal-Sharrock is silent on Pyrrhonism, but tends to read hinges as having the authority they possess because they belong to our *life* (2004:99) but in a much more necessary and objective guise (ibid:113) than a Pyrrhonist would consider acceptable. This reading is in agreement with Pritchard's appreciation of Pyrrhonism in Wittgenstein, with the caveat that while Pritchard views hinges as fundamentally *a-rational* (2015:102) and a matter of 'visceral, animal commitments" (ibid:106; 2011:197), we believe there is space for a different consideration of what lies at the bottom of the language, game, one which understands the dialectical and negotiable character of these hinges. In this sense, hinges are for our picture closer to Coliva's idea that hinges "while neither warranted nor

warrantable, are seen as constitutive of the very notion of epistemic rationality shared by both sceptics and non-sceptics alike" (Coliva 2015:120). On the score of Pyrrhonism, Pritchard is playing the part of the rustic Pyrrhonist, arguing that epistemic evaluation is at best local (Pritchard 2015:114), while here we are aiming at most for a 'urbane' kind of Pyrrhonism. However, in Coliva's proposal, by being outside the abstract space of reasons the constitute rationality as having an almost indefeasible status *because* they lie outside of the scope of reasons themselves (Coliva 2015:129). This seems a limit on the self-reflective capacity of normative agents to change and revise even those propositions that lie apart from the route travelled by inquiry. In this sense our understanding of what constitutes language games and epistemic rationality at large is neither something entirely animal, nor something instituted once and for all. To a certain degree and in certain circumstances, hinges can be still 'up for grabs'.

[41] Hans Sluga has attempted to show how Wittgensteinian Pyrrhonism traces its roots back to the *Tractatus*, albeit in a less resolute form than the one in the *Investigations* and in *On Certainty* (2004:108-110). Wittgenstein's Pyrrhonism is already embodied by Wittgenstein's differences from Frege and Russell in understanding the nature of language (ibid:106).

[42] There appears to be a crucial difference however in the employment Pritchard makes of the term *vertigo* and how we are employing it here. For Pritchard the vertigo acts more like a residuum after curing our epistemic anxiety by rejecting the universality of evaluation that he draws from Wittgenstein's *On Certainty*. Here the vertigo is more substantial, as the anxiety is not completely cured or dispelled away. After climbing up the ladder and throwing it away we realize that the place we raised ourselves up to is somewhere from which we could easily fall back from. The uncanniness of the ordinary makes us realize that the kind of explanatory tranquillity we sought by engaging with scepticism hasn't delivered the kind of final *Erlösung* we were hoping for. Experiencing vertigo is a facet of our continued engagement with uneliminated and arguably uneliminable questions. Thanks to Modesto Gomèz-Alonso for urging me to clarify this point.

[43] The concept of feeling at home in one's language is also present in Wittgenstein concerning the possibility of viewing one's own determinations of thought as if it were 'from the outside' cf. Z:§§234-235. For both Hegel and Wittgenstein, the possibility of regaining the sense lost due to this homelessness takes place within a community that institutes the same *Geist* (Hegel 1806:§640, Wittgenstein Z:§455).

[44] And in Cavell's understanding, we do not realize such uncanniness only for it to be abandoned (1988:166). We have to learn to look back at our ordinary ways of being in the world with new eyes, cf. Pinkard 2004:262-3.

[45] Cf. Gabriel 2008:122. Pyrrhonism shows us that epistemology cannot legitimize its own procedures in an exhaustive way. This anti-foundationalist idea runs through the philosophies of both Hegel and Wittgenstein, see for example OC:§§559, 563,, Z:§§301, 314; Hegel 1812:49, 344-345; 1825:398; 1830:§§16, 42-44, 112. On this nearness between Hegel and Wittgenstein cf. Perissinotto 1991:160-1 and Forster 1989:109-10 who comments that Hegel might very well accept Wittgenstein's contention that our justification comes to an end without a need to uncover an unconditional epistemological ground. This is of course not the kind of position like neo-Moorean foundationalism as it establishes an unconditional ground whose establishment comes outside of providing reasons for it but claims to have epistemological import nevertheless: "One may require of propositions that they be justified. But the justification of these propositions as presuppositions is still not supposed to be philosophy itself, so that the founding and grounding gets going before, and outside of, philosophy" (Hegel 1801b:94). This same consideration belittles any attempt to provide a justificatory foundation within natural science (Bowman 2013:156-7). See also Bristow 2007:118-9 who claims that Hegel in his Jena writings does endorse dogmatism to some extent.

[46] One of the few to recognize that in Wittgenstein we find a negative or critical impulse which mimics closely Hegel's integration of scepticism and which is not merely quietist is Luigi Perissinotto (1991:106-8). The movement between shapes of consciousness in the

Phenomenology can arguably be understood as wading through different epistemological theories whose truth is misleadingly suggested by "the grammar of the way we speak of things" (Pinkard 2010:99).

[47] The locality of epistemic rationality is one of the features that Pritchard identifies in Wittgenstein (2015:67-70) and that showcases a clear Pyrrhonian insight in being directed against a request for universal evaluation of epistemic practices. Gabriel (2008:121) reads Pyrrhonism as essentially endorsing a contextualist position – and understands Wittgenstein's later thought to endorse the same contextualist insight on a naturalist bent (ibid:242) –, which is the offspring of the relativity tropes in Aenesidemus and Agrippa. However, this shouldn't be read as a reduction of Pyrrhonism nor of its therapy to mere contextualism. Context-sensitivity of what we do is at most a result of understanding the finite character of our epistemic practices, not a presupposition.

[48] And yet Wittgenstein does use the term persuasion in *On Certainty* (§§262, 612, 669) in connection with how we see the world and that our reasons ultimately respond to this persuasion (cf. Perissinotto 2016:166, 173). In a completely unreflective guise this term would be alien to Hegel (cf. 1806:§78), however it is telling to observe that for Hegel, commonsense rationality in terms of *Überzeugung* does play already a role for knowledge in going already beyond itself as a contingent, localized phenomenon. In our activity with other subjects, "the action is recognized and thereby actual, because the existing actuality is immediately linked with conviction, or knowing, or because the knowing of its purpose is immediately the element of existence" (§640).

[49] As Pinkard notices (2004:264) this would go against the therapeutic spirit of both Wittgenstein and Hegel, because it would merely be a position that would place our practice on our subjective side, and the world on the outside, in complete incommunicability. Modern, Cartesian scepticism is for Hegel precisely predicated on this idea of the mind having concepts on one side and the world being a blank externality (1802:341-2, cf. Forster 1989:26). This is a stance that modern scepticism shares with ancient Academic scepticism.

[50] In this sense this understanding comes close to Coliva's idea that hinges constitute epistemic rationality, but this doesn't make hinges any less alien to this very process. Hinges themselves are a result of this temporal and intersubjective practice, and as such they will undergo relevant modification, of either status or content, if necessary over time. Wittgenstein himself is aware of this property of our background hinges: "The mythology may change back into a state of flux; the river-bed of thoughts may shift. But I distinguish between the movement of the waters on the river-bed and the shift of the bed itself; though there is not a sharp division of the one from the other" (OC:§97), and right after: "the same proposition may get treated at one time as something to test by experience, at another as a rule of testing" (§98), "On the other hand a language-game does change with time" (§256).

[51] But it has a lot to do with the Cartesian idea that reason is ultimately *self-grounding*. This aspect of Descartes' has usually been neglected in the relevant scholarship, with the possible exception of the latest developments of Ernest Sosa's virtue epistemology, which non-incidentally appeals to a 'Pyrrhonized' variety of Cartesianism.

[52] And in this sense both belong to a fundamentally pragmatist tradition that views experience as a matter of a process, a perceptual performance (Brandom 2011:7), whose normativity is implicit in the properties of these very practices, which is a fundamentally Kantian insight (ibid:9).

[53] Herbert Hrachovec has reported that in various unpublished Wittgensteinian manuscripts, the idea that the constitution of objectivity and its criteria is a matter of normative activity is made even clearer, with expressions such as "The intention sets a standard that enables one to judge the fact" (Hrachovec 2019:80). Against those readers such as Crispin Wright or Paul Boghossian that finds implausible to read Wittgenstein's rule-following considerations as establishing some kind of global projectivism, these passages should at least suggest otherwise.

[54] Such as the mind/body problem that Hegel is quite clear rests on a mistaken assumption of having on one side an immaterial substance and on the other a material world completely independent of that immaterial substance (1830:§389, cf. Quante 2011:54)

[55] Cf. Forster 1998:100-1 for the suggestion that while Hegel does attempt to do justice to central "aspects of common sense and common/usage concepts" he does not share the general 'deference' towards common-sense that Wittgenstein instead endorses. However, one of the impulses behind the reading of Wittgenstein's Pyrrhonian position presented above is precisely that he is not completely deferent towards common-sense. There is a distinctive dimension of disquiet in his approach towards the way common-sense understands our relationship to the world. Wittgenstein is no G. E. Moore. Unfortunately, this aspect tends to be overshadowed by Wittgenstein's aversion to classical systematic philosophizing.

[56] Hegel would therefore arguably object to Michael Williams' idea that scepticism is wholly *unnatural*. While it is true that scepticism is a product of philosophical reflection, for Hegel this very philosophical standpoint is not merely an artificial construct, it belongs to our character as rational beings. However, he might agree on the verdict that *external world scepticism* is the product of an already compromised understanding. But at this point it should be clear that external world scepticism is little more than a facade in front of a bigger issue.

[57] In the *Skeptizismusaufsatz* Hegel holds in higher regard the Aenesideman tropes over the Agrippan ones, which where even viewed as a kind of *corruption* of the earlier tropes (1802:334; Forster 1989:33), but in his *Lectures* on the history of philosophy he would come to essentially revert the judgment. Agrippan tropes are directed against the finite reflections of the intellect and therefore belong to proper philosophical dialectic (Hegel 1825:393-94, cf. Forster 1989:207; Vieweg 2017:9, D'Agostini 2002:142, Sparby 2015:121). Vieweg (2007:28-7) notices how the earlier tropes are for Hegel an embodiment of the Pyrrhonian's freedom of *character*, while the Agrippan tropes concern freedom of *thinking* (cf. Hegel 1825:359).

[58] Hegel's criticism of common-sense is also a fairly common occurrence in the *Wissenschaft der Logik*, cf. Hegel 1812:7-8, 25, 124). See Giladi 2018:269-70 for an analysis of these passages as focusing on common-sense's scientism and nominalism. The preface of the *Phenomenology* is also a further clear moment of conflict between Hegel and common-sense (1806:§§2-3).

[59] It is *speculative* philosophy that which has to give common-sense its justification, not common-sense itself (Hegel 1830:§27)

[60] Cf. Pinkard 2004:283-4 and Sparby 2015:125. The idea is that the kind of *tranquillity* that Hegelian Pyrrhonism affords us is the tranquillity of being able to re-approach intelligible philosophical questions (ibid:128).

[61] Cf. Kolb 2019:97 for a fitting description of how Hegel would react to Wittgensteinian dissolutions: "Hegel grumbles: 'Wittgenstein, what kind of freedom are you offering the fly? The open space outside any bottle still has its own geometry and curvature. Our logical space is finite and closes in upon itself; true freedom consists in moving the natural curves of that space, not in some illusory infinite openness where all directions of flight are arbitrary and meaningless"

[62] The question of whether Hegel can be a quietist of course depends on whether the Wittgensteinian variety of quietism is the only one on the market. See Giladi 2015:253ff for an attempt at describing a non-Wittgensteinian form of quietism, more amenable to Hegel.

[63] On this aspect, cf.in particular Forster 2004:6-9.

[64] As in the sections of the *Sense-Certainty* chapter of the *Phenomenology* (cf. Hegel 1806:§93-9), the attempt to grasp the truth of mere indexicals shows their fundamental evanescence (DeVries 2008:71)

[65] "A philosophical problem has the form: 'I don't know my way about'" (PI:§123)

[66] See for example the first position of Thought towards objectivity in the *Encyclopaedia Logic*, where Hegel ascribes to the naive metaphysics of common-sense precisely the lack of such opposition "of thinking within and against itself" and the possibility "thinking engages the objects directly" (1830:§26). If this is how Hegel conceives of common-sense, it should appear

clear that his attacks against common-sense are attacks against those position that transform it into a kind of ultimate principle which it is not. Hegel is attacking *philosophical* conceptions of common-sense. Cf. Giladi 2018:275.

[67] The lack of recognition or better, the lack of attention given to the historical and genealogical dimensions of our normative practices has been usually considered the weak spot of Wittgenstein's appraisal of norms in comparison with Hegel (cf. Kolb 2019:100, Pinkard 2019:195). This neglect also had its influence on Kripke's solution remaining ultimately to a superficial level.

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