RADICAL SCEPTICISM'S PRESUPPOSITIONS

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ABSTRACT

Philosophical scepticism confronts us with very difficult conclusions. Scepticism about knowledge of the external world, for example, leads us to the conclusion that we have no knowledge of the world at all. Not only do we not have any knowledge of the world, but when presented with sceptical arguments it seems that knowledge becomes, in principle, unattainable. Scepticism's conclusions are seemingly ludicrous, but its arguments are often convincing and compelling.

Sceptical arguments leave us with bleak prospects for the possibility of knowledge, and in light of them it is easy to be led to pessimistic attitudes about knowledge; if scepticism is correct, we think and act as if we have knowledge when we do not and cannot have any. This leads many to draw a practical lesson about knowledge from scepticism; we cannot have knowledge, but we ignore sceptical arguments and act as if we have knowledge in order to fulfil practical goals. What we normally call knowledge is relegated to the role of pragmatic, but epistemically unjustified, assurances; saying 'I know' is just a way of convincing others to accept your case, and acting as if we know is just a practical necessity when action must be taken. The sceptical argument is taken at face value and applied directly to our epistemic situation in the world. The result is that we must make do with our decidedly lacking epistemic abilities.

I am unwilling to accept this pessimistic position, and I am not convinced that scepticism is quite as convincing as it appears to be. The pessimist sees sceptical conclusions as clashing badly with our common appraisals of knowledge, with scepticism having the last word; in common practice and everyday situations we think we have knowledge of the world, but scepticism tells us otherwise, and so much the worse for our everyday knowledge. I also believe that if the sceptic is correct, then there is a sincere clash between our everyday appraisals of knowledge and sceptical arguments. In everyday situations we believe we have all kinds of knowledge, yet scepticism tells us otherwise. But contrary to the pessimistic view, I contend that the clash between everyday knowledge and sceptical arguments is reason to question the sceptic's arguments as much as it is to bring judgment upon everyday knowledge. My goal is to try to determine whether sceptical arguments go wrong in some way. It is my position that they do, and that as such, sceptical arguments do not actually clash directly with everyday knowledge; the sceptical argument seems to bear directly on our everyday knowledge, but it actually fails to capture our common conception of knowledge, and so fails to apply to our epistemic position. Because of hidden assumptions or presuppositions, scepticism gets our epistemological position wrong.

It is easy to see why many are brought to the pessimistic position that we do not have any knowledge whatsoever. Scepticism, in its most convincing forms, works from what it claims *is* our everyday conception of knowledge, thus its conclusions reflect directly on our epistemic position. I hold that this is not the case; scepticism is in fact working with assumptions and presuppositions that we do not necessarily accept in our everyday epistemic practices. Also, many sceptical arguments have intuitive appeal; they are convincing without any knowledge of philosophical theories or complex argumentation. I believe that if we can

isolate the assumptions and presuppositions of scepticism, it will lose its intuitive appeal. Michael Williams, in Unnatural Doubts, presents a very convincing argument along this line.

The purpose of this essay is to study philosophical scepticism, in order to reach a better understanding of its arguments. The hope is to find what assumptions and presuppositions, if any, sceptical arguments tacitly carry, in order to show that scepticism, contrary to reflecting badly on our everyday epistemic position in the world, does not actually reflect on us at all.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

AGRIPPA'S TRILEMMA

Agrippan scepticism is a form of radical scepticism named after the ancient philosopher credited with presenting it (Empiricus 252). It is a general sceptical strategy; it may be applied to any argument or claim whatsoever, and is not limited to claims that are epistemological, metaphysical or otherwise in nature. This broad applicability gives Agrippa's Trilemma a great deal of force.

Agrippa's Trilemma presents us with five sceptical procedures: Discrepancy, Relativity, Infinity, Assumption and Circularity (Williams, Problems of Knowledge 61-62). The first two procedures, Discrepancy and Relativity, are general methods of disagreement and do not provide us with radically sceptical arguments. Discrepancy simply says that we may disagree about almost anything; if someone feels like being argumentative, for example, she may disagree for the sake of disagreement. Relativity says that any argument one makes may be accused of being applicable only to the one presenting it; an argument may be convincing only to the arguer personally, or for her culture, political affiliation, and so on. Discrepancy and Relativity present reasons why we may always oppose an argument, but they do not give us radical scepticism; the fact that we may disagree does not force us to admit that no argument is any better or worse than any other. Disagreement leaves room for correctness and incorrectness, varying levels of support, and proofs, even though some of us might not accept them. But once we recognize this, we acknowledge that we may be asked of any claim put forward what our reasons are for holding it. If we are to avoid the criticism that an argument we make may be disagreed with or made relative to our personal position, we must acknowledge that an explanation of why we hold our claim to be true may be asked of us.

It is here where the Trilemma of Infinity, Assumption and Circularity become apparent. We have made a claim, and the sceptic rightly asks us why we hold it; how do we know it to be true? If the reason we hold our claim to be true is based on an assumption, our claim is shown to be empty because of its dogmatism. In order to avoid the pitfall of dogmatism, we will cite some sort of evidence to show how we know our claim to be true. The sceptic may now ask why we hold *this* to be true. If we cite another assumption, then we have not furthered our position at all and our claim remains dogmatic. This is the Assumption portion of the Trilemma.

If we make a new claim in support of the previous claim, this too will need to be supported. If we continue making new claims, we embark on a vicious regress of justification. This is the Infinity portion of the Trilemma. Finally, if we cite an earlier claim in support of the one in question, we fall into the trap of circular argumentation. This is the Circularity portion of the Trilemma.

It follows that for whatever claim we make none of our reasons for holding it will be good enough; if we are not dogmatically assuming support we are either citing earlier claims as support or providing novel reasons. If we cite earlier claims as support for our argument,

then it is circular. If we cite novel reasons as support, we are led down an infinite regress of justification. Every claim may be challenged with Disagreement or Relativity, and every challenge may be responded to in only three ways, none of which improves our position. The result is that not only can every claim be questioned, but no claim is *ever* any more or less justified than another; this is why Agrippa's Trilemma is a radical form of scepticism. If we are to avoid being dogmatic with assumptions or circular with our arguments, then any claim we make must cite novel support. As such, any claim we make is doomed to an infinite regress of justification; every claim is equally (un)justified.

A striking feature of Agrippa's Trilemma is that it applies to *any* argument or claim. Aristotle's response to scepticism was to work from self-evident premises in order to deduce true claims. But the radical sceptic may then ask: why do you hold that self-evident premises will bring us to true conclusions? If we are assuming it, our Aristotelian claim fails. Our options are novel support or circularity, and we embark on Agrippa's Trilemma again. Foundationalist arguments fall prey to Agrippa's Trilemma as well. When the Foundationalist presents the claim that all knowledge is justified by the senses, we may ask if that is an assumption. A familiar pattern occurs.

CARTESIAN AND HUMEAN SCEPTICISM

Humean and Cartesian scepticism ask whether or not we can know anything about the "external world." We seem to see tables and people and trees in front of us, but do we *know* that they exist, independently of what we believe? This sort of radical scepticism about the external world is what this paper will be focused on.

Descartes' path to scepticism is likely a familiar one, but it is worth surveying. Descartes begins by doubting anything that could be doubted, in order to assess all his supposed knowledge (Descartes 89). His goal is to find out which, if any, of his beliefs could be considered knowledge; his goal is a broad assessment of all of his beliefs as knowledge (Williams, Unnatural Doubts 23). In order to accomplish this, Descartes chooses a belief that he and most anybody would consider a paradigm of knowledge: that he knows that he is sitting at his desk in front of a fire (Descartes 90). The conditions for knowing in this case are as optimal as one could hope for; Descartes has a clear view of everything he observes, the lighting is good, he is in close physical proximity to what he is observing, and so on. It is in this way that we are to take it that Descartes' conclusions apply to all of knowledge (Stroud, The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism 9).

In this sense, Descartes' belief that he is sitting in front of the fire with a piece of paper is a best case belief; you could not ask for better circumstances or more justification. It is for this reason that Descartes' evaluation of his knowledge is considered an assessment of all knowledge of the external world in general; if Descartes fails to have knowledge in this case, then clearly knowledge in more difficult circumstances of less obvious things is not possible (Stroud, The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism 9-10). The paradigmatic nature of the knowledge that Descartes doubts gives it its general application to all our knowledge of the external world, because it is the best position one could be in for claiming to have knowledge. As such, if Descartes does not have knowledge in this situation, then it is safe to

say that no one has any knowledge of the external world in any situation.

Descartes' initial conclusion is, of course, that he does not know that he is sitting in front of a fire with a piece of paper. His reason for his conclusion is that he does not know if he is dreaming. Descartes has had dreams that he believed at the time were real experiences. Obviously, any belief Descartes formulated while dreaming would not be knowledge; dreaming that one is sitting in front of a fire with a piece of paper does not give one knowledge that one is sitting in front of a fire with a piece of paper, even if one is actually in such a situation. The difficulty is that Descartes could very well be dreaming all of his observations yet not know it; if he is dreaming, then none of his current observations will count as evidence that he is not dreaming, because any observations could be the same whether or not he was dreaming and he would not know the difference. The possibility that Descartes is dreaming is one he cannot rule out, and it is a possibility that would deny Descartes knowledge; if Descartes cannot know whether or not he is dreaming, he cannot rule out the possibility that his observations do not lead to knowledge.

Other formulations of the argument have been presented, such as brain-in-a-vat scenarios, Cartesian demons, and so on. Each has the same general form and conclusion: we cannot know anything about the world because there are certain possibilities that cannot be ruled out by observation, and the presence of those possibilities denies us knowledge of the external world. The result is radical scepticism; we can never know anything about the world, because there are certain conditions on knowledge that cannot be met.

THE ARGUMENT FROM ERROR

Worth noting in contrast with Cartesian and Humean style scepticism is the argument from error (Williams, Unnatural Doubts 135-136). Descartes himself considers a form of it in the Meditations (Stroud, The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism 8). Descartes notes that, from afar, a tower may look round when it is in fact square. In such a case we do not know whether or not the tower is round. This would seem on the face of it to be a sort of sceptical argument.

Arguments from error are less persuasive than Cartesian or Humean style radical scepticism. The reason is that the argument from error does not rule out the possibility of knowledge; it merely points out that in some situations standards for knowledge may be difficult to meet. We may not know whether the tower is round or square from a distance, but when we are up close, we can clearly observe the shape of the tower. The argument from error does not rule out this possibility. If the argument from error is considered a form of scepticism, it is definitely not radical scepticism; it does not make it impossible for us to have any knowledge of the external world whatsoever. Cartesian and Humean style scepticism, by contrast, rule out the possibility of *ever* having knowledge of the external world, and it is for this reason that Cartesian and Humean scepticism are of more interest than the argument from error. At worst, the argument from error encourages us to set high standards on our knowledge, but not impossible standards.

THE DIFFICULTY OF RADICAL SCEPTICISM

Radical scepticism seems to clash badly with our normal beliefs about knowledge. We believe and act in everyday situations as if we know all sorts of things, and we seem to have no problems at all. Attributions of knowledge are consistently made, and we accept or reject knowledge claims for many reasons.

Scepticism says that all those claims and attributions, even those that are seemingly irrefutable in everyday circumstances (that I am sitting at a computer typing, for example,) are taken with just as little reason as the claim that I am actually a brain in a vat. The question then is: why do we accept the sceptical conclusion? Its being clearly incompatible with our every day knowledge claims seems like a *prima facie* reason for rejecting it as a theory of knowledge, or at least for considering it dubious.

The difficulty is that scepticism seems to use the very everyday concepts of knowledge that we consider it to be in conflict with (Stroud, The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism 70). That we do not know anything as a result of observations we have during dreams is perfectly reasonable, as is the contention that often when we dream we do not know we are dreaming. To take one more step, and say that we might be dreaming right now without knowing it, and as such we are not justified in holding our knowledge claims about the external world as true, seems natural too. In this sense radical scepticism has an intuitive edge; radical scepticism's conclusions seem to be drawn from aspects of knowledge that we all accept. As such, its contrast with our everyday beliefs about our knowledge seems not to be a reason to hold sceptical arguments to be false or dubious, but rather as a reason to hold that our everyday beliefs simply are not what we thought them to be. Radical scepticism is drawn from everyday aspects of knowledge, and as such its conclusions are based on intuitive premises. As such, radical scepticism seems to display a dark secret about our everyday knowledge; even by its own standards, our everyday assertions of knowledge are never justified. What we thought was knowledge we can in fact never know at all.

What are we to think of this clash between our everyday assertions of knowledge and radical scepticism's conclusions? We continue to believe all the things we believed before, even after learning of sceptical arguments. We also act on those beliefs; to doubt that the car that I see ahead of me exists while I am driving down the highway at 100 kilometres an hour would clearly result in a disastrous choice. It also seems perfectly reasonable to act in such a way, at least by our everyday standards, even though sceptical arguments tell us that no piece of knowledge is any better-held than any other. To the sceptic, whether or not you slam on the brakes to avoid the car ahead of you, you are making an equally unjustified choice based on your knowledge. It seems that, although sceptical arguments are derived from intuitive premises, they nonetheless seem to be at odds with everyday knowledge claims and actions.

Hume's answer for this was essentially a psychological thesis; we believe and act as if we know certain things because it is in our very nature as humans to do such things. We cannot avoid it, because it is how we are made (Hume 110). As Quine said, "The Humean predicament is the human predicament." (Quine, Epistemology Naturalized 72) We understand the sceptic's conclusions, but they seem to fade away the moment we are left to

make a decision based on our supposed knowledge in normal circumstances. The sceptic's conclusions are profound, remarkable and persuasive, but they cannot hold up to our firm convictions about the way our knowledge works, even if those convictions are ultimately unfounded.

This response seems reasonable, but it is also unsatisfying. There is of course the somewhat ironic point that Descartes' proposal that it is human nature to act as if we know certain things is unfounded under sceptical lights; if we take the sceptic seriously, we do not even know that claim. But further difficulties seem more worrying. If the sceptic is correct, even our most cherished and prized discoveries are lowered to the level of the merest speculation. Any claim about the world cannot be considered knowledge more than any other claim; those who believe that the world is flat have just as much, or little, reason for claiming knowledge as those who claim it is another shape. Knowledge seems to have been rendered an unattainable goal, and the result is that none of our claims are what we thought they were.

The sceptical problem remains. To appeal to a psychological fact about us as humans to explain why we act as if we have knowledge in light of sceptical claims seems almost to amount to an appeal to ignorance; we do not know anything, but we can still act as if we do because there is nothing else we *can* do. This is a bleak and unsatisfying conclusion, and "knowledge" being relegated to a byproduct of human nature seems to run counter to what we take to be important about it.

For this reason, I believe that the sharp contrast between sceptical conclusions and everyday attributions of knowledge does point to a defect in sceptical reasoning. In order to show this, we must address the issue of the intuitive nature of sceptical arguments, in order to show that they are not in fact as intuitive as some might take them to be. If this is so, then the clash between everyday knowledge and scepticism should be damning for scepticism.

RESPONSES TO SCEPTICISM

MOORE

Two papers by G.E Moore attempt to challenge the radical sceptic: "Defense of Common Sense," and "Proof of an external World." In "Defense," Moore lists a series of things he knows are true: that he has never been far from the Earth's surface, that there are other people, and so on (Moore, A Defense of Common Sense 33-35). Moore's proof of the external world is short and simple, but its implications and impact are not quite so simple (Stroud, The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism 84). His proof proceeds as follows: raising one hand, Moore says, "Here is one hand," and raising the other, he says, "and here is another" (Moore, Proof of an External World 73). The two hands are external objects, that is, things that are to be met in space, and it follows from the fact that there are two external objects that externals objects exist (Moore, Proof of an External World 66).

Moore's arguments are difficult to come to terms with in light of radical scepticism. Someone persuaded by radical sceptical arguments is likely to say that Moore has missed the

point; these so called facts, which Moore so confidently reports, are the very things that the sceptic contests, and the very thing that the sceptical argument is said to show we cannot be justified in holding true. To lay them out as disproof of the sceptical argument is like responding to the sceptic's conclusion that we do not know of the existence of external objects with a stubborn, "Yes we do." This will not do for most philosophical arguments.

But dismissal of Moore's arguments ought not to be quite so quick. For one thing, as Moore points out, his proof contains all the features of a good proof. First, its premises are different from its conclusion; that is the conclusion that "External objects exist," could be true even if "Here is one hand," and "Here is another," are not. Second, Moore takes it that the premises are true; the conclusion is drawn validly from true premises.

An obvious difficulty is that, if the sceptic is correct, then Moore cannot claim that he knows his premises to be true; sure, they might be true, but if we do not know whether or not they are, how can we say the conclusion is true? If the sceptic is correct, then Moore must be wrong.

But it is still not quite so simple as that. Moore takes his argument to be doing the very opposite of what the sceptic claims; Moore is giving us examples of true things that he knows, and proofs that he knows those things, and thus concludes that the sceptic must be wrong. The coin has two sides, so to speak; Moore's contention is that he knows these things, and if he knows these things the sceptic must be incorrect. Both the sceptic and Moore cannot be correct at the same time, and so the sceptic must concede defeat. Which side are we to take?

Here we see an interesting facet of radical scepticism brought to light by Moore's argument; there seems to be a severe clash between Moore's argument and the sceptical argument. The two butt heads so to speak, yet neither seems to win an undisputable victory. This is made apparent by the intuitive nature of both arguments. Sceptical arguments seem to play on our intuitions about knowledge; that is, they are convincing because they seem to use our common conceptions of knowledge to show us that we in fact have no knowledge. Descartes might say: if we are dreaming we do not know anything about the world from our experiences, and when we are dreaming we sometimes do not know we are dreaming. We could be dreaming right now and not be able to tell that we were dreaming from our experiences alone, and if we cannot rule this case out, we cannot say that we know that external objects exist from our experiences of them. The argument is convincing to most everyone, but the conclusion seems absurd.

Moore on the other hand uses our intuitions as well; we *do* know all kinds of things! We know where we live, that our houses exist, that we have friends and family who are human beings. It is absurd to say that we do not know these things, because every part of our lives involves us knowing these things and drawing conclusions from such knowledge. If we did not know such things, we would be paralyzed by lack of knowledge. Should I go to the store and pick up some milk? I would, but I do not know whether the store exists. Moore's conclusion that we know about the existence of many external objects is perfectly reasonable to any sane person. Yet Moore's argument seems unsatisfying somehow, even despite the fact

that it is the sort of thing we could do at any time in everyday life.

There is a persistent clash here between the sceptical argument and common, everyday use of "knowledge." Both seem to be convincing in their own ways. The sceptical argument is persuasive and has a drastic and surprising conclusion, yet its persuasiveness seems to disappear in everyday life, where its drastic conclusion falls away; we would not, maybe even could not, actually doubt the existence of the entire world and remain reasonable people. Moore's arguments, on the other hand, hit on the everyday examples of knowledge that we take to be obvious. We act as if we know all the sorts of things Moore takes us to know, and if someone were to tell us in everyday circumstances that we *did not* know such things, we would probably take them to be crazy, or joking. I could not seriously doubt that I am sitting in a chair now; it is the most obvious piece of knowledge I could give, and if I doubted it I might as well doubt that I can walk on the ground or talk to people or eat food or do anything at all that we do in our everyday lives. Yet Moore's argument still seems philosophically hollow; scepticism's argument is quite convincing, and if it is correct, then Moore cannot even use his premises, let alone make his conclusion.

We are left in a unique situation: we have a convincing sceptical argument with an absurd conclusion, and a somewhat ham-fisted argument, with a perfectly reasonable conclusion. Which are we to accept? If you have affinities towards one or the other, you may find either convincing. But I take it to be far from obvious at this point that scepticism prevails unquestionably due to Moore's assertions, or that Moore has shown scepticism to be impossible. I do believe that both cannot coexist; one or the other is correct in its conclusion. There must be something wrong with one, or even both, of the arguments or conclusions, but it will be a difficult thing to show.

AUSTIN

Austin's approach to the problem of scepticism is to examine closely the way we use words like "knowledge." Once we understand how such epistemic terms are used in everyday situations, we will come to see that the sceptic misuses language, and as such cannot come to the conclusion that our everyday epistemic concepts lead us into radical scepticism; the sceptic cannot mean what he says he means, because his terms misrepresent the way language about knowledge is used (Williams, Unnatural Doubts 140).

To begin his study of the way we use epistemic terms Austin, in a manner similar to Descartes, makes use of a paradigm case of a knowledge claim. His goal is to show when a knowledge claim is reasonably advanced, how it can be challenged and when it ought to be withdrawn. Austin contends that his proper analysis of our everyday use of language bears no sceptical conclusion.

The contention is that the sceptic violates our ordinary use of language, but the sceptical argument carries its intuitive weight precisely because it seems to gel with our common concepts of knowledge; the sceptic *does* seem to use our everyday concepts of knowledge. If Austin is to succeed he must not only show that his analysis is the most intuitive, and more likely correct, one, but must also show the sceptic to be incorrect. We must compare the

Austinian and sceptical approaches to knowledge-claim analysis.

The sceptic asks how we know what we claim to know; for example, the sceptic might ask, "How do you know you are now sitting at your desk by a fire?" as a challenge to our claim to be sitting at a desk in front of a fire. The challenge is one that is meant to threaten our knowledge in general; if we cannot justify our knowledge claim we must withdraw it, and all other knowledge claims if the claim at hand is paradigmatic of all knowledge.

In this way, we must prove that we know what we claimed to know. The difficulty of course is that we seem to be incapable of doing this. I claim that I am sitting by a fire, the sceptic challenges my claim by asking how I know such a thing. In response to the challenge we offer grounds; I know I am sitting in front of the fire because I can see that I am. At this point the sceptic produces a general objection, applicable to any of our grounds; the sceptic will assert that I do no know that I am sitting in front of the fire because I could be dreaming all of my experiences and not know it. The sceptic has shown us not to have knowledge.

Austin's analysis appears to proceed in a similar manner, but does not produce scepticism. In Austin's example, someone claims that the bird they see in the field is a goldfinch. The sceptic challenges by asking how our would-be knower knows such a claim. At this point grounds for the claim are produced; the claimer says, "I know it is a goldfinch by its red head." Finally, the sceptic responds with a doubt; the sceptic might say, "But woodpeckers also have red heads." (Austin 83)

Austin's sceptic seems to have thwarted our would-be knower. Yet knowledge in general has not been threatened; the debate between the two is still open, and the possibility of knowledge being attained is still live. Further, the particulars of this case do not lead to a general scepticism; explaining that woodpeckers also have red heads does not leave out the possibility of further examination of the bird, nor does it imply that other knowledge claims will suffer from a similar deficiency. The important feature is that Austin's example of a knowledge claim proceeds according to the way actual everyday knowledge claims do, and in everyday knowledge claims general doubts, such as brain-in-vat and dream scenarios, are never brought up. Reasonable, everyday doubts do not act like sceptical doubts.

But, it appears that the sceptic's approach is the same as Austin's; in both analyses a claim is made, the claim is challenged, grounds are given in response, and a doubt is given in response to the grounds. What exactly makes Austin's everyday case superior to the sceptic's case? What is right with Austin's example, which appears formally similar to the sceptic's yet does not lead to scepticism, and wrong with the sceptic's case? What makes Austin's case more "everyday" than the sceptic's?

According to Austin the sceptic aims to show that the evidence we normally advance as grounds for a claim is not enough, because it does not exclude such possibilities as dreaming or brain-in-a-vat scenarios that show we do not know what we claim to know. But, Austin contends that there are conditions on knowledge claims that govern when evidence is adequate; these are conditions that we use in everyday knowledge claims, but that sceptical

challenges violate (Austin 83-85).

The two conditions that Austin cites are what Williams calls the *definite lack* condition and the *reasonable sufficiency* condition (Williams, Unnatural Doubts 141). The definite lack condition says that we cannot reasonably challenge the evidence for a knowledge claim unless it can be specified in a definite way how the evidence is deficient. The reasonable sufficiency condition says that evidence is adequate if for present intents and purposes there is no room for alternatives within reason. If a knowledge claim or challenge violates either of these conditions it is unreasonable, and not in line with our everyday use of knowledge terms. We are now in a position to see how Austin and the sceptic's cases, which appeared formally similar, are actually different. Presumably Austin's non-sceptical case will stay within the bounds of the definite lack and reasonable sufficiency conditions, and the sceptic's case will violate them in some way.

Austin's conditions are meant to harm the sceptic's position. But the definite lack condition seems to be unproblematic for the sceptical argument; citing the possibility that we may be dreaming is a definite challenge, and one that we can all understand. We cannot seem to meet challenges like dream possibilities or brain-in-a-vat scenarios, but that does not make them vague or fuzzy or somehow lacking. In fact, that sceptical dream possibilities are such challenging philosophical questions seems to show that they are indeed definite challenges. Or at least definite enough that we can argue over them.

On the face of it sceptical challenges seem to meet the definite lack condition. We are left with the reasonable sufficiency condition if we are to refute the sceptic with Austin's tools. We must show that given some specific intents and purposes, there is no reasonable room for sceptical alternatives when making a claim that the sceptic challenges.

But now a problem is immediately apparent: for philosophical purposes, it seems the sceptic's challenges *are* reasonable. The sceptic's intents and purposes, namely to question all of our knowledge at once, make his broad doubts seem very relevant in philosophical discourse. As Michael Williams explains, this is because Austin ignores the sceptic's philosophical project. In Austin's goldfinch example there are many specific ways the knowledge claim may go wrong; for example, it could be a woodpecker, the knowledge claimer could be an inexperienced bird watcher, the area they are in might be devoid of goldfinches, and so on. Many practical questions may have to be met for the knowledge claim to succeed, but broader doubts, such as dream possibilities, do not seem to arise in Austin's case.

Williams contends that, for this reason, Austin's case does not even reflect on the sceptical case presented by Descartes. Austin's example is not a best-possible case for a knowledge claim, and as such it does not threaten the sceptic's case. The specific doubts raised in Austin's case are such that his example cannot be a best-possible case of knowledge claim, and as such Austin's case cannot be paradigmatic of all knowledge, which it would need to be if it were to challenge the sceptic's case. If we can doubt whether the bird is a goldfinch or a woodpecker, then we are clearly not in the best possible situation for knowledge, and our knowledge claim does not reflect badly on the rest of our knowledge. If Austin's case

were the same as the sceptic's, no simple doubts could be raised; we would have the best possible evidence for the bird being a goldfinch. It is at this point that sceptical doubts may arise and threaten all of our knowledge. In effect, Austin's example changes the subject on the sceptic, then claims that his example reflects badly on the sceptical case, even though they are not actually comparable.

The result is that Austin's everyday examples of a knowledge claim being challenged are particular enough in their doubts that they cannot approach the sceptical argument; Austin's case misses the point so to speak, and the sceptic and Austin talk past each other. It is easy to see how this is possible; both Austin's case and the sceptic's seem to be formally identical. It is only once we note that Austin's particular doubts deny the possibility of his case being generalizable to all of our knowledge that we notice the difference between the two. Austin is right to say the goldfinch claim ought to be withdrawn in light of the doubter's claim that woodpeckers have red heads too, but if the knowledge claim fails in this particular way there is no way for the doubt to apply to all of knowledge; we are left at best with an argument from error, which is not radically sceptical. Austin's example cannot generalize to all of our knowledge, and so it is not the same as the sceptic's claim.

The sceptic on the other hand uses cases of knowledge claims in which there are no sources of doubt particular to the situation; any doubt we have about Descartes' knowledge claim that he is sitting in front of a fire will apply to any knowledge claim at all, because no particular doubts are left over to have. In fact, because the sceptic needs a best case scenario of knowledge claiming to get his case of the ground, he cannot have any particular doubts in his case at all; if a reply, such as Austin's, does make use of particular doubts, it cannot reflect badly, or at all, on the sceptic's position.

Austin's attention to detail initially seems to be the strength of his position; Austin analyses our everyday uses of knowledge claims with great insight and understanding, and he illustrates our everyday use of knowledge claims with accuracy. But, the sceptic never uses, and cannot use, detail in the first place. The sceptic's intents and purposes involve not particular doubts about knowledge claims, but rather broad doubts that can apply to all of knowledge. In this way, the sceptic's claim seems to meet Austin's reasonable sufficiency condition; in philosophical discourse, when the sceptic is trying to assess all of our knowledge at once, we see that broad, normally unreasonable, doubts about dreams and brains in vats become relevant. The sceptic's claim meets both of Austin's conditions, and Austin's anti-sceptical argument seems to fail.

We may be left with some misgivings about all of this. Austin's knowledge-claim analysis is after all more true to our everyday use of "knowledge"; in everyday situations we do not make people overcome general doubts about dreaming. If I asked someone, when he claimed to have seen a goldfinch, whether he knew it was a woodpecker or not and if he also knew whether he was dreaming, I would seem very unreasonable; the knowledge claim would not be threatened by the possibility of dreaming. Yet the sceptic's claim seems perfectly reasonable under philosophical considerations.

Why do we not choose Austin's conditions and cases over the sceptic's? Both Austin and the

sceptic make intuitive arguments, but one applies to our everyday situation, the other only to philosophical arguments. The sceptic's conclusion is incredible, but he needs incredible circumstances, in which no particular doubts are available, in order to reach it. In this way, the sceptical argument might seem less intuitive than Austin's. But we are far from being able to show anything of the sort yet. At best we find both arguments intuitive in some way or another, with clashing conclusions from both; it seems reasonable to say Descartes knows he is sitting in front of a fire, but also reasonable to say that we do not know whether we are a brain in a vat or not. If we are to show that Austin's everyday examples ought to take precedence over philosophical intents and purposes, we must be able to show that there is some sort of unintuitive deficiency in the philosophical position. But for now we are still left with Austin's conditions, which the sceptic meets, and Austin's intuitive knowledge claim case that is nonetheless irrelevant to the sceptic's case, which is intuitive in its own right.

QUINE

A problem of scepticism is that when we call into question all of our knowledge, we are left with no conceptual tools with which we may make any epistemic progress; any supposed fact or theory we may cite in order to show that we have knowledge of the external world is just as unknowable as the knowledge we are trying to prove. Quine's approach to this problem is to make epistemology the subject of science, specifically psychology. (Quine, Epistemology Naturalized 82) If we study knowledge just as we study other human phenomena we will see that there is a great deal of progress to be made in understanding how we know. Epistemology will no longer be a study of knowledge that is external to all knowledge, so to speak, and becomes a study of knowledge that is internal to science; we will move our epistemic position from one in which we have no resources at all, to one in which we have all of science and psychology to support and develop our ideas about knowledge. This is the Naturalized Epistemology referred to in the title of Quine's essay on the subject. Epistemology, once naturalized, moves away from philosophy and into the realm of psychology; where we once argued about the conditions for knowledge, we now simply study humans and human phenomena in the same way a psychologist does.

Under Quine's naturalized epistemology the sceptical problem takes on a new light. The only way we can experience objects is through our senses. For example, light bounces off of objects and hits our eyes, and we see an image that presumably looks like the external object. As Quine says, the problem is that, "... we know external things only mediately through our senses" (Quine, Word and Object 1). A familiar sceptical thesis now presents itself: we do not know whether our senses are being systematically deceived so that everything we experience is actually an illusion; so we do not know anything about the objects we experience. We can never know if our inferences from our sense experiences are correct. Quine tends to describe the problem in the language of underdetermination: our rich theories about the external world are underdetermined by the meager evidence we get from our senses. That is, we cannot determine what theory is correct given our limited sense input, so we may always be wrong. But the general sceptical conclusion that we do not know anything that we infer from our senses remains common between the classic sceptical argument and Quine's theory underdetermination argument.

But, contends Quine, what we have missed about this sceptical argument is that it is a scientific argument; that is, it is an argument made from within science. It is a scientific, empirical fact that we see images of objects by the stimulation of our sense receptors by light, for example, bouncing off of objects, and that we formulate theories about the existence of objects from this meager data (Quine, The Natural Theory of Knowledge 2) (Quine, Epistemology Naturalized 83-84). As such, this phenomenon may be studied just like any other scientific one. In other words, we may study our knowledge of the world just as we study our culture, psychology, and so on: in a scientific, empirical manner. In this way, we can make just as much progress in epistemology as we have made in other scientific areas, by studying it in the field, so to speak. The sceptical problem is presented by science, through theories about light bouncing off of objects and making us experience images, and it so it can be answered by science as well, just like any other theory.

Stroud advocates that after Quine's naturalization, the epistemological problem becomes a scientific study of theory in the same vein as psychology, sociology, and so on, in that it is a perhaps imperfect, but developing field with a general direction of enquiry in which we have many resources to answer admittedly tough questions (Stroud, The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism 217). Every theory in science is underdetermined to some degree; in chemistry we must infer the existence of subatomic particles, in psychology we must infer that people make fairly reasonable decisions. But science seems to be no worse off because of this. By understanding epistemology as a part of science, we grant it the same benefit. Presumably, if we are to make an inference from experience of an image to knowledge of an object, such a move will be less troublesome once epistemology is part of science.

The difference between theories of chemistry and psychology and epistemology is that epistemology's theories are not explicitly stated as traditional scientific theories are; perhaps they have been assumed for generations, since before culture and science were established. This, of course, is another empirical fact that may be studied scientifically. The reason we hold on to it is that it has been a successful theory. We continue to use the theory of external objects for its pragmatic benefits, however vague that idea may be.

A difficulty in Quine's anti-sceptical naturalized epistemology seems to arise, however. Epistemology is a scientific field like any other, meaning we can study our knowledge empirically. This has the benefit of bringing epistemology down to earth so to speak; we study chemicals and people and societies and so on, so if we study knowledge in the same way, we will have all the resources of psychology at our fingertips to solve what has been traditionally an ethereal problem. But the problem of underdetermination seems to apply to *all* scientific theories, so that we never know from our experience whether *any* theory is correct (Stroud, The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism 218). In other words, the traditional sceptical problem seems to apply to all of science: if I do not know if I am dreaming, I do not know that what I experience is real, and it follows that I do not know whether my scientific theory of epistemology, or chemistry, psychology or sociology, is correct either. Broad underdetermination of theory by our available sense evidence seems to undermine *all* of science, meaning epistemology's sanctuary in science is no safer from scepticism than the traditional epistemological position. We are left in an Agrippan situation: every scientific theory is underdetermined, yet all we have is scientific evidence to back up

our choice of theory. When faced with the problem of underdetermination we are left with the unattractive option of supporting our choice of scientific theory with scientific evidence, making science, and the epistemology it encompasses, circular. The other options are to delve into a regress of novel support, however unlikely that is, or unfounded assumption.

In this way, it seems that Quine's naturalized epistemology does not answer the traditional sceptic's challenge. We can perform an empirical, scientific study of knowledge and call it epistemology, but it will be no safer from sceptical arguments than it was before. We may always ask how we know that the empirical study is correct. Once all of our knowledge is in question, an appeal to any of it to answer the sceptic becomes circular, science included.

Quine finds this unsatisfying. He contends that our fear of circularity in science, and hence epistemology, is "logical timidity" (Quine, The Roots of Reference 2). Sceptical arguments come from science, Quine contends. If we argue that we do not know about external things because we experience them mediately through images, we must refer to a theory about light reflection and eyes and images and so on. If we use illusion as our basis for sceptical argument, we must have a scientific theory of how illusions occur in order for it to succeed, and if we use dreams in our sceptical argument, we must have a theory about dreams. If we recognize that all sceptical arguments come from science, we ought to see that we may use science to answer those sceptical issues. The challenge to our knowledge by scepticism comes from scientific knowledge we have; our doubts of knowledge come *from* knowledge, so we ought to be able to use that knowledge in responding to the sceptic.

Once again, Quine has put us in a position where we have a selection of scientific tools to use in responding to the sceptic. Epistemology is part of science, so we can use all the resources of science in explaining how we have knowledge. Traditional sceptical problems seem to threaten that position, but traditional sceptical problems too are part of science, and so may be questioned by scientific evidence. Sceptical doubts *are* scientific doubts, so epistemology is in a strong position to answer those doubts with science.

Yet we run into another difficulty. If our understanding of illusions, dreams and images of objects depends on theories in science, then it seems that using those theories to disprove our knowledge of science is a classic *reductio ad absurdum*: science presents us with theories, and if those theories cast into doubt all of our scientific knowledge, we have shown science to be absurd by its own lights. Quine himself admits that this is a valid argument available to the sceptic (Quine, The Nature of Natural Knowledge 68). We are left in a strange position. Quine wants to tell us that the sceptical argument is an overreaction, and that plenty of scientific evidence is available in answering it. But the sceptical argument seems to call into question the very scientific evidence we are to use in answering it. At best we are in the unenviable position of having a sceptical argument that is not supported by scientific evidence because all of science has been shown to be underdetermined. Either science is available to us in answering the sceptic, in which case the sceptic can use scientific evidence to perform a *reductio ad absurdum*, or scientific evidence is not available to the sceptic or the anti-sceptic, because we do not have any scientific knowledge at all, in which case the sceptic's work is done for him anyway.

It seems we are left in a lose-lose situation. If sceptical arguments are correct, even if they are part of science, they may make all of science unavailable to us. Naturalizing epistemology, and everything else, leaves our knowledge just as vulnerable as before, because all of science is vulnerable to the sceptical argument. Finding epistemology's sanctuary in science seems to provide us with many resources for answering the sceptic, but all those resources disappear if the sceptic's arguments are correct. If the sceptic is correct and we see that all of our theories are underdetermined, we cannot appeal to any of our scientific theories in answering the sceptic. If we do not know anything about the external world, we do not know if our theories are true, and if we do not know if our theories are true, we cannot use them to answer the sceptic.

But Quine's position may still be stronger than it appears, even after we admit the possibility of a *reductio ad absurdum* of science. Quine would insist that a *reductio ad absurdum* of science would itself be a scientific fact to be discovered empirically. Under a naturalized epistemology, the question of whether science is absurd will have to be studied scientifically, just as everything else is studied. In this way, Quine admits that we may find that science is absurd in the way a *reductio ad absurdum* would show it to be, but such a fact is to be discovered by science (Quine, Reply to Stroud 475). We may also find out that science works just fine; naturalizing epistemology leaves such questions up to science, and in order to dismiss all scientific discoveries we need a scientific reason to do so. After Quine's proposal there is no other way we can argue. The *reductio ad absurdum* is a possibility, but a scientific one, which will be vindicated or disproved by science itself.

It would seem, if Quine is correct, that we simply have to wait for the science to come in if we are to get a good answer to the epistemological, sceptical question of our knowledge. The psychologists will study as many humans as they can and come back to us with a verdict; over time our knowledge about our knowledge will strengthen, and we will come to find one theory or another works best. But at this point, things also seem to get strange. What does the psychologist know about epistemology? She can tell us about what is happening in our brain when we claim to have knowledge, or the way people act when they say they have knowledge, and so on, but it seems difficult to say that we would ever be satisfied with a psychological response to scepticism.

The impression is that Quine's naturalized epistemology, while avoiding the problem of scepticism, seems to be drifting away from epistemology altogether; Quine is unknowingly changing the subject. Barry Stroud stresses this point (Stroud, The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism 251). As he explains, Quine wants both to talk of epistemology as strictly a study of causal chains of events, in other words as a purely scientific study, and also as the study of how the meager input for our senses leads to the torrential output of our theories. The difficulty is that strictly naturalized epistemology, in which the only thing that is studied is causal chains of events from light hitting eyes to belief-events in humans, would leave out all possibility of underdetermination; there is no such thing as a cause underdetermining its effect. Either the cause preceded the effect, and the effect would not have happened without it, or it did not. As Stroud explains, there are no gaps in causal chains, as there are in chains of inference from meager input to torrential, theoretical output: "It makes no sense to say of one event (e.g., an impact at a sensory surface) that it

'underdetermines' another events (e.g. a coming-to-believe-something) that occurs later in the series" (Stroud, The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism 251).

Causal underdetermination then cannot be the sort of underdetermination that Quine would have a naturalized epistemology solve. Rather, it is informational underdetermination that Quine wishes to address; the problem of underdetermination is that the data we get at our sensory inputs underdetermines the information we are to surmise from that data. The sceptical question is concerned not with how we are caused to come to believe something, but rather with the truth of that belief given the sparse information we are given by our senses. This is not, and cannot, be a causal question, because once we are concerned with causal determination there is no question of underdetermination; underdetermination only applies in the case of inference from data to theory. As Stroud explains:

It is the truth or falsity of the content of the 'output' that Quine says is not 'determined' by the data or the sensory impacts; the relation of 'underdetermination' holds between one set of truths and another.... [Quine] asks how knowledge is possible, given that 'the only *information* that can reach our sensory surfaces from external objects' is 'meager' in relation to what we come to believe about those objects as a result of receiving that sensory 'information'. That gap is just what gives rise to Quine's epistemological problem. (Stroud, The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism 251)

If we are to drop all epistemological talk in favour of talk of causal chains, as a naturalized epistemology would have us do, then we abandon the possibility of even addressing the sceptical problem; causal chains leave no room for underdetermination. Naturalized epistemology allows us to avoid the problem of meager input underdetermining torrential output, but it does so at the cost of becoming irrelevant to the problem of scepticism. Far from being able to answer scepticism, naturalized epistemology becomes inert to it. As Stroud says, "[Quine] wants to avoid all questions of awareness. But he can do so only by avoiding all talk of the 'meagreness' of our 'input' relative to our 'torrential output' as well" (Stroud, The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism 252).

With nothing but causal explanations of physiological events, naturalized epistemology is left with no way to confront the sceptic, because it cannot address the sceptic at all. Naturalized epistemology may have its practical benefits, but it does not give us progress in the sceptical problem. Other approaches, which directly confront the sceptic, may prove useful.

NOZICK AND DRETSKE

Nozick's reply to scepticism is to deny the principle of epistemic closure, which he takes to be a central tool in the sceptic's argument (Williams, Unnatural Doubts 336). The principle of epistemic closure states that if I know a proposition *p*, and I also know that *p* implies *q*, then I know that *q*.

Nozick's contention is that the principle of epistemic closure is vital to the radical sceptical argument about knowledge of the external world. Every such argument must have a premise

that uses epistemic closure to draw a conclusion about our knowledge from the knowledge we take ourselves to have (Nozick 172-178). For example, if I know that I am sitting in a chair, and I know that my sitting in a chair implies that I am not dreaming, then I know I am not dreaming. From here we take note that I *do not* know that I am not dreaming, and if I do not know that I'm not dreaming, then I cannot know that I am sitting in a chair; if I do know I am in a chair, then from the principle of epistemic closure it follows that I know I am not dreaming. Nozick's strategy is to deny the principle of epistemic closure, thereby blocking the sceptical argument from getting off the ground; it no longer follows from the fact that I do not know that I am not dreaming that I also do not know I am sitting in a chair.

Dretske takes a path similar to Nozick in responding to the sceptic, though it takes a different name. He bases his discussion on what he calls *penetrating operators*, but the main issue is nonetheless still closure (Dretske 1014). Dretske uses the example of going to a zoo and looking at a zebra (Dretske 1016-1017). We know that it is a zebra, yet we do not know that it is not a disguised mule. Dretske's way of describing this is to say that our knowledge fails to penetrate to the presuppositions of our knowledge; our knowledge of *that* being a zebra does not penetrate to knowledge about it not being a disguised mule. For Dretske, as for Nozick, closure fails; we know x without having to know what is implied by x. And, it must fail if we are to avoid scepticism, because if closure does not fail, then we are left in the position of having to know that what we think is a zebra is not a disguised mule, or a shape-shifting alien, or a clever painting, and so on.

A difficulty with this strategy is that the principle of epistemic closure seems to be perfectly reasonable. It is intuitive that if I know I am at home, and I know that being at home means I'm not at school, that I know I am not at school. Giving up the principle of epistemic closure seems to deny us knowledge that we take to be obvious. In this way, Nozick and Dretske's replies to scepticism amount to an epistemic concession to the sceptic; by denying closure we have blocked the sceptical argument and saved a great deal of our knowledge, but at the same time have denied ourselves a good deal of other knowledge. We may be able to say that we know things about the external world, but cannot say that we know things that are implied by closure; I know that I am sitting in a chair at home, and know that being at home means not being at school, but do not know from deduction that I am not at school, apparently.

Perhaps denying closure does not have as drastic an effect on our knowledge as radical scepticism does, but we have not gained very much ground through this denial. At best we have replaced the problem of scepticism about knowledge of the external world with a sort of scepticism about knowledge from closure. If we are to find a plausible and acceptable answer to scepticism, we should try not to give up knowledge that we find intuitive, because that is what the sceptical argument would take away from us in the first place.

Further, the principle of epistemic closure may not even be necessary for the sceptical argument. Michael Williams has argued that the sceptic does not in fact need closure at all to make his argument. Williams' contention is that Nozick and Dretske unknowingly confuse two questions when they attack closure in an attempt to stave off scepticism. One question is whether knowing a proposition *p* and that *p* implies *q* means knowing that *q*; this question

about closure implies nothing about what it takes to know *p*. We may ask if knowing that I am at school and that being at school means not being at home leads to me knowing I am not at home, but this says nothing about what it takes to know that I am at school. The question of what it takes to claim knowledge of p might or might not remain open, depending on your epistemological position. If it does remain open, another question arises about whether we must know that we know *p* if we are to have knowledge of *p*. This question is not about closure; it is about a stronger epistemic principle. It is this stronger epistemic principle that the sceptic actually makes use of.

Knowing that we know *p*, for the sceptic, involves knowing the presuppositions of *p*. For example, take the familiar sceptical argument about dreaming: if I am to know that I am sitting in a chair I must know that I am not dreaming, so that I know that I know I am in a chair. It is a presupposition of knowing that I am in a chair, according to the sceptic, that I know I am not dreaming. This is perhaps a stronger principle than epistemic closure; it implies not that knowing *p* and that *p* implies *q* leads to knowing *q*, but that in order to know *p* at all, we must first know that *q*. What the sceptic really needs might be called the principle of *epistemic presupposition* (Hymers 224). The question of presupposition is, as Williams puts it: "must I first know that the relevant presuppositions hold in order to come to know that P?" (Williams, Unnatural Doubts 331) This is a different question from the question of closure. But the presuppositions of *p* are often, if not always, the same as the *q* given to us by closure. For example, take our earlier example of closure: if I know that I am at school (*p*) and that being at school means not being at home (p ⊃ q), then according to closure I know I am not at home (*q*). Epistemic presupposition makes use of the same propositions, but of different relations between the two; if I must know that I know *p*, then if I am to know that I am at school (*p*) I must first know the presupposition of *p*, that I am not at home (*q*). I must *first* know *q* before I can claim knowledge of *p*, where *q* and *p* are the same propositions in both the case of closure and of epistemic presupposition. In this way it is easy to see how the principle of closure was mistakenly taken to be required by the sceptic; they are very closely related. But, they are not the same thing. Once we make note of this, we see that a denial of closure is not only unintuitive, but ineffective against radical scepticism anyway.

Nozick and Dretske are not necessarily wrong to deny the principle of epistemic presupposition, because it does seem to put unreasonable constraints on our knowledge. It is a presupposition of water being a liquid that its temperature be above 0° Celsius. Epistemic presupposition implies that if you know that some water is a liquid, then you must first know that its temperature is above 0° Celsius. But this is strange; you know that the water is liquid when you notice that it flows, not given this observation after checking the temperature (Hymers 224). It is counterintuitive to imagine that when finding some liquid water we must know that the temperature is above 0° Celsius before we can know that it is a liquid; we know it is liquid, without necessarily knowing anything about the temperature.

Epistemic presupposition, which the sceptic really requires, is not the same as closure. By conflating the sceptic's use of closure with epistemic presupposition, Nozick and Dretske have suggested that we deny the intuitive principle of closure, while doing no damage to the sceptic's position. It seems reasonable to hold on to closure and look for more effective

responses to radical scepticism. It also seems reasonable to deny something like the principle of epistemic presupposition, but we will have to have good reasons for doing so; the sceptic may still argue that the principle of epistemic presupposition is necessary, given sceptical considerations.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL DIAGNOSIS AND CONTEXTUALISM

So far it seems none of the anti-sceptical arguments we have sketched have been able to answer the sceptic properly. We are left with an intuitive problem that casts doubt on all of our knowledge at once. We have seen arguments, such as Moore's and Austin's, which seem to provide us with other intuitive possibilities, but sceptical arguments remain. Rather than try to provide alternatives to sceptical positions, or try to show the sceptic to be wrong by coming up with a definitive refutation, it would seem wise to examine the intuitive nature of the sceptical argument, and see if we can find some leeway there.

THE EPISTEMOLOGIST'S DILEMMA

As we have seen, Quine, Nozick, Dretske, Austin and Moore have failed to answer the sceptic. Scepticism remains as a powerful argument against the possibility of knowledge and is difficult, if not impossible, to approach due to its simple, intuitive form; anti-sceptical responses seem artificial, pretentious and difficult to come to terms with compared to scepticism's elegance. In this way, scepticism's lack of theoretical presupposition gives it resilience to criticism. It arises from everyday notions of knowledge; our options in responding to it then are to either deny principles of knowledge that we all find perfectly reasonable, or to put forward contentious theoretical ideas that fail to convince. We cannot contradict the sceptic, because in doing so we are contradicting our own intuitions. Nozick and Dretske seem to do just this; by denying closure they hope to do away with scepticism, but in doing so they would also do away with a principle of knowledge that seems perfectly reasonable. By attacking scepticism, Nozick and Dretske inadvertently attack our intuitions about knowledge. We also cannot respond to the sceptic with novel theories of knowledge, because in order to avoid scepticism novel theories must avoid the intuitive ideas of knowledge that scepticism makes use of, giving them unintuitive consequences. Quine seems to do just this; his naturalized epistemology is a radical shift from what our normal ideas of knowledge are, and as such it misses the epistemological point altogether. In an attempt to avoid scepticism it diverges so radically from our intuitive ideas of knowledge that it ceases to be relevant. Next to the intuitive considerations that lead to scepticism, Quine's naturalized epistemology is a very hard sell.

We seem to be in a dilemma; any response we give to scepticism, in an attempt to rid ourselves of the paradox of our concepts of knowledge robbing us of knowledge, seems to result in its own paradox. We are left with criticisms of scepticism that dispose of intuitive principles of knowledge, such as that of closure, or theories that are unpalatable next to scepticism, such as naturalized epistemology. In short, it seems every response to scepticism hits us just as hard as scepticism; in responding to the sceptic we must make concessions to her that are unpalatable. If scepticism is based on everyday ideas of knowledge that run deep in our intuitions, then in criticizing scepticism we are arguing with ourselves, so to speak. If scepticism is based on ordinary ways of thinking, and anti-sceptical arguments must criticize ordinary ways of thinking or propose theories that diverge from intuitive ways of thinking,

then it seems that criticizing scepticism is ultimately just another way of agreeing with the sceptic (Williams, Unnatural Doubts 19). In making epistemological theories to replace scepticism, or in denying the intuitive principles used by scepticism, we deny that our own ideas of knowledge are legitimate.

Williams calls this the epistemologist's dilemma. The intuitive nature of scepticism means that responding to the sceptic damages our knowledge in some way, and amounts to no more than a concession to the sceptic. As Williams puts it:

... we can either accept scepticism, or make changes to our pre-theoretical thinking about knowledge that shrink the domain, or alter the status, of what we previously thought of as knowledge of objective fact. In making such changes, however, we inevitably appear to be making very large concessions to the sceptic. (Williams, Unnatural Doubts 22)

The intuitive basis of scepticism leaves us with few options.

The only anti-sceptical option that remains is to try to show the sceptic's position to be incoherent. Williams calls this approach *definitive refutation* (Williams, Unnatural Doubts 32). But as we have seen, definitive refutations are difficult to accept; if the sceptic is incoherent, then it is difficult to explain how we can make sense of him so easily. This is especially so if we take the sceptic's position to be intuitive; how are we to make sense of an argument that is meant to show that an intuitive argument is nonsense? To do so it seems we would have to show our own intuitions to be incoherent; scepticism merely takes ideas and principles that we make use of everyday when making knowledge claims, and from those principles it determines that we have no knowledge. We cannot deflate the sceptic's position, because in doing so we must presumably deflate the very everyday knowledge we wish to uphold.

Further, this assumes we can even deploy such arguments. It is difficult to see how we are to show that an intuitive argument is incoherent. Are we to use intuitive ideas to show that the intuitive sceptical argument is incoherent, or some other theoretical ideas? Using our intuitions to perform a *reductio ad absurdum* on themselves in order to show that scepticism is incoherent seems like simply another form of scepticism. And it is hard to say how a theory could show our intuitions to be incoherent; the theory, which defies our intuitions, would seem like nonsense if it clashed with intuitions. In short, we cannot seem to make sense of an argument that would show scepticism, which is intuitive, to be incoherent; we *do* understand the sceptic just fine. As such, most definitive refutations must end up doing something other than show the sceptic to be incoherent, and the only possibility seems to lead to an epistemologist's dilemma.

Austin's anti-sceptical arguments seem to fall into this trouble. He intends to show that the sceptic cannot mean what he says he means, by showing the way our normal language is *really* used. But, given the intuitive nature of scepticism, it is seemingly impossible to understand how such a thing is possible. As such, Austin's attempt to show the sceptic to be incoherent turns into a sort of tacit agreement with the sceptic; the sceptic ends up meeting the two principles that Austin puts forward, meaning the sceptic's argument is coherent and

effective. Austin cannot make the argument he wishes to make, and as a result ends up falling into one of the two possibilities mentioned earlier that make up the epistemologist's dilemma.

The only anti-sceptical argument that does not seem to fall into the epistemologist's dilemma or attempt a definitive refutation is Moore's. Moore seems to simply butt heads with the sceptic by employing other intuitive arguments and facts, with the sceptic ultimately winning. But why does the sceptic win? Moore straightforwardly answers the sceptic's conclusions with his own intuitive conclusions, but fails. Why does the argument work in the sceptic's direction, from intuitive ideas to lack of knowledge, but not in Moore's direction, from intuitive pieces of knowledge to the disproof of scepticism? It seems we must investigate the intuitive nature of scepticism if we are to get any answers.

WILLIAMS' ANTI-SCEPTICAL STRATEGY

Williams' answer to scepticism is different from the strategies we surveyed in the last chapter. He sees a general inability to succeed in every response to scepticism. This is because in responding to the sceptic, anti-sceptics fall into the epistemologist's dilemma. As such, Williams does not want to try to stubbornly answer the sceptic directly as Moore does, or try to show that the sceptic is unable to mean what he says as Austin does, or attempt a radical transformation of our epistemological practices as Quine, Nozick and Dretske do. Instead he wants to turn away from answering the sceptic and try to show the sceptic's arguments to be theoretically contentious; he wants to attack the sceptic's seemingly strongest asset, rather than answer scepticism on the sceptic's terms.

As we have seen, the strength of the sceptic's position is that her arguments are taken to be intuitive; that is, they supposedly follow from concepts of knowledge that we all find plausible. Any theoretical response to scepticism, such as Quine's, Nozick's or Dretske's, will seem unpalatable compared to the intuitive arguments of the sceptic; the sceptic will win on intuitive plausibility, no matter how well thought out the anti-sceptic's response is. Further, deflationist views, such as those similar to Austin's anti-scepticism, will be difficult to accept given scepticism's intuitive nature; it is not easy to see how the sceptic can fail to mean anything when we so intuitively understand her arguments. The sceptic's seemingly intuitive arguments afford considerable strength and resilience to the sceptical position, making it look intractable.

This is where Williams wants to dig in: by questioning the intuitive nature of the sceptical argument that puts scepticism beyond the reach of almost all criticism. As he puts it, he wants to shift the burden of theory onto the sceptic (Williams, Unnatural Doubts 31). Rather than try to respond to the sceptic on her own grounds, Williams wants to question the sceptic's grounds and show them to be theoretically loaded, as opposed to intuitively motivated; if we can show scepticism to be just as theoretically committed as many other epistemological positions, we take away a great deal of its strength, and bring it down to the same level as many other epistemological positions. If we can show that sceptical doubts are not as natural as they seem, then we can show that scepticism is not forced on us by everyday ways of thinking about knowledge, and that some anti-sceptical responses are not

implausible simply due to their less intuitive nature; some plausible, anti-sceptical epistemological positions will be at worst equally theoretically loaded as scepticism.

Williams dubs this particular approach to anti-scepticism *theoretical diagnosis*; the purpose of theoretical diagnosis is to show that scepticism *does* have theoretical commitments (Williams, Unnatural Doubts 32). This is contrasted with what Williams calls *therapeutic diagnosis*; therapeutic diagnosis takes for granted, whether knowingly or not, that sceptical arguments are intuitive, and then attempts a theoretical response. According to proponents of a therapeutic approach, the intuitive nature of scepticism means we have only a few options: remain pessimistic about the inevitability of scepticism, attempt a radical conceptual shift in our epistemic standards, or show the sceptic to be unable to mean anything through definitive refutation. Pessimism is obviously unpalatable for many, and radical conceptual change leads to a tacit concession to the sceptic, so a therapeutic approach is most promising given scepticism's intuitiveness. Accordingly, the best approach is to try to dissolve scepticism by showing it to be incoherent. But as we have seen this is a difficult, if not impossible, task, given that the proponent of a therapeutic diagnosis has accepted that scepticism is intuitive; any attempt at showing scepticism to be incoherent seems doomed to failure, because if scepticism is intuitive, then we do seem to understand it in some way or another.

Therapeutic responses fail, according to Williams, when they take for granted the intuitive nature of scepticism, making the sceptical position seemingly unapproachable. But it is at least possible that we can take a step further back in the sceptic's argument and question the very intuitive nature that presents us with problems (Williams, Unnatural Doubts 35). For example, it may be the case that the sceptic gets our everyday ideas of knowledge wrong. We have everyday, intuitive ideas of what constitutes knowledge, but they are not always obvious; any attempt to spell out our everyday ideas of knowledge can be contested, in an Agrippan manner. If someone says, "The everyday, intuitive notion of knowledge is *X*," we may ask, "How do you know that? Are you assuming it, or is your support for it novel evidence or circular presuppositions?" If the sceptic must have a contentious theory of what our everyday ideas are, then the sceptical position will be shown to have theoretical commitments, and we may contest those commitments with other, equally plausible, but anti-sceptical, theories.

Further, sceptical conclusions, as we have seen in Moore's arguments, seem absurd; no reasonable person believes that we do not know where we are or if we are human or brains in vats, and so on. In everyday circumstances we take it as obvious that we know we are humans, and that we are on the planet Earth, and so on. Yet the conclusions of sceptical arguments contradict these obvious knowledge claims; scepticism's intuitive arguments lead to deeply unintuitive conclusions. So, if sceptical arguments are in fact intuitive, it seems the sceptic may need a theory to explain why intuitive arguments lead to these unintuitive conclusions. Further, the unintuitive nature of the sceptic's conclusions seems not to spill over into everyday life, where we do not ever take them to be as serious as their intuitive arguments imply we ought to; scepticism is supposedly derived from everyday concepts of knowledge, yet they do not affect our everyday knowledge claims. The sceptic may need a theoretical explanation of why common attributions of knowledge, such as those Moore

presented, seem immune to sceptical doubts in everyday situations; as Williams says, the sceptic must have a theory to show why scepticism is only persuasive in detached, objective, philosophical contexts, and not everyday contexts (Williams, Unnatural Doubts 35). In short, the sceptic must explain the context-sensitivity of his arguments.

The sceptic's position seems unstable in everyday contexts; we take Moorean propositions to be perfectly reasonable, and almost ridiculous in their obviousness. Of course we know that we are on the planet Earth right now; it is so obvious that stating it seems out of place. Yet the sceptic must hold that his discovery that we have no knowledge affects all our knowledge in general. This is another way in which the sceptic may hold theoretical commitments: if the sceptic must have a theory about how scepticism can affect our knowledge in everyday contexts, then our everyday knowledge is insulated from the intuitive nature of scepticism. As Williams explains:

Although we cannot simply assert the commonsense outlook against the results of philosophical reflection, the fact that our ordinary epistemic attitudes are at variance with the sceptic's conclusions is *prima facie* evidence that the sceptic's principles do not reflect our ordinary way of thinking about knowledge. (Williams, Unnatural Doubts 82)

Scepticism may be an intuitive argument, but only in philosophical contexts; if the sceptic is to show that everyday knowledge is affected by scepticism, she must take on theoretical commitments, in which case scepticism is as vulnerable as any epistemological theory to criticism, and other epistemological theories may be just as plausible in comparison.

So, it is not implausible to think that the sceptic does have some sort of theoretical commitments, and that the sceptical position is not as invulnerable to criticism as it seems. It is possible that the sceptic has an implicit theory of the way in which philosophical reflection and everyday knowledge are related, so that *all* knowledge can be cast into doubt by scepticism. If this is the case, then the sceptic has a difficult task ahead of himself: he must acknowledge the contextual sensitivity of sceptical doubts, while still being able to show that scepticism is generally threatening and genuinely conflicted with Moorean propositions. This will be a task that will most likely take some theoretical work, but it will also take some work to show that the sceptic is in fact in this position of theoretical commitment.

In this way, Williams takes theoretical diagnosis to be incompatible with any therapeutic diagnosis. In order to show that the sceptic has tacit theoretical commitments, we must make full sense of the sceptical position, excluding any possibility of showing the sceptic to be incoherent. We must understand what the sceptic means to begin a theoretical diagnosis.

Williams takes the theoretical diagnosis approach to be most promising (Williams, Unnatural Doubts 35). We must put scepticism into a theoretical context, in the ways mentioned above, by showing that it is committed to a connection with some sort of theoretical epistemological project, and not just supported by intuitive notions of knowledge that we all take to be obvious. This epistemological project must have certain concepts of knowledge that make scepticism seem plausible, convincing and inevitable. But once we show that these

epistemological concepts are part of the theoretical commitments of a specific epistemological project, and not of intuitive ideas we all hold about knowledge, we can begin to show ways in which those theoretical commitments are not compelling; we may respond with our own theories and not have to worry about scepticism winning by intuitive default. The theoretical diagnosis approach is to show that scepticism is a genuine problem that we can understand, but only given certain theories about knowledge; that is, only given certain contexts of epistemological enquiry.

EPISTEMOLOGICAL REALISM

Williams sees a common root in sceptical problems that he calls *epistemological realism*. This is a theoretical doctrine that some epistemologies, sometimes unknowingly, use as the framework to support their position. It shapes the character of epistemological positions, such as foundationalism and coherentism, with certain principles that make the path to scepticism almost inevitable.

Epistemological realism is the position that certain propositions are better suited for justification because of intrinsic properties they possess. Further, propositions are better suited for justification on account of their content; that is, the intrinsic property of a proposition that makes it justificatory is its content.

In this way, epistemological realism holds that beliefs and propositions are divided up into certain kinds, and that these kinds are either basic and justificatory, or demanding of justification, and that they are divided into these kinds only by their content, and by not other considerations. A proposition's status as justificatory is determined only by its content, and by no other considerations.

FOUNDATIONALISM

By exposing the theoretical commitments of scepticism, Williams plans to show its arguments not to be intuitive. These theoretical commitments will have to be part of some sort of contentious epistemological project. We have seen that epistemological realism has been identified as a root of sceptical problems. But epistemological realism is a broad commitment, and a particular epistemological project must be identified to show how scepticism is born.

Williams identifies *foundationalism* as the implicit theoretical project giving scepticism the principles necessary to make it seem unavoidable and insurmountable. The standard view of foundationalism is that there are foundational propositions that do not require further justification; they are meant to be the end of justification, so to speak. It is the theory that there are points of knowledge from which the rest of our knowledge is produced. But this is not the part of foundationalism that Williams is worried about. He is concerned with the specific types of propositions that are taken to be foundational, and with the way foundationalism divides our beliefs up into justificatory and non-justificatory propositions or beliefs.

The important part of foundationalism, says Williams, is that there are certain *types* of beliefs or propositions that act as the fixed points of justification in our knowledge. Foundationalism is a form of epistemological realism, in that it holds that certain propositions are epistemologically prior to others; that is, certain types of propositions are better suited to play the role of justification for all other propositions, due to their intrinsically justificatory properties. Foundational propositions are justificatory due to their content alone; a foundational proposition is epistemologically prior to other propositions permanently, due only to its own content. These propositions form the foundation of justification for all of our knowledge about the world; without these foundational propositions none of our propositions can be justified, because they are the only justification we have, and they are the only type of proposition that can play the role of justification.

In this way, Williams identifies two aspects of foundationalism; foundationalism holds that justification starts from certain points of knowledge, *and* that those points are fixed as certain types of propositions with inherent justificatory properties due to their content. Williams calls this particular form of foundationalism *substantive foundationalism*, although it will be referred to simply as foundationalism throughout this essay. As Williams explains:

Thus for the (substantive) foundationalist beliefs have an *intrinsic epistemological status* that accounts for their ability to play one or other of the formal roles the theory allows. Beliefs of one kind can be treated as epistemologically prior to beliefs of some other kind because they *are* epistemologically prior; some beliefs play the role of basic beliefs because they are basic; others receive inferential justification because they *require* it; and all because of the kinds of beliefs they are. (Williams, Unnatural Doubts 115)

This is contrasted with *formal foundationalism*, which only holds that justification begins at certain points, and not that those points are fixed permanently by any particular properties of propositions. Formal foundationalism does not on the face of it have the sceptical qualities of substantive foundationalism, because it does not presuppose epistemological realism. Without an account of what types of propositions are intrinsically justificatory, formal foundationalism avoids scepticism (Williams, Unnatural Doubts 115).

The particular type of proposition that plays the justificatory role, according to foundationalism, is experiential statements; that is, statements about what we see, hear, feel, and so on. The statement, "I see the image of an apple in front of me," serves as justification for the statement, "There is an actual apple in front of me," and it is the only type of statement that can be used to justify belief in external apples. All of our statements about the world are ultimately supported by such experiential statements, because of their special status as justificatory statements; if we lose them, we lose all of our knowledge about the world. Experiential statements take priority over all other statements in providing justification, so if they can all be doubted, we are left with no justification at all.

Here we can see the beginnings of how scepticism might emerge from specific theoretical commitments, particularly foundationalism; and if we can show that radical scepticism *requires* epistemological foundationalism to reach its negative conclusion about all of our knowledge of the world, we can show that scepticism is avoidable, and that it can be

contested by other theories.

But merely pointing out that scepticism may hold such tacit foundational commitments is not enough. Defenders of scepticism who take scepticism to be intuitive in nature will argue that, contrary to requiring foundational presuppositions, scepticism actually generates foundationalism; foundationalism falls out of scepticism once we realize that all of our knowledge is called into question by doubting that we can know the existence of external objects by inference from sense experience. We make the discovery of foundationalism when scepticism shows us the importance of experiential statements. Sceptical arguments present a challenge to our knowledge and foundationalism answers that challenge by giving experiential beliefs priority: the problem of scepticism is that we are not justified in holding any beliefs about the external world true, and in response foundationalism presents us with the idea that experiential beliefs are intrinsically justificatory, so that we *are* justified in holding beliefs about external objects true so long as those beliefs are based on experience. The next step is for the sceptic to show that even by foundationalist lights we are not justified in holding beliefs about the external world, so that we once again have no knowledge of the external world.

The challenge now for Williams' anti-scepticism is to show that foundationalism is required for scepticism, and not the other way around; we must show that sceptical arguments have the strength they do only because of foundational epistemology, and not that foundationalism exists only because of sceptical considerations. If we can accomplish this, then we can show that, only given foundationalism *and* sceptical arguments do we have no knowledge; and we may then proceed to reject foundationalism. We may argue that scepticism is only possible in the context of epistemological foundationalism, and we may put forward contexts of our own, contexts in which scepticism is not an issue. If it can be shown that there are implicit foundationalist presuppositions in scepticism, because scepticism requires foundationalist principles in order to be convincing, then we will have shown that scepticism is just as theoretically contentious as any other epistemological theory. We will no longer be stuck in the position of being forced to accept the epistemological paradox of our everyday concepts of knowledge intuitively leading to the denial of all of our everyday assertions of knowledge, because the so-called intuitive premises will be shown to be the theoretically contentious principles of foundationalism. We may begin the work of showing scepticism to be an unpalatable consequence of the particular theoretical, epistemological project of foundationalism. This will make scepticism begin to look less appealing, and more like the beginnings of a *reductio ad absurdum* of foundationalism. But first, we must show that scepticism does in fact require foundationalism.

SCEPTICISM AS THE BASIS FOR FOUNDATIONALISM, OR FOUNDATIONALISM AS THE BASIS FOR SCEPTICISM?

The task for the anti-sceptic is now to show that foundationalism must be a precondition for scepticism. The sceptic, then, must be able to show that foundationalism is instead a by-

product of scepticism. In order to do this the sceptic will first have to give the most intuitive argument available, which forces us to ground knowledge of the world on sense experiences. Once this is accomplished the second task for the sceptic is to show that grounding knowledge of the world in sense experience results in knowledge being unobtainable. This can be done by, for example, noting that we can never know whether we are dreaming through sense experience alone, and if we are dreaming we do not know anything about the external world from our sense experiences. If sceptical arguments do in fact play out in this way, with foundationalism being produced by scepticism and then being proven ineffective at giving us knowledge, then the anti-sceptic may be accused of only focussing on the second stage of the argument; the anti-sceptic only responds to the attack on foundational knowledge, and not on the intuitive arguments that set up scepticism in the first place (Williams, Unnatural Doubts 59). The anti-sceptic will have mistaken the presuppositions of the foundationalism that is forced on him with the presuppositions of all of scepticism. If this is so, scepticism cannot be avoided, and we are forced to accept the priority of experience put forth by foundationalism, and all its shortcomings.

The most intuitive, simple and straightforward form of scepticism seems to be Agrippa's Trilemma. Take a simple argument for the existence of external objects, similar to Moore's: 1) I am having an experience of a chipmunk; 2) There is a chipmunk here; 3) There is an external object here. The difficulty is that the first premise only supports the second premise if the third is true. Someone may simply ask, in an Agrippan manner, "How do you know that seeing a chipmunk means that a chipmunk exists?" If we respond by explaining that we know so because of the fact that there is a chipmunk here, then we are arguing circularly; we know there is a chipmunk here because we see there is a chipmunk, and if we see there is a chipmunk then we know there is a chipmunk here. The response then, is to propose foundationalism; our argument seems to support the idea that sense experience is prior to other knowledge, because we intuitively understand it this way. It seems intuitive to all of us that seeing a chipmunk means a chipmunk being there. But without foundationalism the Moorean argument fails under Agrippan considerations. So, we propose foundationalism out of the Agrippan sceptical argument: sense experience claims are prior to knowledge claims, so that our claim that seeing a chipmunk means knowing a chipmunk is there is justified. This seems to be a fair, reasonable and intuitive move. But at this point the sceptic proceeds in a familiar manner by pointing out that we cannot know by experience whether we are dreaming or are brains in vats and so on, and if we are dreaming or are brains in vats, then we cannot know by sense experience about the external world. This is the sceptic's best bet for showing that foundationalism comes out of sceptical considerations, and that foundationalism is then shown to be inadequate by familiar sceptical reasoning, which the anti-sceptic responds to.

The difficulty with this approach to scepticism is that Agrippa's Trilemma is a very broad strategy that can be applied to *any* argument or premise. The sceptic may ask, in an Agrippan manner, how we know that seeing a chipmunk means that a chipmunk is here, but we may also ask, "How do you know that you are experiencing the image of a chipmunk?" If the answer is that it is known that a chipmunk experience is being had because that is what is being experienced, then the argument is circular. The other possibilities are assumption and regress.

So, the Trilemma can be shown to call into question the very experience used as the first premise, just as much as it can call into question the move from the first premise to the second. If this is the case, then foundationalism does not get off the ground; sense experience is not prior to other knowledge, because we can question the reliability of experience in an Agrippan manner. If this is so, then the intuitive sceptical strategy that the sceptic would use to show that foundationalism supposedly falls out of sceptical considerations can also be used to show that foundationalism does not fall out of such strategies: the Trilemma shows that sense experience does not support external knowledge of objects, which would lead us to propose foundationalism; but it also shows that sense experiences are just as dubitable as knowledge of objects, which would mean we could not propose the priority of experience that is foundationalism.

Agrippa's Trilemma does not give us reason to propose foundationalism any more than it does to oppose foundationalism; the most intuitive sceptical argument available to the sceptic is neutral in regards to the adoption of foundationalism. The Trilemma is such a broad strategy that it can be used against the sceptic as easily as the sceptic can use it. As such, the sceptic has not proven that foundationalism falls out of sceptical considerations. Rather, the Trilemma seems to show that the sceptic must adopt foundationalism as a contentious theoretical doctrine in order to support Humean and Cartesian scepticism that makes use of dream-arguments; the most intuitive of sceptical arguments does not support scepticism, so unless we can come up with other intuitive sceptical arguments, it seems radical scepticism does not have as its roots intuitive arguments, or at least not the Trilemma. Without an intuitive argument to ground foundationalism in the sceptic is left with only the second stage of the argument: a Moorean argument for knowledge of the world is put forward, and the sceptic makes the dream or brain in a vat argument, which only works if foundationalism is presupposed.

These considerations are supported by comments made by Wittgenstein, as Williams explains (Williams, Unnatural Doubts 70). Wittgenstein notes that, "My having two hands is, in normal circumstances, as certain as anything I could produce in evidence for it" (Wittgenstein 250). In other words, proposing that knowledge of the external world requires sense experience as evidence is just as plausible as proposing that knowledge of sense experience requires the external world as evidence. The process of justification can work either way, because, as the Trilemma has shown, we are at best equally certain or uncertain about external objects as we are about our sense experiences. The only way that sense experience becomes more certain than propositions or beliefs about external objects is if we adopt a foundationalist epistemology.

This bears on another potential argument that the sceptic might use to support the case that foundationalism is produced from intuitive scepticism. All that is required, the sceptic argues, is that the logical gap between experience and knowledge of the external world be recognized; all our experiences are compatible with the external world existing as we see it or not existing at all, or being completely different from what we experience. There is no logical connection between our experiences and the way the external world actually is.

But, as Williams explains, a simple logical point such as this does not make an

epistemological point about the priority of experience over knowledge of the external world. The logical point is just that there is a gap between experience and the way the external world is, and it does not insist on or even recognize a direction in which that gap is most deficient. We cannot infer from a logical gap between experience and the world that experience takes priority over knowledge of the world any more than we can infer that knowledge of the world takes priority over experience. If, as Wittgenstein noted, having two hands is as certain as anything that can be produced in evidence for it, then it is just as reasonable (or unreasonable) to produce sense experience as evidence for our having two hands as it is to produce our having two hands as evidence for our experience. If anything, the logical gap between experience and knowledge of the world shows that experience and knowledge of the world are just equal in status; it shows that we ought *not* to draw any conclusions at all about epistemological priority. If the two are equal, then this is not the intuitive argument that the sceptic hopes will show that foundationalism falls out of scepticism; it shows nothing of the sort, and instead shows that the opposite thesis, that knowledge of the world takes priority over experience, is equally plausible.

In order to get the epistemological conclusion that the sceptic wishes to get out of the logical point about the gap between sense and experience, we see that the sceptic needs to presuppose foundationalism; the logical gap between experience and knowledge of the world is unbiased in its direction, and so does not support foundationalism any more than the opposing thesis of priority of knowledge of the world over experience. Williams refers to this as the *neutrality of experience*: (Williams, Unnatural Doubts 73-79) a statement about the world can go beyond our experiences just as much as a statement about experience can go beyond the world.

It seems that scepticism requires some sort of epistemological priority, specifically foundationalism; but due to the neutrality of experience pointed out by Williams and supported by Wittgenstein and Agrippa's Trilemma, the logical gap that the sceptic presents as an intuitive argument for foundationalism could just as easily work against the sceptic. Statements about experience and statements about the world are epistemologically on par before we introduce any epistemological theories that involve priority. To expand on our earlier quote, Wittgenstein says:

My having two hands is, in normal circumstances, as certain as anything I could produce in evidence for it. That is why I am not in a position to take the sight of my hand as evidence for it. (Wittgenstein 250)

But further:

... a proposition saying that here is a physical object may have the same logical status as one saying here is a red patch. (Wittgenstein 53)

The priority of experience over knowledge of the world requires that knowledge of the world be more dubitable than our experiences, but the neutrality of experience shows this not to be the case, unless we make epistemological, theoretical presuppositions. To put the argument into a form that might be more familiar, the neutrality of experience supports the argument

that we cannot know about the world if we are dreaming just as much as it supports the argument that we are not dreaming because we know things about the world. This is reminiscent of Moore, who argued that because he knows many obvious things, scepticism must be incorrect. This is the opposite of the sceptic's argument that because we do not know if we are dreaming, Moore's propositions must be incorrect. But we also see how Moore went wrong: he was right to point out that the sceptic's conclusions about knowledge were not necessarily better than his, but he attacked the sceptic head on and failed to question the sceptic's presuppositions; and with foundational presuppositions thus intact, the sceptical conclusion maintained its resilience to Moore's knowledge statements.

Here too we may be reminded of the principle of logical presupposition that Nozick and Dretske mistook for the principle of epistemic closure. The principle of epistemic presupposition requires that we must *first* know that we are not dreaming before we can know anything about the world. But, as we have seen, the neutrality of experience shows that it is reasonable to argue that we know that we are not dreaming because we know things about the world. And if we know that we are not dreaming, then we have met the principle of epistemic presupposition's requirements, just in a roundabout way: we want knowledge of the world, but the principle of presupposition says we must know we are not dreaming first, so we show that we know we are not dreaming by showing how much knowledge of the world we have. The neutrality of experience supports this possibility as much as it supports the sceptical one. But this seems strange, because it is a circular argument, but not viciously so. We have knowledge of the world already, so why use it to show that we are not dreaming in order to show that we have knowledge of the world? In other words, why propose the principle of epistemic presupposition at all? Why suppose that we must first know that we are not dreaming before we know anything else, when the neutrality of experience supports adopting this principle as much as it supports it being useless?

The only reason for adopting it as a reasonable principle is if we first adopt the priority of experience over knowledge of the world. The principle of epistemic presupposition seems to be reasonable if we prioritize the sense experience side of the logical gap, but pointless if we prioritize the knowledge of the world side. But if we presuppose foundationalism it suddenly becomes much more forceful: we may no longer make the move from having knowledge of the world to knowledge of not dreaming, because in order to have knowledge of the world, according to foundationalism, we must proceed from our experiences, and our experiences cannot tell us whether or not we are dreaming. If experiences cannot tell us whether or not we are dreaming, and experience is all we have, then the requirement that we must know if we are dreaming to know anything about the world becomes incredibly epistemologically restrictive: we cannot know we are dreaming, under foundationalism, so we cannot know anything about the world under the principle of epistemic closure. Without foundationalism the principle of epistemic presupposition is unnecessary and strange, but with foundationalism it is powerful. So why adopt the principle at all? The upshot is that there is no reason, as far as we have seen, unless we have presupposed foundationalism and wish to get scepticism.

The next obvious question is, why suppose foundationalism at all? It seems there is no reason. From the sceptic's most intuitive arguments we do not get foundationalism, but

rather the neutrality of experience, which gives us no reason to adopt anything like the principle of epistemic presupposition or foundationalism. Contrary to forcing us to adopt foundationalism and all its epistemological flaws, the intuitive arguments proposed by the sceptic *require* foundationalism to have any radically sceptical edge. Adopting such principles and theories simply seems to impose theoretical restrictions on our knowledge that are not supported by any intuitive argument.

As such, to get scepticism about the external world the sceptic needs to conjoin Agrippa's Trilemma or the logical gap between experience and knowledge of the world with a foundationalist conception of knowledge, giving them an epistemological bite, and forcing the gap between experience and knowledge of the world to work only in one direction. But we do not have any compelling reason to do this unless one wants to be a foundationalist; we have been given no good reason for supposing that foundationalism is forced on us; so adoption of it seems to be choice of theory, and choice of contentious theory at that. The sceptic's attempts to show that intuitive sceptical arguments lead to foundationalism have failed so far, and instead we have support for the idea that foundationalism must be presupposed by scepticism. Unless the sceptic has another intuitive argument that leads to foundationalism, it seems she must be using a contentious theory like foundationalism to get to scepticism. But if this is the case, then the sceptic cannot use scepticism to produce foundationalism; this would be obviously circular.

In light of this, foundationalism begins to look more like an optional, contentious theory that is necessary for scepticism, as we hoped to show; if foundationalism is not forced on us by scepticism, and must instead be presupposed by scepticism in order for scepticism to succeed, we have a case for denying foundationalism in favour of other theories, without having to worry about damaging our intuitive principles of knowledge.

COHERENCE

So far we have made a case against scepticism being an intuitive argument, and for it presupposing a foundational epistemology. If the foundational commitments of scepticism have been revealed, then the door is open to proposing anti-sceptical epistemologies to replace foundationalism.

Coherence theorists hold such a position; they present a theory that is anti-foundational and anti-sceptical. Coherence theories are many and varied [1], so I will focus on one particular formulation of it that I take to be a strong representative, presented by Williams, who has drawn a great deal from Bonjour (Williams, Problems of Knowledge 117). Proponents of coherence theories hold that foundationalism's commitment to linear inference poses sceptical difficulties. Linear inference requires that justification come out of arguments from premises to conclusions according to certain rules of inference. Coherence theorists reject this conception of inference in favour of a non-linear form of justification; beliefs are connected in a variety of logical ways, but this does not make justification. Justification is instead a property of entire systems of belief; individual beliefs are justified not by being supported by other particular beliefs, but by being part of a coherent total world-view of beliefs (Williams, Problems of Knowledge 117).

So coherence theorists hold that a belief cannot be justified on its own, as in foundationalism; no belief is epistemologically prior to any other, and a belief cannot be justified simply by being the conclusion in a linear inferential argument with justified beliefs as premises. Rather, beliefs are justified when they fit into a justified system of beliefs, where a system of beliefs is more or less justified depending on how well the beliefs hang together as a whole. The important point is that the entire set of beliefs is taken as the unit that is justified; justification of individual beliefs depends on the coherent properties of total belief systems or world-views. This focus on total systems of beliefs as justificatory is radical holism. So coherence is a theory of justification distinguished from foundationalism negatively, by rejection of the idea of intrinsically credible basic beliefs that function as the beginnings of linear justification, and positively by the adoption of radical holism (Williams, Problems of Knowledge 117-118).

It is worth distinguishing two characterizations of coherence. Relational coherence holds simply that a belief is justified if *it* fits into a set of other beliefs; the properties of the belief in question are what matters. In this way, foundationalism may be considered a coherence epistemology: a belief is justified if it coheres with other beliefs that are epistemologically prior, through a linear inferential argument (Williams, Problems of Knowledge 117). This is not the brand of coherence that will be focused on; coherence is meant to be anti-sceptical by its rejection of foundational principles of justification, so a coherence theory that is inclusive of foundationalism obviously won't do. As such, we will focus on systematic coherence. This is the type of coherence we have just surveyed, in which the epistemological status of a belief depends on the way that the entire belief system surrounding that belief fits together. Systematic coherence is radically holistic. Radical holism rejects all of foundationalism's standards of justification.

A response to coherence seems evident: normally we do not do anything like what the coherence theorist suggests when we justify a belief. Normally we use particular pieces of evidence to support particular beliefs, making no reference to anything like a total view of the world that would act to justify. This is referred to as local justification. In order for the coherence theory's radical holism to remain relevant, then, our coherence theorist must hold that if local justification is found to be credible, it must be because the system of background beliefs being used in local justification must be maximally coherent. This is global justification. We may take for granted that global considerations are what ultimately justify and assume that our background system of beliefs is coherent, but all local justification depends on global justification nonetheless; global justification is necessary for local justification at all (Williams, Problems of Knowledge 118).

A few facets of coherence are necessary to make it robust. The first is to draw focus not just on the lack of conflict between beliefs when determining the coherence of a system, but on positive connections between beliefs. These might be considered explanatory relations. The requirement for positive explanatory relations means that our beliefs must not only be compatible, that is not conflict with one another, but should also hang together theoretically; coherence is not just made or broken by logical connections, but also by epistemological connections. These explanatory connections between beliefs are what we make use of in linear justification, but are also important holistically, in that a robust series of individual

belief-to-belief relations make a more genuine system than any arbitrary collection of beliefs; the more dense a set of belief-to-belief explanatory relations are, the better chance they have of being a genuine system, rather than a collection of unrelated beliefs. With more solid internal logical, explanatory and epistemological connections between particular beliefs comes more relevance between those beliefs, and thus better global justification; a set of beliefs related by explanatory connections is more globally justificatory than a set of beliefs made up of less explanatory connections. Thus, a coherent system with solid explanatory belief-connections is more desirable than one with fewer or more dubitable explanatory connections (Williams, Problems of Knowledge 119-120).

Two additional facets of coherentism needed to make coherentism more robust are the related concepts of comprehensiveness and conservatism. Comprehensiveness states that a system is more coherent the more beliefs it takes in, explains and anticipates. This is meant to stave off the objection that it may be more coherent to keep a small, exclusive set of beliefs that conveniently ignores facts contradictory to it. Comprehensiveness ensures that we make our total view more coherent by making it more, not less, complete (Harman 159). This relates to the conservatism requirement, which states that when we are faced with a problem in our system of beliefs, we should make changes that result in the least damage possible to our total view. This is best understood as a requirement coming out of comprehensiveness: in order to keep our system of beliefs comprehensive, we avoid taking on beliefs that would require us to dispose of large parts of an otherwise plausible system, so we keep our system as expansive as possible. This does not forbid the adoption of beliefs that force the disposal of other beliefs in our system, because we can accept a loss in comprehensiveness if a sizeable gain in integration of beliefs follows. For example, beliefs we gain through experience may reasonably be added to our overall system even if they damage some aspects of it; it would be unreasonable to ignore them. Experiential beliefs are sometimes referred to as "cognitiviely spontaneous beliefs." Coherence only requires conservatism in that comprehensiveness holds a certain priority over integration so that we may have a useful system. As long as the system remains useful, and does not become a system of arbitrary beliefs or fairy tales, we may jettison some beliefs in favour of others that increase coherence. But if a belief would damage our system of beliefs drastically, then we ought not to adopt it (Williams, Problems of Knowledge 120).

Finally, a full account of coherence requires that cognitively spontaneous beliefs are included in the beliefs that make up the total view that we are to justify by making maximally coherent; beliefs about the world and beliefs about experience are both included in the same system. This allows external input into our system of beliefs, so that it is not simply a set of belief-to-belief relations cut off from the world, so to speak; cognitively spontaneous beliefs, that is experiential beliefs, ensure that our system of beliefs have something to do with the world by allowing the external world to influence our system of beliefs. But these cognitively spontaneous beliefs are also subject to assessment according to a selection of beliefs about our abilities as perceptual observers; in other words, our total belief system must also include epistemic, or reliability, beliefs. For example, we have beliefs about how reliable we are in certain circumstances; for example, we believe that in low light our perceptual beliefs are less reliable, or that someone who has had a few drinks is less reliable than someone who is sober. So, spontaneous beliefs are regulated by epistemic

beliefs, both of which are included in the total set of beliefs. This allows for the input of observational beliefs, so that a system of beliefs cannot remain rationally insulated from experiences by simply ignoring problematic observations in favour of keeping the system coherent, while allowing for mistaken observations, so that not just any observation can lay waste to the system of beliefs. For example, an experiment with results that do not cohere with certain parts of our belief system may be reasonably ignored if it resists replication; in this case, an epistemic belief that holds that observations must be repeatable allows for the possibility of error in an observation. This set of considerations is referred to by Williams as the rationalized input requirement (Williams, Problems of Knowledge 122), who draws from BonJour (BonJour Ch. 6).

These considerations, which we shall call the criteria of coherence, make the coherence theory more robust. The requirement for explanatory relations, comprehensiveness and conservatism blocks arguments like the "many systems objection," which states that an infinite selection of beliefs could be considered coherent, even fairy tales, making our selection of coherent belief-system arbitrary (Williams, Problems of Knowledge 119); and the rationalized input requirement blocks the "isolation objection," which states that a system of beliefs about other beliefs will be cut off from the world, so to speak, so that it may have no relevance at all to the way the world is, and so be irrelevant. (Williams, Problems of Knowledge 119) The result is an anti-sceptical epistemology; sceptical beliefs are not incorporated into our total view because they would force us to discard an innumerable number of beliefs, limiting the comprehensiveness of the system and violating the conservatism requirement, while presumably offering no gain in integrity or coherence.

So far coherence sounds like an attractive alternative to foundationalism. But it is worth examining coherentism's anti-foundational tenets, in order to see if it is in fact as decisive a rejection of foundationalism, and thus scepticism, as it seems.

As we have seen, coherence theory holds, contrary to foundationalism, that there are no privileged beliefs and no fixed points of knowledge from which linear justification may proceed; in theory any belief whatsoever may be discarded if it is deemed problematic. In coherence theory the rules of logic, math, and deduction all lose their *a priori* status, and so are potentially revisable given the right circumstances. This goes so far as to include the criteria that guide us in determining when a system of beliefs is in fact maximally coherent; the requirements of comprehensiveness, conservatism, rationalized input, even the basic ideas that there are no privileged beliefs and that a system is justified when its beliefs are coherent, may be discarded if they become problematic for the justification of our system of beliefs.

So why suppose we must make inferences from one system of belief to another when looking to justify our beliefs at all? There may not be any reason to. If we wish to hold on to our beliefs in light of problematic evidence we may question the criteria of coherence just as well as we may question any beliefs or epistemic principles or theories; everything is potentially up for grabs in coherence theory, including the criteria of coherence (Williams, Problems of Knowledge 134-135). In principle, coherence theory could come to be regulated by foundationalist principles. This possibility is dangerous for coherence theory; if

coherence theory does break down into foundationalism, then it loses its claim to being an anti-foundationalist, holistic theory of justification, and no longer holds any anti-sceptical weight. The coherence theorist must have some explanation for why this cannot happen, or risk breaking down into foundationalism.

The reason coherentism does not break down into another epistemologicaly, such as foundationalism, is that coherence theory seems to implicitly give the criteria of coherence a privileged epistemic status (Williams, Problems of Knowledge 135). Unfortunately for coherence theory, this amounts to a concession to foundationalism anyway; for the only way coherence theory can avoid the possibility of the rejection of coherentist principles by coherentist standards, leaving it open to foundationalist revisions, is to give the criteria of coherence foundational status so that they cannot be revised. The coherence theorist wishes to deny that any beliefs or rules of inference or logic that connect those beliefs are privileged, but then goes on to privilege beliefs about the criteria of coherence; the criteria of coherence are fixed points from which acceptance of beliefs is regulated. In other words, the criteria of coherence are foundational beliefs; they act as the beginning point from which linear justification must be performed. Just as a foundational belief about the world is justified by an epistemologically prior experiential belief earlier in a linear chain of justification, so too is a belief about the world justified by the criteria of coherence earlier in a linear chain of justification. Individual beliefs may be justified by any number of systems of belief without any special epistemological status, but those systems of belief may only be recognized as justificatory by the criteria of coherence, which must take priority or risk becoming irrelevant to justification by their own lights (Williams, Problems of Knowledge 135).

The coherence theory may be forced to collapse into foundationalism in another way as well. Bonjour presents the Doxastic Presumption as a way of strengthening the coherence theory (BonJour 81-82). According to the Doxastic Presumption, the coherence theory must presuppose two things: that each individual has a primitive sense of what her beliefs are, and that we are entitled to presume that this primitive sense of our beliefs is more or less accurate. The difficulty with this is that there are simple, familiar ways that we know what we believe; if someone were to ask us our belief about a subject, we would have no serious difficulty giving one, so long as we did in fact have one. But this does not resemble the way in which we must know what we believe according to coherence; this simple conception of beliefs is not how coherence theory demands our knowledge of beliefs behave. Instead, coherence theory asks of us that we know the scope, structure and accuracy of our total belief system as a whole. This is an incredibly complex piece of knowledge, and it seems that we have no such sense of our total system of beliefs. How would we even go about thinking about or explaining what our total belief system is? It is hard to say that we could give an account of what our total belief system is; even if it were in principle possible to do so, we do not seem to have the capacity to assess all of our beliefs at once as an entire unit of justification.

As Williams explains, (Williams, Problems of Knowledge 136-137) the Doxastic Presumption seems to be a doxastic *assumption*; we have no reason to think that presuming that we have a primitive sense of the structure of our belief system is warranted, so it seems

to be a brute assumption. The presumption seems to exist only to prevent a regress in our justification. If our knowledge of our system of beliefs can be questioned, then it has to be supported by some sort of justifying inference. Otherwise we do not know when our system of beliefs is a justified one, and so cannot begin to pick a most coherent set of beliefs; we must justify our choice of justified system of beliefs. But this meta-justification must then be included in our system of beliefs: coherence theory is radically holistic, and so *all* of our beliefs must be included in our total view, including meta-justificatory beliefs about the system. Of course, this meta-justification must then itself be justified, and so a meta-meta-justification must be given, which then also must be integrated into our total view, and so on; an infinite regress of justification ensues. The only way to halt this regress is to introduce a presumption that the chain must stop at some point. This stopping point of course takes on foundational status: justification proceeds linearly from the doxastic presumption, which has epistemological priority over other forms of justificatory beliefs, given that the rest of justification is unwarranted without it. Coherence theory is in fact foundational, even if at a global level.

Coherence theory, despite its anti-foundational agenda, seems to actually be foundationalism in disguise (Williams, Problems of Knowledge 134-135). If this is the case, as it seems to be, and coherence theory holds foundational views, why not then just allow privileged beliefs and linear inference among all our beliefs, and not just at the meta-level where we have beliefs about what beliefs are justified? It seems there is no reason not to, especially considering that linear inference seems to resemble our simple, everyday epistemic practices better than coherence theory. And of course, as we have seen, if we allow foundational aspects to be presupposed by an epistemology, then there is a strong case for thinking that we are on our way to scepticism. Coherence fails to be radically holistic, allowing in privileged beliefs and linear justification, and more importantly for our purposes, most likely fails to be anti-sceptical. All the sceptic has to do, once we have shown that all knowledge depends on foundational beliefs such as the criteria of coherence or the doxastic presumption, is show that the foundational beliefs in question fail to give us knowledge. Familiar arguments about brains in vats or dreams will most likely do the job: if the criteria of coherence are epistemologically prior to all forms of justification, then the sceptic contends that we may be dreaming, and thus that we do not even know the criteria of coherence, and that we do not know anything that follows. In order to know that we are dreaming, we need the criteria of coherence, but to know the criteria of coherence to justify our belief system, we must *first* know we are not dreaming. Though they may take on different appearances to account for the meta-level of some of coherence theory's implicit foundational commitments, sceptical arguments apply so long as foundational commitments are present.

CONTEXTUALISM

We have seen that coherence theory fails as a response to foundationalism; it holds tacit foundational principles of its own, and likely leads to sceptical worries because of them. If we cannot find an epistemology that avoids foundational principles, then we are stuck with foundationalism and the scepticism that follows. Either that or we reject foundationalism and are left floating free epistemologically, with no account of how we know anything. This

would seem to be a sort of scepticism by default. For if there is no possible account of knowledge once foundationalism is rejected, why suppose there is any knowledge at all? We must then propose an epistemological account that avoids foundationalism better than coherence theory, an account that must not give priority to any kind of belief.

Contextualism may accomplish this. There is a variety of theories that don the name of contextualism, but they do not necessarily share epistemological affinities.2 For this reason we will focus just on Williams' account, which is presented in tandem with his anti-sceptical arguments. According to contextualism, and contrary to foundationalism, the standards for attributing knowledge are not fixed, but vary with the circumstances of enquiry, or the context. There are five contextual constraints that guide knowledge attributions: intelligibility, methodological, dialectical, economic and situational constraints (Williams, Problems of Knowledge 159-162).

Intelligibility or *semantic constraints* come out of a remark by Wittgenstein that, "A doubt that doubted everything would not be a doubt" (Wittgenstein 457). In other words, it is necessary that some things be not doubted for intelligible inquiry to even begin. We have entitled presuppositions that make the acts of questioning and inquiring possible, because holding some beliefs true and not subjecting them to attributions of error is a condition of being intelligible at all when questioning; not doubting certain propositions, which are presupposed in a particular context, is required to ask questions at all (Williams, Problems of Knowledge 159-160). As Wittgenstein says, "It may be for example that all enquiry on our part is set so as to exempt certain propositions from doubt, if they are ever formulated. They lie apart from the route travelled by enquiry" (Wittgenstein 90). Without holding some things as right, it is not clear what we are talking about, if anything. If we were to discuss with someone the mechanics of pool balls on a table, but at every turn she said she was in doubt of the existence of pool balls and cues and tables and you and me, we would not be able to discuss anything with her. We cannot remain doubtful of everything at once if we are to be understood as saying anything; for if we can doubt everything, we have no reason not to doubt that we can even understand the words we are saying when we doubt, so that we cannot make sense of anything. Eventually the process of doubting shifts from acknowledging the possibility of mistake until it makes us unable to perform any knowledge related tasks, including the task of reasonable doubting (Wittgenstein 35).

If for example someone doubted that he knew what the number four was, or that he knew how to perform any mathematical operation, he could not get from 4 and 3 to 4+3=7; when we asked him what 4+3 was, he might say, "I'm not sure; what is a'4'?" If we told him that it was one less than 5 and one more than 3, he might ask, "What is a '5'?" He would not just be making mistakes by not knowing the answer. When we make a mistake we can always go about correcting it; we know algebra, but sometimes we have a lapse of concentration or a moment of bad reasoning and so on. However, the man who doubts all of math, so that he has to ask what the fact of the matter is about every number and operation, could not be said to have any idea of what math was in the first place; he would have no grasp at all of the concepts, and so his questions would be unintelligible. We could not understand what he was asking, because it would have nothing to do with what we do when we do math -- questioning what every number is just is not a possible way of doing math. The math-

doubter would not understand arithmetic or numbers, because by questioning everything about math he would have no place to begin when trying to understand. When we do math we take for granted what each number is and what each operation means and so on; so to do math, some beliefs must be exempt from doubt. Thus certain questions are exempt from doubt in math, so that math may proceed at all. Doubting what a number is does not enlighten us to new ways of understanding math; rather, it exempts math from being done at all.

But there is not an instant switch from doubting to unintelligibility. Rather, it is a fuzzy distinction between mistake and incomprehension. Perhaps someone could be mistaken about how long-division works, and so would fail consistently at doing certain types of math; and we might then say that he does not understand math, in some way. But we could presumably correct him, so that he performed properly, so long as he understood the rest of math properly or at least some significant part of it. If he did not have any idea what anything in math was, we would have to begin from the start, and maybe we could teach him from the beginning. Presumably he could gain comprehension at some point. But where he went from not understanding math to understanding would not be determinate. Nonetheless, if everything is doubted, then nothing can be known; if the math-doubter did not accept any part of what we taught him about math as true, he could never be taken to comprehend math.

For this reason the contextualist must be careful in acknowledging that any belief may be up for grabs, so to speak. If no beliefs have any special status over any others, then we may be able to question them all, and so a contextualist epistemology would lead to unintelligibility of all beliefs, if the sceptic chose to argue in such a way.

This is where the contextualist stresses the importance of context to knowledge, justified belief, and inquiry: it is not true that just anything can be called into question in *any situation*. To ask a question requires setting an epistemic stage, so that some things cannot be questioned in that context, in order for inquiry to be intelligible. This is true of all forms of questioning, inquiry and doubting, including sceptical forms. So the intelligibility constraint of contextualism has to do with being able to ask meaningful questions at all, which necessarily involves leaving some things out of doubt, depending on the context of inquiry.

Methodological constraints are another way in which some doubts are excluded in particular contexts; methodological constraints exclude some doubts not just so that we can make sense of inquiry at all, but so that questions of a specific kind can be raised within a broad field of inquiry (Williams, Problems of Knowledge 160); for example, so that questions aboutbraham Lincoln can be asked in history. Methodological constraints exempt propositions that are necessary for specific questioning to take place; and these exempted propositions or beliefs are called *methodologically necessary* by Williams. It is worth noting that there does not have to be a sharp distinction between beliefs that are methodologically necessary and beliefs that are necessary for intelligibility; depending on the way inquiry goes and the context, the same proposition may not be methodologically necessary or necessary for the preservation of intelligibility (Williams, Problems of Knowledge 160). To do history we have to presume the existence of people. We would be unable to follow the line of questioning about European history, for example, if we kept asking whether people

existed when trying to find out particular facts about Europeans. This might be considered a methodological necessity for European history in this situation, or even necessary for intelligibility; for how could we doubt the existence of people, when we *are* people? To do geography we do not necessarily need the same presupposition, but we would have to presume the existence of the Earth to remain intelligible, or that specific parts of the Earth were inhabited at certain periods of time to ask specific kinds of questions. The point is that propositions are not methodologically necessary on their own; they require a context of inquiry to be considered presuppositions, and in different contexts different beliefs will be methodologically necessary or necessary for intelligibility.

Methodological constraints also give direction to inquiry (Williams, Problems of Knowledge 160-161). Intelligibility constraints often exempt doubts about objects existing or about our having existed a few moments ago, and so allow us to ask questions at all. Doubting propositions that are necessary for intelligibility does not increase the rigour of, say, historical investigations; it would just stop investigation altogether. Methodological constraints on doubt, on the other hand, are associated with the logic of particular inquiry; methodological constraints do not make a sceptical point about our practical limitations when asking questions, but make a point about putting some questions aside so that our historical inquiry may take a certain direction. We may ask a historical question about whether Brutus existed, but the methodological constraints in this situation will give our inquiry another direction than if we were asking about what Brutus did in his life. Asking whether Brutus existed is not a stricter way of doing history; it is just a different way of doing history, which takes a different direction. We may lower or raise our standards when asking questions, but some questions must be set aside to do history in a certain way. To doubt that all records ever written are reliable would stop us from doing history at all; to ask whether a particular record is forged is to give historical study a certain direction, which is a methodological constraint. So what we are studying depends on what we leave out (Wittgenstein 341-343). If we were to question everything in a field of study we would have no direction at all when inquiring; methodological constraints make focussed questioning possible.

Given a certain direction of inquiry, *dialectical constraints*, the third kind of contextual constraint, require that certain objections to a line of inquiry may or may not be legitimately brought up: some objections are available given the methodological and intelligibility constraints in play, and some are not (Williams, Problems of Knowledge 161). If a claim does face a persistent, legitimate objection in a context of inquiry, then it will not play the role of a presupposition in that context.3 Likewise, a proposition or belief that does act as a presupposition may cease to act as such when new problems, objections or questions are brought into play. Thus the status of a claim, belief or proposition changes with the dialectical landscape.

The fourth variety of contextual constraint is the *economic constraint*, which stresses that objections to a claim in a particular context do not gain relevance simply by being mentioned; there needs to be a reason to think the objection holds (Williams, Problems of Knowledge 161). Our level of strictness or scrutiny during an inquiry is fixed by the sort of objections that hold. This is where varying standards of strictness come into play when

doing, for example, history.

We impose high standards of justification in a context if we rule out even remote possibilities of error in order to avoid objections, and we impose lower standards if we let certain error-possibilities slide. But we do not simply set high or low standards for no reason. Instead, economic factors play an important role in deciding when it is reasonable to be loose about not considering certain objections or strict in fielding many objections.4 If reaching a decision is a priority, and error would not bring great costs, or being correct would be very beneficial, it may be reasonable to relax our standards in accepting or considering objections to a claim. On the other hand, if the cost of error is severe, then it may be reasonable to enforce higher standards. Balancing the issues of cost, benefit, and decision-making priority will determine the strictness of justification in our inquiry, and how we balance them depends on the situation.

For example, if we must test a newly synthesized chemical to determine what properties it has, we may only do three out of four possible tests; perhaps the first three tests make the possibility of the chemical having the property identified by the fourth test remote. If there are time constraints on when the chemical's properties must be identified, perhaps if someone's health depends on the chemical having the properties identified by the tests, then we have further reason to avoid doing the final test. It is not epistemically irresponsible or inadequate to forego the final test, because the situation calls for certain economic restraints on inquiry and objections, even though doing the final test would presumably increase our knowledge by letting us know that the chemical definitely does or does not have a certain property. If on the other hand, the final test would reveal to us whether the chemical has a property that is harmful to the patient, it would seem reasonable to adopt higher standards; the costs of error are high, so our standards ought to be more stringent.

The last constraint is the *situational constraint* (Williams, Problems of Knowledge 162). Methodological and dialectic considerations do not exhaust the possibilities for justification or error of epistemic contexts; facts about the situation in which inquiry is done matter too. In other words, objective matters are important to inquiry, because when we hold a belief we commit ourselves to its being objectively well-grounded. As such, we must always be open to the possibility of self-correction, since there may always be ways that we could go wrong that we have overlooked. This does not mean that we must always field objections and counter-arguments, but that we must be open to the possibility that, in the future, matters may surface that alter the outcome of our inquiry, even if we performed an epistemically reasonable and responsible line of inquiry. The purpose of asking questions is to better understand the world, so it goes without saying that we may have to ask questions about how we have gone about what we thought was justified if we are to make progress.

The methodological, dialectical and economic constraints are examples of constraints that determine when our claims are epistemically responsible or justified; they describe when it is acceptable, reasonable and appropriate to doubt, question, accept or ask questions of knowledge claims in a particular context (Williams, Problems of Knowledge 161). The situational constraint is not about the appropriateness of inquiry, but about the objective grounding of our claims, so that our claims are not insulated from the way the world is

(Williams, Problems of Knowledge 162). Of importance is the fact that this constraint displays the externalist nature of contextualism. We need not always be aware of our grounds for belief to be epistemically responsible; we do not need to know that we know. Nonetheless, what real-world possibilities our grounds must exclude is determined by our interests, so that even the objective adequacy of our claims is not free from considerations about epistemic responsibility.

These considerations illustrate an epistemology that is anti-foundational: justification does not depend on any particular kind of belief at all. For example, beliefs of a perceptual kind do not hold priority over any other beliefs simply due to their being perceptual. In fact, there is no need to postulate any kinds of beliefs at all. This does not mean that we are prohibited from interpreting beliefs in such a way that they are divided into various kinds, so that some beliefs are called "perceptual," others "logical," and so on, but it does mean that beliefs do not have any special properties, justificatory or otherwise, due to their kind. Whether a belief plays a justificatory role depends on a number of contextually variable factors. Thus the same belief can slip from being justificatory in one context to non-justificatory in another, depending on how inquiry proceeds. As such there is no need for epistemically different beliefs in the first place, not to mention that the idea of beliefs being divided into epistemological kinds runs counter to the intentions of contextualism.

So contextualism is opposed to foundationalism's account of beliefs, in which intrinsic credibility makes individual, basic beliefs justified on their own because of their content, regardless of other beliefs, or of the context or situation in which they are brought up. Contextualism is also opposed to foundationalism's justification process, in which non-basic beliefs are justified only by epistemologically basic beliefs. Contextualism proposes that in any context of justification there may always be a large number of beliefs or commitments importantly involved, not just non-basic and epistemologically-prior basic beliefs.

With these considerations in mind, it is worth noting that contextualism may still be formally foundational (Williams, Problems of Knowledge 164-165). Certain beliefs act as the foundation for other beliefs in a given context, depending on what issue is in question. Foundationalism of this formal variety, as we noted earlier, does not bring along any sceptical baggage, because it does not involve beliefs that have special epistemological status that confers priority upon them in all situations; instead a belief can be formally foundational in one direction of inquiry and not in another. It might even be the case that some beliefs tend to act as formal foundations in a range of contexts, but they need not be foundational in the traditional, and scepticism-prone, way. Instead of having intrinsic content, these contextual, formally foundational beliefs get their content from the practices of inquiry and justification that they are part of in a given context (Williams, Problems of Knowledge 165). For example, when doing history about Abraham Lincoln, we take for granted that he existed; for if we did not presuppose the existence of him, then we would not be able to ask questions about him at all. We could of course question the existence of Lincoln, but we would be embarking on a new line of inquiry, and so different considerations would come into effect, and different beliefs would become important; the subject would be changed. If we felt so inclined, we could question the existence of physical objects generally, but we would definitely not be doing history any more. If we found that

we had no reason to believe objects exist, then presumably we would have reason to think that Abraham Lincoln also did not exist; but this particular context of inquiry and its presuppositions do not have any priority over the rest of our beliefs or contexts of inquiry. Questioning the existence of external objects is not out of the question, but it is a particular form of inquiry and cannot be done at just any time without changing the study of history about Lincoln, for example, into epistemological scepticism. To believe in the existence of Lincoln is just to recognize certain possibilities of error and not others, so that inquiry may proceed by asking for particular evidence. If we did not carry out inquiry in this way -- by presupposing the truth of some beliefs given the context -- inquiry would be unintelligible.

It is worth noting that it is very unlikely that the constraints and presuppositions of context could be codified into any particular set of rules, so that we could say, "These are the rules of context that must be followed to ensure justification." We can follow the direction of inquiry in a particular context, but the constraints and presuppositions of all possible contexts are so varied and heterogeneous that we may not be able to explicitly state what the exact constraints or presuppositions are. There is no simple set of exhaustive rules that would point us towards the correct presuppositions. Even if we could explicitly state rules that identified what presuppositions to hold, it is doubtful that they would be of any use in inquiry, because learning to follow a line of inquiry is a process of learning *how* to recognize contextually relevant evidence, objections and replies. Rules about such things would not illuminate the process of inquiry any more than rules about playing guitar would make someone a good guitar player; both require practice. We must master the practical forms of discourse and inquiry, so that knowing that essentially involves knowing how.

To sum up, for contextualism all questions of justification arise against and depend for their intelligibility on presuppositions that are reasonably not in question. Some presuppositions will tend to be held in place across many investigative contexts; some will only be relevant to the matter at hand. But no belief takes priority over any other. Questioning one presupposition just shifts the focus of inquiry so that other beliefs naturally become presuppositions. If we exempt some propositions from doubt, so that the direction of inquiry is fixed in a particular context, it is because presupposed beliefs play a normative role.

So the anti-sceptical case has been made: scepticism seemed to be an intractable problem because of its intuitive arguments. So the supposedly intuitive nature of scepticism was examined, and what seemed to be intuitive was in fact shown to require foundational presuppositions, with foundationalism being a contentious epistemological theory. Once it was shown that foundationalism was required for scepticism, and that foundationalism was not forced on us in any way, the case had been made for discarding foundationalism in favour of another, non-sceptical epistemology. But coherentism does not fit this bill, because it has tacit foundational commitments itself, and so contextualism was presented as a non-realist, formally foundational, anti-sceptical conception of the way knowledge behaves.

CHAPTER 3: OBJECTIONS TO CONTEXTUALISM AND ANTI-SCEPTICISM

DEROSE AND BLACK

DeRose and Black make similar criticisms of Williams; they both argue that Williams has missed some important sceptical arguments in his analysis.

DeRose contends that Williams' anti-sceptical arguments focus mainly on *evidentialist arguments*. Evidentialist arguments, as DeRose characterizes them, are a variety of sceptical argumentation that aims to show that knowledge of the external world cannot be derived from experiences. These sorts of arguments require foundationalism, because only if we put epistemological emphasis on experiential beliefs over other beliefs does the argument that experiences cannot bring us knowledge hold weight. So if the anti-sceptic simply determines that we do not need foundationalism, and rejects it, then she has made a strong anti-sceptical case.

But DeRose stresses that Williams has only made a strong anti-sceptical case for evidentialist arguments; the important task, argues DeRose, is to show that *non*-evidentialist arguments *also* require foundationalism. We may grant this, and begin a search for other sceptical arguments that are non-evidentialist, so that, if we can find any, we may see if there is a way to expose them as having foundationalist presuppositions. Nonetheless, DeRose's criticism of Williams seems to be about scope, rather than about any flaws in argumentation: Williams' anti-sceptical arguments *do* work, they just have not been shown to apply to all sceptical arguments, or perhaps the most important ones. We will need to survey some non-evidentialist arguments to see if this criticism holds.

With this in mind, DeRose focuses on Williams' anti-sceptical arguments against broad sceptical hypotheses. These hypotheses, in which PE is a proposition about the world, such as "I have hands," and HS is a sceptical hypothesis, such as "I am a handless brain in a vat," are of the form:

I know that PE entails not-HS;
I do not (cannot) know that not-HS;
Therefore I do not know that PE. (Williams, Unnatural Doubts 80)

Williams' contention is that the second premise, that one cannot know that one is not a brain in a vat, only holds if we accept that experiential beliefs have epistemological priority over other beliefs; that is, if we are foundationalists. If the second premise requires foundationalism, then we reject foundationalism and the argument fails.

DeRose contends that there exists an intuitive interpretation of this sceptical hypothesis, and that it does not in fact require foundationalism to succeed. DeRose asks us to suppose that we have never had nor ever have taken ourselves to have had any sensory experiences.

Instead, suppose our beliefs about the world are formed completely by events in our brains, without any sense experiences, so that we *only* have beliefs about the world, and no beliefs about our sensory experiences. Further, we know that this is the case, and take ourselves to know what we believe about the world through perception. We would have no inclination towards believing foundationalism; we could not, because we would hold that we had never had any sensory experiences, and so would hold that sensory experiences are obviously unimportant to knowing. As DeRose says, "Suppose... that we have never had, *nor did we ever take ourselves to have*, [emphasis added] any sensory experiences." (DeRose 605) Next, someone in this situation makes a sceptical argument of the brain-in-a-vat sort that we mentioned earlier, and knowledge of the world is successfully doubted.

The difficulty is that DeRose attempts, through brute force, to construct a situation in which we cannot possibly hold foundationalist sympathies, so that he may make a non-foundational sceptical argument. He does this by straightforwardly inserting in his argument the premise that as would-be knowers we do not take ourselves to have any sensory experiences. The next step is to simply make a sceptical argument, and we have a sceptical argument from people who do not, and cannot, hold any foundationalist presuppositions; that is, we supposedly have a non-foundationalist sceptical argument. Unfortunately, the price DeRose pays for the straightforward introduction of this foundationalism-avoiding premise is contradiction; we must hold that we do not ever have any sensory experiences, yet we also hold that we know what we believe through sensory experiences.5 As DeRose says,

Suppose... that we have never had, *nor did we ever take ourselves to have, any sensory experiences*. Rather perceptual beliefs about the external world were produced directly by neural events, without any accompanying experiences. And suppose that, realizing this, *we still took ourselves to know what we came to believe through perception* [emphases added]. (DeRose 605)

DeRose's sceptical arguer holds beliefs that contradict one another; he holds that we have no sensory experiences while also holding that we know our beliefs through sensory experiences that he, by his own admission, does not even believe we have. We may take for granted that there are psychological accounts of belief that hold that we can and do hold contradictory beliefs, but we nonetheless have an argument based on people who argue from contradictory beliefs; and if someone with contradictory beliefs about knowledge comes to make a sceptical argument that requires beliefs about knowledge, then we have no reason to accept the argument, because the arguer contradicts himself in making his case. If our would-be sceptic believes that he gets knowledge of his beliefs through sensory experiences, then he can make his brain-in-a-vat sceptical argument, but if he *also* believes that he does not have any sensory experiences, then he cannot reasonably make his sceptical argument. The brain-in-a-vat argument requires believing we have sensory experiences, so both believing that we do and do not have sensory experiences makes it impossible to make such an argument. The result is that even if he could hold such contradictory beliefs, the arguments produced from them would be nonsense. And in order for DeRose's non-foundationalist sceptical argument to succeed, his sceptical arguer must do just that; he must argue from contradictory beliefs, in which case we have no reason to accept the sceptical argument that follows, and no reason to accept that DeRose's argument has presented us with

a non-foundationalist scepticism.

But none of this takes into account that the argument presented *does* seem to be foundationalist anyways. Let us take for granted that the argument goes through despite the contradiction, and that we have a reasonable sceptical argument. DeRose asks us to suppose that we take ourselves to know what we believe through perception (DeRose 605). If this premise simply means that we are *caused* to know what we believe through sense experiences, then it supports no sceptical threat. Williams discusses the sceptically innocent nature of the contention that beliefs are caused by sense experiences, in order to avoid confusion arising from not recognizing the distinction between sense experience as cause and sense experience as grounds (Williams, Unnatural Doubts 69-70). As Williams explains:

This much is perhaps a truism: that without functioning sense organs, I would never form any beliefs about the external world and so would never come to know anything about it either. But all this shows is that possessing functioning sense-organs is a causal precondition for possessing knowledge of the world: it establishes nothing whatsoever about the general evidential basis of such knowledge, not even that it has one. Consequently, it offers no inkling as to how any such supposed basis might be inadequate. (Williams, Unnatural Doubts 69)

But this does not seem to be what is meant by the premise in question. The premise says that we take ourselves to know what we believe *through* the senses; that is, we have beliefs, but we know them in light of our sense experiences. DeRose seems to imply that we take ourselves to know our beliefs to be true just because they are beliefs of a sensory kind. Perhaps this is unfair interpretation of what was meant by this premise, but the only other explanation that presents itself is the causal one, which is sceptically irrelevant. And it is hard to see how knowing our beliefs through the senses can be interpreted in any way but this; we have beliefs for whatever reason, but we know those beliefs through sense experience.

This sounds dangerously foundationalist; if we take ourselves to know beliefs through the senses, then the senses are what we take to be central in forming knowledge. If we take the senses to play a central role in forming knowledge, then it is difficult to see how to avoid the contention that sense experiences take a priority over other beliefs in bringing us knowledge. We take ourselves to know our beliefs through the senses, but this seems to boil down to saying that we take sense experiences to be more important than other beliefs in forming knowledge. Williams makes a similar point in response to Stroud's claim that, "What we gain through the senses is on Descartes's view only information that is compatible with our dreaming things about the world and not knowing anything about that world. How then can we know anything about the world by means of the senses?" (Stroud, The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism 12-13) Williams replies:

This takes a lot for granted.... the assumption that we know about the world "by means of the senses" is simply shorthand for a foundational view of knowledge and justification. This is an example of what I suggested is a recurrent pattern in supposedly intuitive arguments for scepticism: a seeming truism (all empirical knowledge is *in some sense* dependent on the

senses) serves to introduce a contentious epistemological doctrine (all knowledge of the world must be derived from more basic, experiential knowledge). (Williams, Unnatural Doubts 69)

It seems that DeRose may have made the same familiar, but perfectly understandable, mistake in identifying an argument as intuitively sceptical yet lacking in foundationalist presuppositions.

If this is so, then it is obvious that DeRose's sceptical arguer can make his case, but only because he is a foundationalist; he holds foundational beliefs by believing that we know our beliefs through the senses, and so he can make brain-in-a-vat arguments that threaten our knowledge. But this is not the non-foundationalist sceptical argument DeRose was looking for. If anything, the case that sceptical arguments require foundationalist presuppositions has been strengthened. It seems that DeRose's strongest criticism of Williams is that he does not address the sceptical arguments that matter, that is, the sceptical arguments that are non-evidentialist yet still intuitive, but we have yet to see such an argument.

Carolyn Black also contends that Williams has failed to address some crucial sceptical arguments. She mentions that all of the sceptical arguments that Williams addresses are very general in their scope, and are only brought forward outside of everyday life situations. Williams' arguments would be strengthened by discussing sceptics who trade in specific questions and doubts, rather than theories and generalities (Black 742).

Williams is of course concerned with sceptical arguments with general focus and scope because they are the radically sceptical arguments, the ones which impugn all of our knowledge; they are the arguments that conclude that we cannot have any knowledge whatsoever, by showing that if knowledge fails in a best-case scenario, then it must fail in all cases of knowledge (Williams, Unnatural Doubts 135).

Without further example of what sceptical arguments that trade in particular doubts are, it is hard to say exactly how such arguments might look. But it sounds reminiscent of the argument from error. For example, if I say, "I know that is my friend down the street," someone may challenge me with a particular doubt and ask, "How do you know that is your friend? She is very far away (or the lighting is bad or you haven't seen her face, and so on.)" A knowledge claim is made, and it is challenged by particular doubts. The difficulty with presenting such an argument as significantly sceptical is that particular doubts may be answered with particular evidence: we may get closer or get into better light or look at the person's face in order to confirm that she is in fact my friend.

Particular doubts do not amount to radically sceptical arguments because they do not rule out the possibility of overcoming the doubts and confirming your knowledge. Radically sceptical arguments, by contrast, due to their generality, rule out the possibility of *ever* having knowledge, which is a deep epistemological problem. Non-radically sceptical arguments challenge our knowledge, but do not make nowledge impossible, and so do not seem to be deeply epistemologically worrisome (Williams, Unnatural Doubts 47-51). Black's contention sounds as if it may be very similar to the argument from error, and the argument

from error is not sceptically interesting due to its lack of scope.6 As Williams says, "... it would not be reasonable to base a general distrust of the senses on the fact of their 'deceiving' us in certain special circumstances: for example, when the objects we are interested in are small or far away or observed under poor conditions." (Williams, Unnatural Doubts 136) It seems that if a sceptical argument is going to trade in particular doubts, then it naturally is not a radically sceptical argument, and so does not present a strong enough problem to give us a great deal of worry. Williams intentionally avoids discussing arguments that trade in particular doubts, because their very lack of generality makes them a weak example of sceptical argumentation.

Black also contends that Williams fails to take account of Pyrrhonist arguments. Such arguments raise numerous genuine doubts about claims or beliefs about one's own experiences (Black 742).

A classic Pyrrhonist argument is the Five Modes of Agrippa (Empiricus 110-112). We have referred to part of the Five Modes as Agrippa's Trilemma, because the 3 modes of infinity, circularity, and assumption are what give the Five Modes their sceptical teeth. Williams does discuss this, and uses it to establish the neutrality of experience in order to show that foundationalism is not forced upon us (Williams, Unnatural Doubts 65-66). But Black must have something different in mind from this; after all, she mentions genuine doubts being raised about one's own experiences.

The Pyrrhonist approach is to not assent to any claim, because any claim may be legitimately doubted, by Agrippa's Trilemma for example (Empiricus 255-256). Perhaps this is what Black had in mind when she mentioned particular doubts. It is hard to say exactly what was intended by introducing the claim that even our beliefs and senses can be doubted. Agrippa's Trilemma shows that the senses can be doubted, which paved the way for contextualism by showing that foundationalism cannot get its hooks in, so to speak, by giving priority to sense experience. Pyrrhonist arguments can give reason to doubt the external world just as much as the senses; and the neutrality of experience then follows.

But perhaps some important questions are raised by this approach. If anything can be legitimately doubted by Pyrrhonist arguments, without any sort of foundationalist presuppositions, why does the sceptic not just play by her own rules, objecting that ordinary everyday contexts don't matter because of Pyrrhonian sceptical reasons, and put forth her own sceptical contexts all the time?

RESPONSE

The question we are presented with is: why don't we just do sceptical epistemology all the time? Why not bring up sceptical contexts at every turn? The Pyrrhonist arguments seem to give us reason to bring up sceptical questions whenever we feel like it. If we are still able to ask sceptical questions all the time, then it would seem that scepticism still looms strong. If we use only beliefs about sense experiences along with epistemologically realist principles, such as foundationalism, as the methodologically necessary beliefs in a context, then we do not know if external objects exist. But if we do this all the time, as suggested, then we have

just adopted foundationalism; we may have no particular reason for holding foundational theories, but nothing is *stopping* us from bringing them up all the time.

Of course, we may just as well use beliefs about external objects as our formally foundational presupposed beliefs of context, and say that we *do* have knowledge of many things. If a sceptic always ask questions about the existence of external objects, forcing us to prove the existence of them by using sense experiences, we can respond in the other direction, asking the sceptic to show us why beliefs about sense experiences are any more dubitable than any other beliefs. Agrippa's Trilemma shows us that we have no good reason to adopt one context's methodologically presupposed beliefs over another's. To force one direction over the other so that sceptical conclusions are unavoidable seems to be foundationalism by force rather than the tacit foundationalism we dealt with earlier. There would be no grand conclusion about all of our knowledge to draw from questioning the existence of external objects all the time, any more than there would be a grand conclusion in the other direction.

We may still have misgivings about all of this. How does contextualism get rid of the problem of scepticism? It seems we can still easily ask sceptical questions, so why do they not have any effect? In fact, it seems that sceptical worries have a sort of broad applicability that most common conclusions in everyday inquiry do not. For example, we may study some particular facts about Lincoln, taking for granted the fact that he existed as a methodologically necessary presupposition for doing history about Lincoln. We may find some novel facts about Lincoln in the process that will affect other closely related forms of inquiry, perhaps history about American politics. Suppose we find out that Lincoln was not the sixteenth president of the US. Our beliefs will presumably change and, realizing we were mistaken, we will take ourselves to have different knowledge from before. These changes may have an effect on how history about Lincoln and American politics and other historical fields is done; perhaps we will be forced to revise history about the civil war, and so on. Taking ourselves to have this new piece of knowledge about Lincoln, it would seem reasonable to use it as a methodological presupposition in other relevant contexts, such as history about the civil war, perhaps. But it will not affect math or logic or quantum physics in the least; for inquiries into these subjects will presumably share no or few important presuppositions with history. Likewise for discoveries in math and physics: these will almost definitely not affect history in any appreciable way. So it is reasonable to suppose that conclusions in some contexts can affect other contexts only depending on their applicability to those contexts.

But suppose we decided to take an epistemological line of inquiry, and ask a sceptical question: how do we know that objects exist? Whether the answer is positive or negative, this seems to automatically have application in a great deal many of other contexts; we must presuppose that Lincoln exists to do history about him, so we must presuppose that at least some objects exist. Likewise for geography, astronomy and so on: we must presuppose the existence of objects to study the solar system, or the terrain of Earth. It would be reasonable to use the conclusions of the epistemological, sceptical question as the presuppositions for a great deal many other fields, so that changing the subject does not seem to alleviate the question of scepticism -- doing history does seem to depend on the outcome of sceptical

questions.

If scepticism leads to a negative assessment of all of our knowledge about external objects, then our presupposition that Lincoln existed seems to become an illegitimate assumption; we cannot presuppose it because there are good reasons to think we are not justified in holding it true. How would a skeptical argument like this go? Presumably we would make a claim, for example, "Lincoln was the sixteenth president." The always alert skeptic gets straight to the point and asks, "How do you know Lincoln existed?" Here we must cite sensory evidence: I have seen photos, letters, and so on, that show that Lincoln existed, perhaps. We have changed the subject from history to epistemology, but there is nothing prohibiting this, and we have no other evidence to cite. But if we are challenged again by the sceptic, we are left without any idea of what to cite as evidence; we can probably only say that we saw some evidence. We move to the epistemological context in order to escape the sceptic's challenges, because we run out of normal evidence to cite. But in making this move we ground our knowledge in an ultimate source: the senses. If we wish to defend the claim that we saw photos of Lincoln, we either refuse to defend it, thus making our claim a groundless assumption, or we say that we just saw it, which is circular reasoning.[7] Here we run into Agrippa's Trilemma once more, which is perhaps what Black had in mind when she contended that Williams must address Pyrrhonian arguments. We have a skeptical argument from Pyrrhonian considerations in Agrippa's Trilemma. And if it is shown that we cannot know that Lincoln existed, why should we be able to presuppose it?

In Problems of Knowledge Williams addresses these issues. He distinguishes two approaches to justification: the *Prior Grounding Requirement*, and the *Default and Challenge* approach (Williams, Problems of Knowledge 24-25). The Prior Grounding Requirement says that being epistemically responsible in believing a proposition depends directly on one's belief being based on adequate evidence. This view makes evidential justification fundamental for all of justification, since being epistemically responsible depends crucially on having evidence; epistemic responsibility just *is* a matter of having good evidence. The Default and Challenge approach, on the other hand, holds that one is entitled to his belief by default, but that one's entitlement is "always vulnerable to undermining by evidence that one's epistemic performance is not up to par" (Williams, Problems of Knowledge 25). If one's epistemic responsibility in holding a belief is reasonably challenged, *then* evidence in favour of one's belief or epistemic reliability must be produced in order to hold on to entitlement. In this way, beliefs need not necessarily be derived from evidence, but must be defensible; beliefs may be presumed, but still require defense in the face of discrediting evidence.

An important aspect of the Default and Challenge approach to justification is that challengers share justificatory obligations (Williams, Problems of Knowledge 150-151). One does not always hold the entitlement to nakedly challenge a claim, unlike what the Prior Grounding Requirement would allow; rather, challengers must earn reason to challenge a claim by either finding specific reasons why the claimant may believe falsely, or by having reason to question the claimant's entitlement to hold her belief. As Williams explains:

Appropriate defeaters cite reasonable and relevant error-possibilities. There are two main

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

Challenges, as much as claims to knowledge, have some presupposed default entitlements, and so challenges need to take place in a justificatory context as well, so that naked challenges need not be legitimate defeaters for a knowledge claim; a blank challenge of "How do you know?" may be reasonably met with a counter-challenge, by asking, "What do you have in mind in asking how I know?" If the challenger can give no justification for their challenge, then no response is required, because the challenger has not made a challenge in any sort of context and so has no methodological presuppositions, or any presuppositions, and so inquiry cannot logically proceed. That is, the challenger may put forth a challenge that questions the reasoning used in forming the belief, or by presenting a conflicting belief that is also plausible, but he may not nakedly ask "Why?" For a challenge to be legitimate, it must be justified just as a claim must be justified. This requirement gets its inspiration from Wittgenstein, when he says, "Can we say: a mistake doesn't only have a cause, it also has a ground? I.e., roughly: when someone makes a mistake, this can be fitted into what he knows aright" (Wittgenstein 75). The Default and Challenge approach is of course the driving force behind contextualism.

So the sceptic has challenged our claim to knowledge: I say I know something about Lincoln; the sceptic asks me how I know this, demanding evidence. We can see that the sceptic has taken for granted the Prior Grounding Requirement conception of justification: the sceptic does not challenge our claim with particular evidence showing us to be irresponsible or mistaken in believing, as would be the case under the Default and Challenge approach, but rather sees any claim as challengeable, because all beliefs necessarily require evidence to be held in the first place. Assuming the Prior Grounding Requirement gives the sceptic a generic reason to challenge any knowledge claim: if evidence is required before a belief may be justified, then demanding evidence is always an option if one wishes to question another's grounds for believing. The sceptic has reason to bring up the skeptical question at any turn, threatening all of our knowledge.

So the sceptic takes for granted the Prior Grounding Requirement, meaning her challenge to our knowledge claim needs no particular explanation; the sceptic may generically ask, "How do you know?" For example, "How do you know that Lincoln existed?" We would most likely answer by saying, "I've seen photos, and letters and so on that prove his existence." But given that the sceptic is committed to the Prior Grounding Requirement and may indefinitely challenge us for evidence, she may ask again, "How do you know that you have seen photos, letters, and so on?" Here we probably just do not know what to say, other than to say that we saw the photos and letters. We quickly run out of evidence, and are forced into an epistemological context; we commit ourselves to citing sensory information as the ultimate evidence for our claim. If we accept the sceptic's first challenge to our knowledge, we accept all the following challenges. It seems as if we have been forced into accepting a

foundational view of knowledge, and so skepticism, but it is only for the Prior Grounding Requirement that we are in such a situation.

Rejecting the Prior Grounding Requirement means that the sceptic is not entitled to blankly and generally challenge any claim. The Prior Grounding Requirement is internalist (Williams, Problems of Knowledge 148), in that grounding a belief requires first having evidence, and is thus foundationalist or coherentist (Williams, Problems of Knowledge 154), so it seems reasonable to reject it in favour of the Default and Challenge approach and the externalist contextualism that follows.

There does not seem to be reason to suppose that we can only draw conclusions about the rest of knowledge from sceptical epistemology, and not draw conclusions about epistemology from the rest of our contexts of inquiry. We have been given reason to think that no belief takes priority over any other, so we may just as easily argue that we know a lot of facts about Lincoln, so he must have existed, so that our conclusions from history would bear on conclusions from epistemology. To prioritize sceptical conclusions about epistemology is a form of foundationalism.

We are reminded of Moore's argument and his conclusions that two hands exist, so objects exist; why not argue in such a way? To disallow it is to prioritize one sort of belief over another. At worst, the conclusions from history and from sceptical epistemology are on equal grounds; neither is more widely effectual than the other. The problem with Moore's claims was that they clashed with scepticism's conclusions, but we have been given good reason to think that sceptical contexts are no more important than any others.8 Moore's conclusions seemed so blatantly obvious that they were almost not worth mentioning. So what was wrong with his obvious pieces of knowledge? The answer may be that nothing is wrong. There is just as much reason to say that Moore knows there *is* a hand in front of him as there is to say that Moore knows he *sees* a hand in front of him. Moore's conclusions perhaps seem strange because they act as methodological presuppositions in many contexts, and so we almost never argue for their truth (except in epistemological, foundationalist contexts, which do not take priority over other contexts.) The existence of objects is often presupposed by arguments in particular contexts, so that pointing out that a tree exists seems strange; but we may say "of course it exists, if it didn't, I could not see it right now." Such a statement is no more or less credible than the claims of the foundationalist sceptic.

But perhaps there are good reasons for choosing the Prior Grounding Requirement and its foundationalism over the Default and Challenge model and its contextualism. Skorupski and McGinn broach such subjects.

MCGINN AND SKORUPSKI

McGinn characterizes Williams in the following manner (McGinn 211-214): According to Williams' contextualism it is possible that in some, maybe even many, contexts one does know that one is not a brain in a vat; it is a methodological presupposition of claiming to know a certain fact in some contexts that I am not a brain in a vat, and since Williams does not need to deny the principle of closure, the particular fact that I come to know in that

context entails that I also know that I am not a brain in a vat. It is Williams' externalism that allows him to make this claim, embodied in the situational constraint; there are objective states of affairs about the world that put conditions on whether or not we have knowledge, but these objective facts do not necessarily need to be known to obtain in order to have knowledge. According to externalism we do not need to know that we know in order to claim knowledge; if I am not a brain in a vat, then I can know that I am not a brain in a vat, even though if I were a brain in a vat I could not know anything (McGinn 213).

In certain contexts then, it is possible to know I am not a brain in a vat. But Williams also points out that knowledge may be unstable; a change of context may result in our losing knowledge we previously had in a different context. For example, a claim to know that one is not a brain in a vat changes the context to an epistemological one in which one's belief that one is not a brain in a vat comes into question. But the only context in which it is reasonable to question such a thing is one in which foundationalist propositions are methodological necessities. The skeptic's conclusion has been cut off from our everyday knowledge, and may only seriously affect our doubts in inquiry involving a philosophical, epistemological, and foundationalist context. The skeptic now just shows not that knowledge is impossible, but only unstable; the sceptic only affects us in one context, and so his conclusion is confined.

McGinn's contention is that Williams' externalism is too weak to defeat the skeptic in this way (McGinn 214). It can only propose that if my experiences are causally related to an objective world, as we take them to be in everyday situations, then I have knowledge of the world, but if the world is not this way, for example if I am a brain in a vat, then I cannot have knowledge of the world; my methodological presupposition that I am not a brain in a vat will be false by externalist standards, so that any knowledge derived from it will also be false. We do not have unconditional certainty about our judgments about our environment (McGinn 215). As McGinn explains, "To rely on contextualism at this point, and to attempt to ground these certainties in the idea of methodologically necessary *assumptions*, also seems to make our relation to them qualified and therefore too weak." (McGinn 215)

Skorupski conducts his discussion of Williams in terms of epistemological functions,9 but his position seems to be akin to McGinn's. Skorupski explains that Williams' externalism is what allows contextualism to stave off the problem of having no account of propositional content in justification; to deny that a proposition has any content outside of a context would be to hold that degree of justification can vary without depending on content, leaving us in the hard-to-understand position of having no grip on propositional content. In order to remedy this, Williams' externalism allows context to include states of affairs of which the knower is unaware (Skorupski 402).

Next, contextualism's instability of knowledge staves off objections about rational assessment of beliefs. Most internalists will hold that a crucially important facet of justification is rational assessment of one's own beliefs. This view seems to parallel the Prior Grounding Requirement: in order to be justified we must first rationally assess our beliefs,

where rational assessment is presumably a matter of giving good evidence and reasons for our beliefs. But if we are externalists and need not know the objective facts that ground our knowledge, then it may be the case that we need not rationally assess our own beliefs in order to have knowledge. For the internalist this unassessed knowledge is not knowledge at all, because "... if I cannot tell whether I am rationally permitted, then I am not rationally permitted and the sceptic wins, in the sense that I have to agree with him (and Hume) that if I believe at all, I believe without rational legitimacy" (Skorupski 403). Externalist "knowledge" allows that I need not know that I know, but knowing that I know is rational assessment, which is the important part of justification for internalists. As such, Williams explains that this sort of rational justification of knowledge arises in an epistemological context in which we have no knowledge, but which also requires foundationalist presuppositions and which does not affect other, non-epistemological and foundationalist contexts; the authority of scepticism is confined to foundationalist contexts.

Skorupski's contention is that Williams' instability of knowledge argument is insufficient to avoid the sceptic; justification of our beliefs through rational assessment is normative, which is enough to ground internalism in the way the sceptic wants (Skorupski 403). The epistemological context is a normative one, and so reflection on our knowledge in sceptical ways legitimately lifts contextual restrictions on our beliefs, leading to a conclusion about the epistemic priority of experience. The epistemological context is not the same as other contexts; instead it is the context in which we reflect on the rational legitimacy of our reasoning in all other contexts (Skorupski 404). The epistemological context takes priority over other contexts, meaning if the sceptic wins in his epistemological context, he wins in all contexts.

If externalism is correct, then rational assessment of beliefs is not necessary. But Skorupski contends that the epistemological context is normative, so Williams' externalism is overridden by the internalist's requirement for rational assessment of our beliefs. Knowledge is not unstable; instead, it is nonexistent, because a negative result in the epistemological context bears on all of our knowledge, given that the internalist context of rational assessment is more fundamental than the externalist. This criticism seems to parallel McGinn's: externalism is too weak because it allows for the possibility that we are brains in vats but do not know it; if externalism is correct, and we need not know that we know in order to claim knowledge, then if we are brains in vats we may claim knowledge about external objects when there is no objective fact about such external objects. Without some sort of internalist-style rational assessment, externalism allows for the possibility that we "know" things about the world when we are in fact brains in vats; as such, internalist contexts of rational assessment of our beliefs take priority.

The theme seems to be that there is something legitimate to the internalist concept of rational assessment of our beliefs over the externalist concept, perhaps because it is a part of our concept of knowledge, whether that is because it is normative or simply because externalism is too weak to deal with scepticism and an alternative is required.

RESPONSE

Skorupski argues that externalism is required to deal with the problem of propositional content. But this seems strange. Williams' reason for adopting externalism is to account for objective facts; and once externalism is adopted, objective facts can play into Williams' theory, meaning it is not cut off from the world. But to say that the problem of propositional content is solved by externalism is to say that there is a problem with contextualism not accounting for the objective nature of propositional content; it is to say that there is an objective fact of the matter about a proposition's content outside of any context, which must then be accounted for, like facts about the world, by externalism. Why would we need an externalist account to deal with the content of propositions unless the content of a proposition were an objective matter? The only reason we have to think that there is an objective fact of the matter about what a proposition's content is, outside of context, is if we are epistemological realists. Further, if epistemological realism is to result in scepticism about the external world as Skorupski would have it, it must be realist about propositions about perceptual beliefs, and thus be foundationalist. But Williams adopts an externalist position to account for objective facts about the world, not objective facts about propositions. It seems that Skorupski holds marked foundationalist leanings in responding to Williams.

It is also claimed that internalist rational assessment of beliefs results in the epistemological context being "not just another context," (Skorupski 404) that is to say, that the epistemological, sceptical context takes priority over other contexts so that its conclusions reflect badly on all of our knowledge. But if internalism is just another way of being a foundationalist (Williams, Unnatural Doubts 323), then by giving the internalist context priority we are giving priority to foundationalist theories. Again, this is a position we ought to adopt if we are foundationalists, but we have been given no good reason to be foundationalist over contextualist. If anything, foundationalism's sceptical leanings give us reason not to adopt it.

McGinn likewise mentions that under Williams' externalist contextualist position we do not have *unconditional* certainty about the external world. But why assume we need unconditional certainty? Again, to ask that our knowledge be unconditionally certain seems to ask that a proposition be justified independent of any context; that it be justified despite any conditions. If I believe that my car is blue, then for my belief to be unconditionally justified, it must be the case that "my car is blue" is justified independently of any context. This is of course to give propositions or beliefs objective, intrinsic content, which is foundationalism.

We seem to have positions that butt heads, so to speak; if foundationalism is true, then we have no knowledge, so contextualism is proposed by Williams as the alternative. But for those with foundationalist sympathies contextualism is not convincing. If one is a foundationalist, then one sees foundationalist contexts as having greater priority than others, and if one is a contextualist, then one does not hold this view. This may come down to straightforward sympathies or personal preference. But there may also be good reasons for adopting one or another theory.

The important point raised by McGinn and Skorupski seems, then, not to be just that foundationalist contexts still allow for sceptical argumentation, but that there is some good *reason* for being a foundationalist; that we have reason to believe that rational assessment of our beliefs is the preferable approach to justification. McGinn and Skorupski contend that there is still reason to be anti-contextualist and adopt foundationalism, overriding all contexts with sceptical considerations.

Skorupski contends that the reason the internalist context of rational assessment of our beliefs takes priority over other contexts is that it is normative. But what is it for something to be normative? If it is just that a procedure that is normative takes priority over other, non-normative procedures, then Skorupski's claim that rational assessment is normative seems to be shorthand for claiming outright that rational assessment of beliefs, thus internalism, thus foundationalism, just takes priority over other contextual beliefs. This is of course not a position we are forced to take if we are not persuaded by foundationalism's worth. We will have to look at reasons for why foundationalism and contextualism may be considered normative or not. A discussion of the normativity of foundationalism and contextualism seems to be in order.

Williams discusses just this topic (Williams, Problems of Knowledge 153-157). His contention is that contextualism better represents our everyday practices, evaluations and assessments of knowledge, and so better reflects our epistemological norms than foundationalism. Williams' discussion is conducted in terms of the Default and Challenge approach to justification and the Prior Grounding Requirement, but the implications are directly applicable to Skorupski's and McGinn's discussions; the Default and Challenge approach is externalist, contextualist and anti-sceptical, whereas that Prior Grounding Requirement is internalist, foundational and sceptical, just as Skorupski's rational assessment of beliefs is.

The Default and Challenge approach and the Prior Ground Requirement are competing views of justification, both of which seem plausible; if the Default and Challenge Approach is correct, then we have a great deal of knowledge, and if the Prior Grounding Requirement is correct, then we have no knowledge, and both approaches have supporters with strong arguments for adopting one over the other. The tie-breaker would seem to be normativity: if one or the other seems to better represent our normative practices, then it is the more reasonable one to adopt. We have not been given reasons for why Skorupski believes his rational assessment, Prior Grounding, internalist, foundationalist, sceptical approach is more representative of our normative practices, but we can assess how well Default and Challenge contextualism reflects our norms in comparison to it.

Williams isolates three ways in which the Default and Challenge, contextualist approach holds normative advantages over the Prior Grounding Requirement, foundationalist approach (Williams, Problems of Knowledge 154).

First, in contextualism, discussion of epistemic entitlement and assessment of beliefs as knowledge allows that both knowledge claimants and challengers share the burden of justification. This meshes with our everyday attitudes and practices, because normally a

challenger must be able to justify his challenge, and to give reasons why it is relevant and damaging to the claim at hand. Blank, outright challenges do not hold any weight in everyday discourse; just asking a physicist or historian "Why?" or "How do you know?" does not further our discussion or lead to significant challenges to knowledge claims. The challenger must have in mind a particular way in which the claimant goes wrong, and so must carry some justificatory burden. Skorupski's approach, and the Prior Grounding requirement, on the other hand, do not put any burden on the challenger; the claimant is expected to first justify her belief with rational assessment or evidence, and the challenger may at any time may challenge this assessment. All justificatory burden is placed on the knowledge claimant, who is left with no way to challenge the challenger. But in our practices and assessments of knowledge, we do allow for knowledge claimants to ask for a reason why a challenger disagrees, and we do allow for claimants to show that a challenge is not significant or relevant.

Second, under contextualism, justifying in light of an objection is a matter of explaining away counterarguments and objections, but *being* justified in the first place is not just a matter of going through a prior process of justification. We may be default entitled to certain beliefs that are methodologically necessary for a particular form of inquiry. We can be justified in holding beliefs, without having to first explicitly give reasons for justification. This seems to reflect our everyday practices: if someone says, "Tom Selleck is in town," and a challenger asks "how do you know?" the claimant may say that he read in the newspaper about how he is filming in town for his next movie. This is acceptable as an explanation; the claimant is default entitled to the belief that the newspaper is a reliable source of information, and the claimant need not first explicitly justify this. Of course, if one has good reason, one might challenge the belief that the newspaper is reliable, but one would have to have good reasons, and in doing so other default entitlements would come into play.

For foundationalism, on the other hand, there is an evidentialist bias that is not obviously present in our knowledge practices and assessments; our everyday assessments of knowledge obviously include production of evidence sometimes, but not every belief need be justified by first going through a process of justification, as is shown by our acceptance of default entitlements. If every belief needed first to be justified before it could be held, then providing the newspaper as evidence for a belief would not be possible.

The foundationalist may respond to this line of reasoning; he may argue that what we have just described is only justification for all practical purposes. The Default and Challenge approach to justification only gives an account of what we call 'knowledge,' but the sceptic will argue that this falls short of what our standards actually ask of us (Williams, Problems of Knowledge 154-155). A difficulty with this objection is that the point of describing knowledge in this practical way was to square off our theories of justification with our normative practices; whichever of the two approaches to justification better resembles our normative practices is the reasonable one to adopt. If the sceptic's claim is that resembling our normative practices is just 'knowledge for all practical purposes,' and that the sceptical approach has the correct concepts of knowledge down, then the sceptic has just conceded that his theory is less representative of our normative practices than the contextualist Default and Challenge approach. If the only reason to make this argument is to avoid refutation of

the foundationalist, sceptical approach, then our reasons for adopting the contextualist, Default and Challenge approach is strengthened: the contextualist approach does not require ad hoc supplementation to fit with our everyday notions of knowledge, whereas the foundationalist who accepts the Prior Grounding Requirement must contend that they have the correct view of justification, no matter what our practices are.

Third and finally, normally we are able to attribute knowledge to others because we can defend their reliability. Williams takes his inspiration for this point from Brandom (Brandom 895-908). In this way we can inherit knowledge from experts, by distributing justification among others; if an expert makes a knowledge claim, and we have good reason to take her to be a responsible and reliable knowledge claimant, then we too may hold her claim as knowledge even if we cannot first explicitly give justification for the belief. Many of us reasonably and legitimately believe that electrons and protons exist, even though we have never seen them, and do not know or even understand the experiments that led to their discovery, but trustworthy and reliable experts *have* done the experiments. Foundationalist conceptions of justification, on the other hand, tie knowledge directly to an individual's ability to first cite evidence before he may claim knowledge. This is at odds with the way knowledge is socially distributed in everyday practices.

So we have good reason to believe that the contextualist approach to knowledge is better representative of our norms than the foundationalist approach. But foundationalists will most definitely argue that there are many good reasons why their theory represents our normative practices as well. Let us grant that there are some convincing arguments for foundationalism well-representing our normative practices. Which are we to choose now, foundationalism or contextualism, when both have made convincing cases for being representative of our normative practices?

Contextualism still has one over-arching benefit over foundationalism (Williams, Problems of Knowledge 153). Foundationalism represents our everyday practices of knowledge assessment and claiming as self-defeating; none of our knowledge claims are ever justified by foundationalism's own standards. We obviously do not take this to be the case; we take our practices and assessment of knowledge to result in many instances of knowledge. If foundationalism insists that we have no knowledge when we take ourselves to, then it does not fit our norms well at all; foundationalism represents what we take to be working knowledge-practices as unworkable.

Under a contextualist approach norms are after all meant to be something we establish and follow;10 if a theory such as foundationalism proposes that our norms do not work when we are the ones making the rules, so to speak, then that theory would seem to be misinterpreting our norms (Williams, Problems of Knowledge 157). This is not meant to imply that they are arbitrary, because we make up the rules; the rules of games are normative as well, but they are not arbitrary. What counts as a goal in hockey is determined by a norm we have decided upon, but that does not mean that rule is arbitrary; if the net were bigger too many goals would be scored, if the net were smaller, no goals would be scored. We may change the rules as we go along, but there are practical limitations. Hockey is a workable game made up of rules we have established and follow according to our norms, just as knowledge is workable

and attainable according to the norms that we have established. To insist upon knowledge being unattainable, as a foundationalist would insist, would be like insisting that a hockey net be infinitely small; it would be a game we could not win or lose or do anything in. The foundationalist may insist on his particular conception of knowledge, but it is clearly not representative of our normative practices if it makes knowledge unattainable; our norms allow that knowledge is readily available.

In this way, contextualism clearly wins the battle of normativity: if our norms say that we have knowledge, and foundationalism insists we have none, then it seems very difficult to then insist that foundationalism is better representative of our normative practices than other theories. To insist that we cannot have knowledge even though knowledge is a normative practice is like insisting that we do not know the rules of hockey; we made the rules of hockey, and any theory that says there are no rules or that we do not understand them is in direct conflict with our norms, and so cannot be normative. Contextualism fits well with our everyday practices and assessments of knowledge, and so seems to be more clearly representative of our normative practices.

If norms are standards we set, like rules in a game, then it does not seem to be fitting to talk about a belief being justified independently of any of our practices and attitudes, just as it does not make any sense to talk about a move in hockey being a goal outside of the rules we established for hockey. If this is the case, and if we are going to argue that knowledge is a normative practice, then we seem to have further support for the contextualist approach to knowledge: no beliefs are intrinsically justified, as in foundationalism, because outside of the context of our assessment and practices and norms, beliefs do not seem to have any significance; outside of context, there is no fact of the matter about what a belief or proposition means or whether it is knowledge, because the institution of knowledge is a normative one, dependent on the norms we set and follow in practice and context.

Williams identifies this as a pragmatic approach to knowledge, which is at odds with the epistemological realist approach, which as we have seen holds that there are objective facts about certain types of propositions that fix our epistemological position (Williams, Problems of Knowledge 170). The epistemological realist position leads to foundationalism, and then scepticism, and our position now is: so much the worse for epistemological realism. Epistemological realism is not representative of our norms *and* leads to scepticism, so it seems reasonable to choose the pragmatic approach and the contextualism that follows. But there are authors who argue that this view is mistaken in some ways.

STROUD

Stroud makes a few criticisms of Williams. First, he agrees that the causal truism that we would not have any knowledge without senses does not lead to the discovery that epistemological realism in the form of foundationalism is the proper view of knowledge; but he does think that we can nonetheless get a sceptical conclusion from the causal truism alone. Once the sceptic makes his arguments, based only on the fact that experiential knowledge is causally necessary for knowledge, the trouble begins (Stroud, Epistemological Reflection on Knowledge of the External World 351).

Stroud also agrees with Williams that, given the neutrality of experience, the logical gap between experience and knowledge of the world does not itself bring us the epistemologically realist position that experiential knowledge is epistemically prior to other knowledge. But he contends that Williams is wrong to think that the sceptic is simply assuming epistemological realism from the start. Rather, the sceptic uses a particular line of reasoning, using no epistemologically realist assumptions, to come to a sceptical conclusion. At this point the sceptical arguer puts forward the realist doctrine that experiential knowledge takes priority over knowledge (Stroud, Epistemological Reflection on Knowledge of the External World 352). Presumably the argument continues in such a way that once experiential knowledge is shown to be too weak to give us knowledge we are stuck with a radically sceptical epistemology.

This sounds like a familiar line of reasoning that we have covered: the sceptic does not assume anything; rather, epistemological realism in the form of foundationalism is a discovery made out of sceptical considerations. As Stroud says, "The priority of 'experiential knowledge' over knowledge of objects is in that sense a kind of 'discovery' or outcome which we are led to by applying familiar everyday concepts and distinctions in the course of what is admittedly a special philosophical reflection on our knowledge of the world as a whole" (Stroud, Epistemological Reflection on Knowledge of the External World 354). I think we have shown many reasons why this is most likely not a plausible line of sceptical reasoning, so Stroud's contention is not a particularly worrying one at this point. This claim is supported by Stroud's contention that it is best-case sceptical arguments that bring us to epistemological realism. As Stroud says:

To investigate our knowledge of the world in general we cannot investigate each particular item of knowledge of the world, or each occasion on which we came to know something from sense-perception, on its own, one by one. The philosopher considers one such occasion which can be regarded as optimal for gaining perceptual knowledge of the world. He carefully scrutinizes what goes on in that case, and lets it serve as representative of what goes on on all those occasions on which we take the senses to be operating at their best under conditions we regard as best for the acquisition of knowledge from sense-perceptions. (Stroud, Epistemological Reflection on Knowledge of the External World)

This sounds like a familiar approach to which we have responded: the philosopher can only analyze all of our knowledge at once, in general, outside of any context, if he is first an epistemological realist of the sort that supports foundationalism, and the best case scenario only reflects badly on all of our knowledge if we are foundationalists and must accept that there is one ultimate source of knowledge in the form of the senses, so that showing those senses to be defective impugns all of our knowledge. Further, the sceptic requires foundationalism to make those sceptical arguments; otherwise 'scrutinizing' a particular piece of knowledge does nothing to hurt the rest of our knowledge. So foundationalism is not any sort of discovery out of sceptical reasoning. These points have been discussed at length in chapter 2 and in response to DeRose and McGinn and so on. It seems Stroud is likely to have made the familiar but understandable mistake of making sceptical arguments without seeing the epistemologically realist, foundationalist assumptions at play.

But Stroud does not make this argument blindly. He acknowledges Williams' contention that epistemological realism must be assumed for sceptical arguments to take shape. He recognizes that, only in certain contexts does scepticism arise, but he is wary of the contention that epistemological realism specifically must be assumed for such contexts of sceptical inquiry to take place. He still feels the full force of sceptical argumentation, but does not think that epistemological realism must be adopted for the context of sceptical inquiry to begin (Stroud, Epistemological Reflection on Knowledge of the External World 356). Perhaps Stroud's best-case argument is not the most effective way of displaying how epistemological realism need not be assumed for scepticism to be effective, but Stroud may be on to something important in questioning the significance of epistemological realism. He thinks that it is implausible that epistemological realism is the main problem in scepticism.

The general idea seems to be that Stroud is happy not to accept epistemological realism in any form, but still sees scepticism as a threat. Williams' argument is of course that realist presuppositions are often tacit in sceptical arguments, and so even if one does not explicitly accept the epistemological realist doctrine, one may still be unknowingly depending on its principles. But the general point Stroud makes seems to be worth addressing.

There are two ways to interpret Stroud's claim. One is that he is arguing that we may be able to make some sort of sceptical argument, which leads to the acceptance of foundationalism, without *any* epistemologically realist assumptions. This I believe is the argument that we have addressed already; I think we have shown that foundationalism is required to make sceptical arguments. Foundationalism is at least some kind of epistemological realism, so assuming foundationalism requires some sort of epistemological realism to be in the picture. I think we have shown that there is no reason to adopt epistemological realism, as opposed to a pragmatic, contextualist approach, that comes out of any sceptical arguing, so assuming foundationalism seems to require assuming its particular brand of epistemological realism as well.

But Stroud might also be taken to be arguing that epistemological realism, *broadly speaking*, is not responsible for scepticism. Only the type of realism that leads to foundationalism, and thus scepticism, is worrisome; epistemological realism is not the main culprit in sceptical arguments, just *one type* of epistemological realism. Foundationalism is necessary for scepticism, but epistemological realism in general is not. This is worth examining further, and in the next section we will look at an argument by Graham that concludes just this.

GRAHAM

Graham gives an incredibly insightful and organized analysis of the issues of realism, foundationalism and scepticism.

Graham identifies a series of epistemic principles that govern various ways of forming and holding beliefs. If an epistemic principle is 'true,' then beliefs formed or held according to it are justified, where different epistemological theories hold different principles to be true (Graham 5). The principles are seven processes of justification, including: a priori insight, introspection, deduction, memory, enumerative induction, inference to the best explanation,

perception and testimony. (Graham 8)11 A strict epistemological theory will only allow that a few of these principles are true, whereas a more lenient theory will hold that more of the principles are true. Further, the order I presented the principles in is representative of how likely a strict theory is to accept them, so that the principles for a priori insight, introspection and deduction are accepted by all theories, but the principles for perception and testimony are only accepted by the most lenient theories.

Next Graham defines three kinds of foundationalism, each holding different principles to be true (Graham 8):

• Reactionary Foundationalism:	• A Priori, Introspection, Deduction
• Conservative Foundationalism:	• A Priori, Introspection, Deduction • Induction, Inference to the Best Explanation, Memory
• Moderate Foundationalism:	• A Priori, Introspection, Deduction • Induction, Inference to the Best Explanation, Memory • Perception

Graham also identifies four theories about the nature of justification: *Cartesianism, Reliabilism, Intuitionism,* and *Pragmatism*. These are distinguished by their loyalties to one side or the other of two distinctions: the *Actual-Realist/ Proper-Aim* distinction and the *Fundamentalist/Non-Fundamentalist* distinction.

The Actual-Realist and Proper-Aim views are about the relation between justification and truth: the Actual-Realist view is that if a belief is justified it is objectively more likely to be true than an unjustified belief, whereas the Proper-Aim view does not require that a belief is more likely to be objectively true if justified, only that "justification properly aims belief at truth insofar as truth is the aim or norm" (Graham 5).

The Fundamentalist and Non-Fundamentalist views are about the epistemic status of the epistemic principles listed earlier. The Fundamentalist holds that epistemic principles are *a priori* necessary truths, whereas the Non-Fundamentalist holds that they are empirical contingent truths (Graham 5).

Cartesianism is an Actual-Result, Fundamentalist theory, and holds that "justification supervenes upon necessarily reliable belief forming and holding processes," so that "A principle is true because it is a priori known that the psychological process it governs makes beliefs more likely to be true in all possible worlds" (Graham 5). Reliabilism is an Actual-Result, Non-Fundamentalist theory, which holds that "a principle is true because it is empirically known that the psychological process it governs makes beliefs more likely to be true. The process need only be contingently reliable, reliable in the circumstances of use"

(Graham 5). Intuitionism is a Proper-Aim, Fundamentalist theory, which holds that "epistemic principles are true because they are a priori truths, whether or not the processes governed are de facto reliable" (Graham 6). And Pragmatism is a Proper-Aim, Non-Fundamentalist theory, which holds that, "The principles (what Williams calls 'norms') are true because we accept them; we make them the norms; they are not norms simply in virtue of the way things are, independent of our conversational practices" (Graham 7). Pragmatism is Williams' epistemological position, which we have canvassed in this and the last chapter.

We are now in a position to see which theories hold which epistemic principles. Cartesianism and Intuitionism are the most relevant for our discussion. Cartesianism is the only theory strict enough to accept Reactionary Foundationalism, because it will only accept a priori reasoning, deduction and introspection as true principles of justification. Intuitionism tends more towards Moderate Foundationalism. (Graham 8-9)

So the question hinted at by Stroud was whether or not epistemological realism is necessary for scepticism. How does epistemological realism fit into the schema Graham has illustrated for us? Graham explains that Williams' description is vague enough to allow for weak and strong epistemological realism (Graham 18-19). Graham interprets Williams' epistemological realism as the view that certain processes of belief formation are necessarily justification conferring, which is just the Fundamentalism side of the Fundamentalist/Non-Fundamentalist distinction about the status of epistemic principles (Graham 8). As such, epistemological realism may still either be Actual-Result Fundamentalism, or Proper-Aim Fundamentalism. We have identified Actual-Result Fundamentalism with the Cartesian theory, which is sympathetic to Reactionary Foundationalism and its strict acceptance of epistemic principles, and Proper-Aim Fundamentalism with the Intuitionist theory, which is sympathetic to Moderate Foundationalism and its more lenient acceptance of epistemic principles. Thus Williams' epistemological realism may either be strong realism, which is the Cartesian, Reactionary Foundationalist theory, or weak realism, which is the Intuitionist, Moderate Foundationalist theory. But Williams' depiction of realism restricts epistemological realism to strong realism; Williams' "epistemological realism" is just Cartesianism (Graham 19).

Graham's contention is that strong epistemological realism leads to scepticism, but weak epistemological realism does not, so that epistemological realism *as such* does not necessarily lead to scepticism (Graham 19-20). Graham characterizes radical scepticism, what he calls academic scepticism, in the following way: radical scepticism contends that it is a priori known that no beliefs about the external world are justified, so that they are all epistemically worthless (Graham 10-11). The academic sceptic requires two premises, first, that there is the possibility for massive error in our beliefs about the external world, such as brain-in-a-vat scenarios, and second, that the possibility for massive error means that no beliefs about the external world are justified;[12] radical scepticism requires an epistemological theory that holds that the possibility for massive error rules out justification.

What sort of theory holds this? If a belief is unjustified when there is the possibility for massive error, then for a belief to be justified it must be based on a process in which massive error is not possible; for a belief to be justified it must be based on necessarily reliable

processes, so that any possibility for massive error is ruled out. The only theory that holds this is Cartesianism: all beliefs must be formed by a priori necessarily true principles that make a belief more objectively likely to be true (Actual-Realist Fundamentalism,) so that only the Reactionary Foundationalist principles of a priori insight, introspection and deduction are acceptable. Cartesian, Reactionary Foundationalism is of course Williams' strong epistemological realism; strong realism implies radical scepticism (Graham 10-11).

Weak realism, or Intuitionist, Moderate Foundationalism, does not imply scepticism. We may grant the possibility of massive error, but Moderate Foundationlism's principles do not require that a belief be based on a necessarily reliable process for it to be justified; justification properly aims at truth insofar as truth is a norm, so that perception, for example, is a justificatory principle. If a belief is formed through perception, which Intuitionist, Moderate Foundationalism allows, then it is justified, so that radical scepticism is not a threat. Further, this is weak realism, which falls under the umbrella of Williams' epistemological realism. Realism does allow for non-sceptical interpretations, so that the contextualist and the Intuitionist, Moderate Foundationalist are in the same anti-sceptical boat. Williams' epistemological realism is too narrow, and does not allow for non-sceptical realisms. Either that or it is too broad, in which case it is wrong that epistemological realism necessarily leads to scepticism; if Williams means by Epistemological realism just the Cartesian interpretation, then he has failed to account for non-sceptical forms of realism, but if he means the broader interpretation of realism, then he is wrong that realism leads to scepticism, because Intuitionism is both anti-sceptical and realist. Epistemological realism *as such* is not sufficient for scepticism, but a brand of it, specifically the Cartesian, Reactionary Foundationalist brand, does lead to it.

So a certain type of epistemological realism is sufficient to reach scepticism, but it is not necessary for epistemologically realist positions to be sceptical. For full blown scepticism we must take the Reactionary Foundationalist route of epistemological realism, or perhaps the Conservative route, but there are other anti-sceptical approaches besides Williams'. This is similar to a point made by Rorty; he explains that Davidson's approach to anti-scepticism works just as well as Williams', despite Williams' contention that Davidson's approach is coherentist. Rorty explains that Davidson bears little resemblance to the coherence theorists that Williams argues against, and is instead giving a theoretical diagnosis of his own: just as Graham has shown that Williams' approach is not the only anti-sceptical path, because weak realism is also anti-sceptical, Rorty too has shown that Williams is not the only successful anti-scepticism, because Davidson's approach works just as well (Rorty 156-163).

Nonetheless, I think we have made a case for showing that foundationalism is required to make radically sceptical arguments, so that we have shown that sceptical arguments tacitly presuppose foundationalism. Foundationalism is presupposed by scepticism, so that a certain type of realism must also be presupposed, but other types of realism can be anti-sceptical as well.

CHAPTER: 4 CONCLUSION

I believe that Williams' approach has proven to be plausibly anti-sceptical. We were initially challenged by Humean and Cartesian style scepticism, which took a best case scenario, such as sitting in at your desk next the fireplace, and showed that our standards of knowledge show that even in this case we do not have knowledge of the external world. For we may be dreaming, and if we are dreaming then we do not have any knowledge from what the sensations deliver us; and since we do not know whether or not we are dreaming, we do not know anything about the external world.

The difficulty posed by this sort of radical scepticism was that it seemed to be straightforwardly intuitive; even those inexperienced with philosophy and its theories and nuances are struck by its persuasiveness. Many of us find scepticism's conclusions unpalatable and even ridiculous, but we cannot simply discount it for its absurd conclusions. Instead, its intuitive nature means we must somehow square it against our everyday notions of knowledge, or end up accepting that we have no knowledge at all. It is not enough to say, as Moore did, that scepticism is wrong because it conflicts with our everyday usages of knowledge claims and attributions; for scepticism *comes from* our everyday knowledge claims.

Next we studied the intuitive nature of scepticism, in the hopes of showing that scepticism is not intuitive at all, but rather presupposes some contentious epistemological theory. We had a prima facie reason for doing this, because of the way scepticism clashes so badly with our everyday knowledge practices: radical scepticism is supposed to be intuitive, in that it comes from our everyday practices, yet its conclusions seem to have no bearing on our everyday practices. Our everyday practices tell us we do have knowledge, while scepticism, despite its claim to be rooted in our common concepts of knowledge, tells us we have none; there seems to be reason to look into the supposedly intuitive backing of scepticism.

By looking at best-case-style sceptical scenarios we discovered that radical scepticism seems to require tacit presuppositions to get off the ground. Specifically, it requires the epistemologically realist doctrine of foundationalism, which holds that propositions and beliefs have intrinsic epistemic status if they are perceptual in nature. This is of course a contentious theory and one we need not accept, especially if it brings radical scepticism in tow.

But the sceptic had a response: foundationalism is not presupposed by skepticism; rather foundationalism is a discovery that comes out of sceptical considerations. Once we discover that we need to adopt foundationalism due to sceptical considerations, we show that foundationalism cannot bring us any knowledge of the external world, and we have radical scepticism all over again. But in studying the sceptic's arguments we found no reason to accept that foundationalism falls out of skepticism. Rather, we found more reason to believe that foundationalism must be presupposed by skepticism in order for it to reflect badly on our knowledge; otherwise we just have an argument from error. Having shown that scepticism most likely requires the contentious philosophical doctrine of foundationalism,

we moved on to rejecting foundationalism in favour of another epistemological theory. Coherentism did not seem to fit the bill; for it too held implicit foundationalist premises in its criteria of coherence, which have intrinsic priority over other beliefs. So despite its appearance of radically rejecting all of foundationalism's principles, coherentism is ultimately fundamentally foundationalist in its own way.

Thus Williams' contextualism was put forth as an anti-sceptical candidate. Contextualism holds that no belief or proposition has any intrinsic content or epistemic priority outside of any context. According to contextualism, in a particular context certain beliefs will be held as presuppositions that shape the direction of inquiry and allow or disallow certain objections, so that some beliefs and propositions are fixed from criticisms in a particular context. Further, it is methodologically necessary that certain beliefs be fixed in a context if we are to proceed with inquiry at all; the logic of inquiry requires that some beliefs be out of question for inquiry to take place at all. What we find out of Williams' contextualism is that the sceptic may still make sceptical arguments, but only within a context of foundationalism; all of our other contexts are safe from epistemological scepticism because they hold different presuppositions, so that scepticism's authority is restricted, and it cannot damage all of our knowledge at once.

Finally, in responding to Williams' critics we addressed the issue of whether Williams tackled all the most important sceptical arguments, and from there we were led to a discussion of how well contextualism represented our normative practices compared to foundationalism. We found that contextualism does represent our normative practices well. Next we broached the subject of epistemological realism, and found, as Stroud suggested and Graham explained, that epistemological realism is not always sceptical, only a certain branch of it, so that there are anti-sceptical epistemologically realist theories.

In the end, I believe we have made a strong case for avoiding scepticism: we began with the idea that scepticism must be doing something behind the scenes to get such radical conclusions that clash with our everyday ideas so badly, and we found that this was the case; radical scepticism presupposes foundationalism, and so is only effective in foundationalist contexts.

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