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**RADICAL SCEPTICISM AND TRANSCENDENTAL
ARGUMENTS**

JU WANG

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FOR MY PARENTS AND MY LOVE

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Declaration

I, Ju Wang, hereby declare the following. The present thesis, submitted for examination in pursuit of a PhD by Research in Philosophy, has been entirely composed by myself, and it has not been submitted in pursuit of any other academic degree, or professional qualification. The following two published papers are included in my thesis:

(1) Wang, J. (2014). 'Closure and Underdetermination Again', *Philosophia* 42, 1129-1140.

(2) Wang, J. (2015). 'A Davidsonian Response to Radical Scepticism', *Logos & Episteme: An International Journal of Epistemology* VI (1), 95-111.

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ABSTRACT

I aim to provide a satisfying response to radical scepticism, a view according to which our knowledge of the external world is impossible. In the first chapter I investigate into the nature and the source of scepticism. Radical scepticism is motivated both by the $\text{closure}_{\text{RK}}$ -based and the $\text{underdetermination}_{\text{RK}}$ -based sceptical arguments. Because these two sceptical arguments are logically independent, any satisfying anti-sceptical proposal must take both of them into consideration. Also, scepticism is a paradox, albeit a spurious one, so we need to provide a diagnosis as to why we are lead into the paradox and why the alleged paradox misrepresents our epistemic standings. Hence, I advocate an obstacle-dissolving strategy for combating the sceptical problem.

In chapter two, I discuss the anti-sceptical import of transcendental arguments. Although ambitious transcendental arguments are vulnerable to Stroud's dilemma, I argue that modest transcendental arguments are promising. Modest transcendental arguments start from an undoubted psychological fact and then reveal some necessary theoretical commitments that we must make. Regarding these commitments, I submit that we are type II epistemically justified in believing them. Our commitments are type II justified in the sense that making these commitments can promote our epistemic goals, namely, the attainment of true beliefs and the avoidance of false beliefs. After that, in light of Cassam's objection to transcendental arguments, I contend that a modest transcendental argument should be used as a stepping stone for a diagnostic anti-sceptical proposal.

In chapter three, I develop a Davidsonian response to $\text{closure}_{\text{RK}}$ -based radical scepticism. This form of sceptical argument rests on the idea that there is no limitation on our acquisition of rationally grounded knowledge. I discuss Davidson's theory of radical interpretation, the principle of charity and triangulation. Crucially, he argues that the content of a knowledge-apt everyday belief is determined by its typical cause and other relevant beliefs. Further, among different propositional attitudes, belief is

prior to doubt. What follows is that doubt must be local because it must presume other content-determining beliefs. Also, I explore Davidson's view on the concept of belief. On his view, in order to have a knowledge-apt belief, we must have the concept of knowledge-apt belief. We can command this concept by having the concept of objective truth. Objective truth requires that we are aware of and are capable of appreciating the possibility of a belief's being true or false. And this possibility cannot be appreciated unless we have some related contentful beliefs to identify the content of the very belief. However, we are committed to, as opposed to believing, the proposition that the sceptical hypothesis does not obtain. It is impossible to appreciate the possibility of our fundamental commitments being false from our own perspective, because fundamental commitments specify the general cause of our beliefs. A change in this regard would cause a total change of the content of all beliefs, which leaves us no contentful belief at all to make this possibility intelligible. Therefore, the $\text{closure}_{\text{RK}}$ principle is not applicable to the evaluation of the sceptical hypothesis. Hence, we can retain the $\text{closure}_{\text{RK}}$ principle while evading the $\text{closure}_{\text{RK}}$ -based sceptical challenge. Unfortunately, the Davidsonian response cannot deal with the $\text{underdetermination}_{\text{RK}}$ -based sceptical challenge, because we are not shown whether our rational support in the good case favours one's everyday belief over its sceptical counterpart.

In chapter four, I examine how epistemological disjunctivism can deal with $\text{underdetermination}_{\text{RK}}$ -based radical scepticism. This form of sceptical argument assumes that our rational support provides at best inconclusive support for our beliefs. Therefore, a belief's being rationally supported, no matter in the good case or in the bad case, is compatible with the belief's being false. Epistemological disjunctivism claims that in paradigm cases of perceptual knowledge, our rational support can be both factive and reflectively accessible. The factive rational support at issue is one's propositional seeing. I discuss both McDowell's and Pritchard's proposals for motivating factive seeing, and I argue for epistemological disjunctivism against three *prime facie* objections, *i.e.*, the distinguishability problem, the basis problem and the access problem. When epistemological disjunctivism is shown to be a plausible view,

I argue that underdetermination_{RK}-based radical scepticism can be dismissed. In particular, in the optimal case, factive rational support favours our everyday belief over the sceptical hypothesis. However, regarding closure_{RK}-based radical scepticism, epistemological disjunctivism seems to licence a robust answer. The ambitious answer is that, in the good case, we can after all know the denial of the sceptical hypothesis in virtue of possessing factive rational support. And it is the immodesty of this answer that renders this response unpalatable.

In the last chapter, I propose a combined treatment of the sceptical problem. Although both the Davidsonian response and the epistemological disjunctivist response can only deal with one aspect of the sceptical problem, their views are in fact mutually supportive. On the one hand, the Davidsonian response, together with a Wittgensteinian insight, shows that why rational support can only be provided in a local manner; on the other hand, epistemological disjunctivism reminds us that rational support can be factive in the good case. Putting these two points together allows us to answer the whole sceptical challenge in a uniform way. This combined proposal has three claims. First, our rational support can be both local and factive, so we can dismiss both sceptical arguments in one go. Second, the sceptical problem is a spurious paradox, so the combined treatment involves a diagnosis. This diagnosis starts from a modest transcendental argument which reveals some necessary commitments that we must make, and then proceeds to expose faulty assumptions in the sceptical paradox. Third, once the dubious assumptions are dislodged, we can evade the sceptical problem once and for all. In the end, we are offered with a satisfying response to radical scepticism.

Lay Summary

In everyday life, we take ourselves to know quite a lot of things in the world. We know what happens in our surroundings via sense perceptions. That is, we see, hear, smell, touch and feel. This platitude is, however, challenged by the sceptic. She denies that our beliefs about the external world constitute knowledge. Interestingly, the sceptical challenge is said to be parasitic on our own theory of knowledge. A theory of knowledge tries to explain what constitutes knowledge and how we come to acquire knowledge of the external world. In our theory of knowledge, there is a platitude that mere true belief does not amount to knowledge. For, one can acquire a true belief simply because one makes a lucky guess. In general, knowledge requires justification. To justify one's belief is to give one's belief sufficient rational support. Rational support can include evidence and reason. By providing rational support, one explains on what ground one comes to believe a certain proposition true. Hence, one's belief is not randomly held. Suppose S says that she knows that there is a bunch of tulips on her desk, one may wonder how she knows that. In order to show that S has knowledge, as opposed to mere belief, S is required to provide rational support for her belief. Presumably, S can say that she sees that there is a bunch of tulips on her desk. In normal cases, one's perceptual evidence provides rational support for one's belief, and thereby one gains knowledge in this fashion.

However, in untoward cases where one undergoes hallucination or one is deceived by an evil demon, things become complicated. In such cases, one will have subjectively indistinguishable experiences from that one has in ordinary situations. One cannot discriminate veridical experiences from non-veridical experiences, so one will be misled into believing something that is not true. Hence, beliefs based on one's experiences are fallible. That is, one can seem to have rational support for one's belief but ends up with a false belief.

The sceptic contends that it is impossible to have knowledge of the external world. And her reason is: for us to know an everyday proposition that p (e.g., there is

an apple on the table), we must be able to rule out some not-p possibilities (e.g., there is a banana on the table). Not-p possibilities are incompatible with p in the sense that if p is true, then not-p does not obtain, and *vice versa*. Among not-p possibilities is the sceptical hypothesis, which says that one is radically deceived by the evil demon or one is a Brain-In-A-Vat. If one is in a sceptical hypothesis, one would have non-veridical experiences that are indistinguishable from normal experiences. Therefore, one would fail to rule out the sceptical hypothesis based on one's perceptual evidence, and further one's rational support for one's everyday belief is not strong enough to constitute knowledge. If this line of thought is plausible, then we must concede that we don't have knowledge of the external world.

However, I develop an account of rational support that can satisfactorily oppose this line of thought. I draw lessons from philosophers such as Wittgenstein, Davidson, McDowell and Pritchard. On my view, rational support for our everyday beliefs can be both local and factive. Rational support is local in the sense that we cannot conduct epistemic evaluation without making general assumptions. Necessarily, when we make epistemic inquiries, we must presume some general propositions, such as that there is an external world and that we are not radically mistaken in our beliefs. These general assumptions make our inquiries possible, but in turn they are never under rational evaluations. The sceptic is thus wrong to take general assumptions into rational evaluations. Hence, not all not-p possibilities are required to be rationally ruled out.

Rational support can be factive in that our everyday beliefs are better supported by our evidence. In good cases where we undergo veridical experience, our rational support decisively favours everyday beliefs over their sceptical counterparts. The sceptic is mistaken in submitting that our rational support in both cases, i.e., good case and bad case, is of the same kind because veridical and non-veridical experiences are subjectively indistinguishable. In particular, I emphasize that our rational support include discriminating support and favouring support. Hence, the sceptic ignores our favouring support. In the end, I offer a comprehensive diagnosis as to why the sceptic misunderstands the nature of rational support. When we realize that rational support

can be both local and factive, the sceptical challenge will then be dismissed.

Chapter One

Radical Scepticism

“Scepticism is not an attitude that can be easily sustained in life. In the long run it is intolerable. …Man cannot abandon, one and forever, his hope of encompassing certainty and ‘assurance of judgement.’ He cannot renounce the quest of truth.”

—Alexandre Koyré, *Descartes: Philosophical Writings*, Introduction.

0. Introduction

In the first chapter, I will focus on radical scepticism, including its essence, the main sceptical arguments and our anti-sceptical strategies. I aim to achieve a proper understanding of radical scepticism, which can serve as a good starting point for developing a satisfactory anti-sceptical response at a later stage. Specifically, I discuss the view that scepticism is a paradox in the first section. I will argue that scepticism is a spurious paradox, so we could expect a reassuring response to this paradox. In section two, I review the closure-based and the underdetermination-based sceptical arguments. It is argued that these two arguments are independent and therefore we need separate treatments. After that I sketch a plausible anti-sceptical proposal along the obstacle-dissolving approach.

Scepticism has been a challenge for philosophers since ancient Greece, and contemporary epistemologists are no exception. When a philosophical view is called scepticism, it involves a certain degree of doubt regarding phenomena that are taken for granted elsewhere.¹ Historically, there are various species of scepticism, and for clarity we can distinguish scepticism by its *subject matter* and *scope*.

At first glance, doubts can be about different subject matters. For instance, when

¹ Involving a doubt in what way? Presumably, a view about the subject matter X is a sceptical view if and only if it rejects that the characteristic objects of X exist or are known to the extent that common sense suggests.

one doubts that one can know what is morally right or wrong, one is a moral sceptic. Likewise, one could be a religious sceptic by doubting certain religious beliefs, such as that Jesus was the messiah. One can also, following David Hume, claim that inductive knowledge is impossible.

Also, doubts differ in their scopes. The scope of scepticism is determined by a set of propositions that are said to be unknowable by the sceptic. A sceptic might target all propositions, while another sceptic might only target propositions about past events. Scepticism of the former kind is *rustic*² and *radical* in that all propositions are said to be unknowable, therefore the challenge posed by this species of scepticism is *universal*. Scepticism of the latter kind is non-rustic because not all propositions about the external world are targeted, thus the sceptical challenge is *local*. And obviously, radical scepticism is more pressing because it has a wider range of attack on our knowledge.

After the above discussion, it is time to specify what kind of scepticism I want to deal with. Scepticism about our knowledge of the external world, or *radical scepticism*, is my primary target. Boldly stated, radical scepticism insists that propositional knowledge about the external world is impossible.³ Propositional knowledge is understood as know-that, i.e., a knowing attitude towards a proposition.⁴ How should we understand the term 'external' in play here? Does it mean that the world is outside my mind or body? I suppose not. If we read it this way, the sceptic would continue to deny that we can have knowledge of my body or my current spatial location. The reason is that radical scepticism, with its radical nature, doubts that we

² For the original use, see Barnes (1982, 61). Barnes defines rustic Pyrrhonism and urbane Pyrrhonism. The former has no beliefs whatsoever while the latter is happy to believe most of the beliefs that ordinary people believe. Urbane Pyrrhonist only doubts philosophical and scientific matters, while rustic Pyrrhonism rejects everything. In this sense, rustic Pyrrhonist is radical and universal.

³ One may ask why we don't characterise scepticism as the weaker claim that there is in fact no human knowledge, even if such knowledge were in principle possible. I think this understanding is not philosophically interesting. Because if we grant that knowledge is in principle possible, but we currently lack knowledge because we are not smart and our ways of acquiring knowledge are error-prone, then it becomes a question of how we become more intelligent and how we adopt advanced way of acquiring knowledge. This understanding would make scepticism less threatening and therefore lose its philosophical bite.

⁴ Propositional knowledge is commonly considered as different from practical knowledge, or know-how. Such as know how to ride a bike and know how to make a cake.

know any mind-independent object. Thus, a better reading is that propositional knowledge of a mind-independent object is impossible. With this rough reading in mind, an anti-sceptical proposal must show, step by step, why this kind of knowledge is not impossible.

One influential form of radical scepticism can be found in René Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy*. In his *Meditations*, he imagines a scenario in which one is undergoing a radical deception:

I will suppose ... some malicious demon of utmost power and cunning has employed all his energies in order to deceive me. I shall think that the sky, the air, the earth, colors, shapes, sounds and all external things are merely the delusions of dreams which he has devised to ensnare my judgment. (*Meditations*, 22-23)

Descartes' evil demon⁵ features in what we would call a 'sceptical hypothesis' in the next section. In such a radical scenario, one is radically deceived by the demon. The powerful demon keeps imparting delusive experience to the victim Descartes, so any ordinary object like the sky or the earth he can experience is merely hallucination. In such a scenario, one cannot know whether one is deceived by the demon. The reason is simple: there is hardly any method by means of which one can distinguish being deceived from not being deceived. For, one's application of a certain method will essentially rely on one's experience. Crucially, the evil demon is stipulated to be extremely powerful so that one is radically deceived. That is to say, any experience one could possibly have in a normal circumstance can be reproduced by the demon to the extent that one will find experiences in both cases indistinguishable, thus to apply any method would be ineffective. For example, one may slap one's face and see whether one would feel pain. However, the feeling of pain could also be implanted by the evil demon. If the sign of feeling pain is not unique to ordinary case, then how can one think that this method (slapping face) can determine whether one is deceived? If

⁵ In the first chapter of *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Descartes actually mentions other possibilities of being wrong. Cases include we might be within dreams (in a dream, we will have all the marks of reality that we have in awake situation, therefore we cannot tell whether we are dreaming or awake), or we could be deceived by God. The evil genius comes last, but his role is the most destructive and popular in philosophical discussion.

one cannot know that one is not deceived by the evil demon, then how can one know anything about the external world? As a result, Descartes learns to reject any temptation to fall back into previous opinions, and continues to seek a solid foundation for knowledge.

What we have done so far is to look briefly at scepticism in general and radical scepticism in particular, but we have not made it clear what is the best argument for radical scepticism. Since we do care much about arguments the sceptic may advance, it is wise for us to consider the best argument immediately. But before that, I will discuss the view that scepticism is a paradox. This discussion will be helpful in two aspects: first, it suggests a proper way of understanding the sceptical challenge; second, it poses some dialectical constraints on any satisfactory response to the sceptical challenge. For sure, if these two aspects are not considered carefully, our response will miss the target and turn out to be inappropriate. Consequently, I will proceed to discuss the sceptical paradox in the next section.

1. Scepticism *qua* Paradox

The sceptical paradox is a typical template for contemporary radical scepticism.⁶ As Pritchard (2009a, 103) puts it, the sceptical paradox, like other paradoxes, proposes some claims that we take to be individually plausible or highly intuitive but jointly contradictory. By framing such a paradox, the sceptic is exposing a deep tension within our epistemological concepts. For the sceptical paradox rests only on some epistemological concepts that we take to be plausible, thus even though nobody may actually argue for the sceptical conclusion, we still face a severe problem caused by our current epistemological theories. On this basis, I attempt to argue that the sceptical paradox can motivate the strongest argument for radical scepticism. But before that, I will first take a close look at the formulation of the paradox and then explore reasons for taking scepticism as a paradox.

⁶ This reading of radical scepticism is due to Stroud (1984), Cohen (1988) and DeRose (1995).

I will first look at the formulation of the paradox.⁷ It goes as follows, where ‘SH’ is a sceptical hypothesis, ‘S’ is an agent, and ‘E’ is an everyday proposition:

The Sceptical Paradox

- (1) S cannot know \neg SH.
- (2) If S knows that E, then S must be able to know \neg SH.
- (3) S knows that E.

Here we have three claims. It is necessary for us to appreciate the initial plausibility of each claim in play here and then come to realize the inconsistency among them.

The first claim (1) relies on what we call ‘*sceptical hypotheses*’. Sceptical hypotheses are radical scenarios in which one has subjectively indistinguishable experiences from ordinary normal experiences, but in fact one has massively erroneous beliefs in these situations. Typical sceptical hypotheses include René’s evil demon and Brain-in-Vat (BIV). Imagine you are only a floating brain in a vessel which is filled with nutritious liquid, and all your experiences are in fact ‘fed’ by a super computer. Since your experiences are stimulated by connecting to the electrodes, it is by no means possible for you to tell any difference from your ordinary experiences.

To see this, we need to think of what evidence we need in order to tell the difference. Crucially, we must presume a piece of evidence that is unique to the normal experience so that we cannot have it in a sceptical scenario. However, the problem is that we can hardly find such evidence. According to the definition of a sceptical scenario, experiences in such case are subjectively indistinguishable from normal experiences. Therefore, to assume any evidence on which we can discriminate deceived case from non-deceived case is not an appropriate answer to the sceptical

⁷ For explicit formulations of the sceptical paradox along this line, see Pritchard (2002c, 2015). Other scholars prefer to formulate the sceptical paradox as an argument (the closure-based sceptical argument). For example, see DeRose (1995), Sosa (1999) and Wright (2008).

challenge. Even if we can assume such a difference, we still need a detailed story about how we can spot it in normal situation and why it is necessarily excluded by the sceptical hypothesis. This approach, I think, is hopeless.

When facing such a radical scenario, we are indeed incapable of ruling out such possibilities that we are envatted or deceived by evil demon. Then it looks pretty plausible that S cannot know the denials of sceptical hypotheses. Following DeRose (1995, 1), in what follows I will refer to this premise the *ignorance thesis*.⁸

The Ignorance Thesis

One cannot know the denial of a sceptical hypothesis.

This thesis says that one is unable to know whether a sceptical hypothesis does obtain. What's essential to a sceptical hypothesis? There is no doubt that Descartes' evil demon case and Putnam's BIV case are typical sceptical hypotheses. However, in order to have a better understanding of sceptical hypotheses, I think one clarification is needed. One view is that a sceptical hypothesis is an error-possibility. That is, in such a scenario, our beliefs would be radically false because our beliefs are manipulated by the evil demon or mad scientists. And since knowledge requires true beliefs, false beliefs don't constitute knowledge.

However, there is an alternative view.⁹ On this view, sceptical hypotheses are ignorance-possibilities. There are two apparent reasons for this view. For one thing, we can have beliefs that are necessarily true in a sceptical scenario. For example, we can believe a universally quantified proposition that cats are animals or that bachelors are unmarried. For there are no cats and bachelors in the sceptical scenario, the proposition remains true. We can also, as Kraft (2013, 65) suggests, believe an empirical tautology based on our perceptual evidence. Looking at a dog chasing a ball,

⁸ Note that although DeRose (1995, 1) names an argument that involves the ignorance thesis 'The Argument from Ignorance', he does not name the thesis explicitly.

⁹ See Kraft (2013) and Kraft (2015a) for a detailed defence that sceptical scenarios are ignorance possibilities rather than error-possibilities. Proponents of this view are Beebe (2010), Schaffer (2010) and Murphy (2013).

I believe that a cattle dog is chasing a ball or it isn't. This belief is true in a sceptical scenario because it is a tautology, even though it is formed empirically.

For another thing, even if we can form a true belief in a sceptical scenario, this belief will fall short of knowledge. Moore once illustrates this point with the following example:

But, on the other hand, from the hypothesis that I am dreaming, it certainly would not follow that I am not standing up; for it is certainly logically possible that a man should be fast asleep and dreaming, while he is standing up and not lying down. It is therefore logically possible that I should both be standing up and at the same time dreaming that I am; just as the story, about a well known Duke of Devonshire, that he once dreamt that he was speaking in the House of Lords and, when he woke up, found that he was speaking in the House of Lords, is certainly logically possible. (Moore 1959, 245)

In the above case, the protagonist's belief, as a matter of luck, is true but fall short of knowledge. At least, dreaming that p is not a way of knowing that p . It is so because his evidence/reason for a belief is not sufficient. Given that he will have subjectively indistinguishable experience in a sceptical scenario, his perceptual evidence equally supports a sceptical hypothesis and a non-sceptical hypothesis. Therefore, he has no ground to exclude the possibility that he is in a sceptical hypothesis, and it is his ignorance in this situation that underlies a sceptical hypothesis.

Although these cases show that we can have true beliefs even in a sceptical scenario, I think these cases are very limited. Radical scepticism is, after all, a challenge to our everyday knowledge. Everyday knowledge is about everyday propositions. Most of these propositions are contingent and empirical, such as that there is a book on the table, and that there is a maple tree in the garden, etc. Hence, even if some beliefs are true because either they are necessarily true or they are tautologies, most of our everyday beliefs are still vulnerable to the sceptical attack. Further, the sceptical attack is deemed as a universal attack. That is to say, most or all ordinary propositions can be under the sceptical threat. On the ignorance-possibility view, some beliefs can be true in a sceptical scenario and still fall short of knowledge,

but can this situation be generalized? If so, a question will emerge consequently, namely, how can we end up with so many true beliefs in such a scenario? Since we can form or retain so many true beliefs in a sceptical scenario, it becomes unclear whether the sceptical scenario is a worse epistemic situation than our everyday situation. Or, even if it is worse, is it radically worse? After all, isn't it plausible that widespread true beliefs are epistemically more valuable than widespread false beliefs? A sceptical scenario, however, is supposed to be an epistemically bad situation, so that the sceptical conclusion can be established. On the contrary, according to the error-possibility view, we can generalize the falsity of an everyday belief so that most of our everyday beliefs are false, and therefore we lack knowledge in the sceptical scenario. Hence, to maintain the radical nature of scepticism, I will endorse the error-possibility view.

What underlies the second claim (2) is a general principle called the *closure principle*. The closure principle says that knowledge is closed under known entailment. It is closed in the sense that if someone knows a proposition and she also knows that this proposition logically entails another proposition so that she can make a competent deduction, then she is in a position to know the proposition entailed.¹⁰ We can formally put it this way:

The Closure Principle

(CK) For all S, p , q , If S knows that p , and S can competently deduce q from p , then S is in a position to know that q .¹¹

With the principle so formulated, it seems very intuitive that we can extend our knowledge via competent inference. For example, if I know that Edinburgh is in Scotland, and I can competently deduce that Edinburgh is in the UK from that Edinburgh is in Scotland, then I am in a position to know that Edinburgh is in the UK.

¹⁰ For proponents of the closure principle, for example, see Stroud (1984), Feldman (1995) and Williamson (2000).

¹¹ This formulation is mainly from Duncan Pritchard (2005a, 38).

One might find that the claim (2) (If S knows that E, then S must be able to know \neg SH) is not a straightforward instance of (CK). But the main point of (2) is that if we indeed know an everyday proposition E, then we should be in a position to know what is entailed by E. This is especially plausible when we are aware of the inferential relationship between E and propositions entailed by E and we can competently make the deduction. Since an everyday proposition E is incompatible with the sceptical hypothesis (SH), it follows that E entails (\neg SH). That is to say, based on (CK), if we know that E and we are aware of the incompatibility between E and the sceptical hypothesis (SH), then we are in a position to know that the sceptical hypothesis does not obtain. If we cannot rule out the sceptical hypothesis (SH) in question, then by *modus tollens* we simply don't know that E.

Let us then examine the last claim (3). It is a normal claim about our mundane objects, like 'I know that I have two hands'. In a normal circumstance, we take ourselves to know quite a lot of things like hands, trees, cats. If being asked why we form beliefs about such things, we are in a good position to give reasons by appealing to sensory evidence that we currently have. E is an everyday proposition that we normally attribute to a knowing agent. Now we have a sense of the intuitive plausibility of each claim in the paradox, but it is still not clear why we should take it as a paradox. Therefore, in what follows I will explore this view in more detail.

In his book '*The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism*', Barry Stroud (Stroud 1984, 82) famously argues that scepticism is a paradox and it arises out of 'platitudes we would all accept'. This view becomes influential in contemporary epistemology.¹² In the history of philosophy, if a problem is a *bona fide* paradox, this problem must be more difficult to be resolved since what motivates this problem is very intuitive. Let us take the problem of vagueness as an example:

(VGP) A rich man would not become poor if he spends one pound.

(VGC) So, a rich man can spend one pound indefinitely without becoming poor.

¹² This view is supported by Cohen (1988), Wright (1991), DeRose (1995) and Pritchard (2015).

A normal person would find (VGP) plausible and intuitive, for a rich man must have plenty of money so he will remain rich after he spends one pound. But then, if (VGC) is true, we will arrive at the conclusion by deduction and (VGC) seems absurd and unacceptable. After all, the total amount of one's wealth is not countless, so if one continues to spend one pound indefinitely, one will eventually become poor. In order to respond to the problem, one might provide a theoretical analysis as to why the premise (VGP) is problematic. For sure, this analysis will be counterintuitive, because it labels what we take to be initially intuitive as problematic.

Nonetheless, if we grant that a normal person will find (VGP) intuitive, can we expect her to find the claims in the sceptical paradox intuitive as well? There are apparent difficulties in this regard. As to the first claim (1), one may not immediately find the claim appealing upon one's first reading. Imagine a normal pedestrian is being asked whether one cannot know that one is not a BIV (we plug in BIV as a specific sceptical hypothesis), it is highly likely that he would not come up with a quick response. As we all know, a sceptical hypothesis is not something a normal person will encounter in normal context. Philosophers bring it into philosophical discussion, so without a deep thinking and some necessary skills one cannot fully appreciate this scenario. The second claim (2) might even look implausible to an ordinary person. Why does one have to know the denial of a sceptical hypothesis in order to know an everyday proposition? This requirement looks too demanding to be acceptable. In our everyday situation, one only needs to rule out some relevant alternatives in order to know a quotidian proposition. Alternatives such as BIV or evil demon are too far-fetched to be worth considering. An alternative is an error-possibility that is inconsistent with the proposition in question. For example, in order to perceptually know that there is an orange before me, I may need to rule out that it is some other type of fruit which might plausibly be in the evaluation context, such as a grapefruit(consider that these two kinds of fruits are similar to a certain extent). However, potential alternatives exclude unlikely candidates, such as a stuffed orange or an orange holography. As J. L. Austin puts the point:

Enough is enough: it doesn't mean everything. Enough means enough to show that (within reason, and for the present intents and purposes) it 'can't' be anything else, there is no room for an alternative, competing, description of it. It does not mean, for example, enough to show it isn't a stuffed goldfinch. (Austin 1961, 84)

If we pose such a strong constraint on everyday knowledge, how could a normal knower find it intuitive? After all, it is just like one defines knowledge in a far-fetched way (knowledge requires that one should rule out the sceptical hypothesis) so that others would refuse to buy into this definition. However, Stroud rejoinders that this seemingly unusual constraint is in fact rooted in our everyday epistemic practices. Though at first sight the sceptic's system of epistemic evaluation and our everyday epistemic evaluation are quite different, the former is licensed by the latter. Therefore, Pritchard (2013; 2014; 2015) suggests that the sceptic shows that she is deploying a *purified* version of our normal epistemic evaluation system.¹³ According to his account, we need to notice the *practical constraints* on our epistemic evaluation. Normally, we do epistemic evaluation in a context, but a context involves not only epistemic constituents such as evidence, knowledge and reasoning, but also it involves practical constituents such as time, space and cost. These practical constituents help us to conduct our evaluation on the one hand, but they also pose practical constraints on our evaluation as well. For instance, if I want to check the score of a snooker match in England, I would not think of travelling to the match venue from Edinburgh. Instead, checking the live score on the World Snooker official website is enough for my purpose. In this case, my way of acquiring knowledge is constrained by my time and budget, so what I may need to do is to check whether I typed in the correct address for the website, but I don't need to rule out the possibility that I am a BIV. However, given that practical constraints are different from epistemic constraints, why don't we set aside practical constraints and focus on epistemic matters in a purified version of epistemic evaluation? Here, our evaluation system is purified to the extent that only epistemic considerations matter. If this purification is granted, it seems that it is no longer permissible for us to ignore the possibility of

¹³ The terminology 'purified' is from Pritchard (2013).

sceptical hypotheses.

There is an objection in this regard, which can be developed from Wittgenstein's account on the structure of reasons. In his book *On Certainty* (Wittgenstein 1969) Wittgenstein argues that there is a major difference between the way how epistemic evaluations are conducted in the sceptical context and how they are conducted in an ordinary context. Crucially, he points out that in our ordinary life our rational evaluation takes place relative to 'hinge' propositions. A hinge proposition is a proposition that we take to be fundamentally certain so that they are immune from doubt in an evaluative system. For example, in historical study, when one tries to figure out whether People's Republic of China was founded on 1st October, 1949, one must commit oneself to, for instance, that the earth did not come into existence five minutes ago and that to know past events is possible. If either commitment is being doubted, one cannot rationally evaluate any historical material that bears a relation to determine the specific historical fact. Note that hinge commitments are necessary in order for an evaluation to take place, so our everyday epistemic practice is *local* in the sense that not all propositions can be examined at the same time. Wittgenstein writes:

[...] the questions that we raise and our doubts depend upon the fact that some propositions are exempt from doubt, are as it were like hinges on which those turn. (Wittgenstein 1969, §341)

Further, the local nature of epistemic evaluation is essential, so even a *purified* version of our evaluation system cannot get rid of this constraint. He continues:

That is to say, it belongs to the logic of our scientific investigations that certain things are indeed not doubted. But it isn't that the situation is like this: We just can't investigate everything, and for that reason we are forced to rest content with assumption. If I want the door to turn, the hinges must stay put. (Wittgenstein 1969, §§342-3)

The logic of investigation requires that any epistemic assessment must be local, so a purified investigation suggested by Stroud must also inherit this feature, otherwise it

would be a *perverse* version rather than a *purified* version of our ordinary epistemic practices. Following Wittgenstein, Pritchard (2014, 219) remarks that our everyday epistemic evaluation does not underwrite the sceptical practices of epistemic evaluation, because the latter essentially involves a wholesale evaluation of our beliefs while the former is piecemeal. To be specific, the sceptic is evaluating all our empirical beliefs in one go, so there is nothing left undoubted. Accordingly, the sceptical practice of epistemic evaluation and our ordinary epistemic practice are different in *kind*, not in *degree*.¹⁴ With this point in mind, Pritchard (2014, 221) argues that the sceptical paradox is not a *bona fide* paradox, which can be extremely difficult to be dealt with, and therefore we only need to solve a disguised paradox. This disguised paradox consists of some platitudes and some theoretical assumptions, but we are easily led into a ‘predicament’ because we are unaware of the faulty assumptions and they masquerade as pre-theoretical platitudes. But it is still not clear how exactly we go amiss and why we are deeply tempted by the sceptical reasoning to the extent that we take it to be intuitive, so a diagnosis is necessary to dispel the allure. Once the problematic assumptions are exposed, an intellectually reassuring response is still possible. Consequently, though there is something wrong with the view that scepticism is a *genuine* paradox, Stroud still highlights the necessary component of a satisfactory response to radical scepticism, *i.e.*, to explain why the sceptical paradox, as a *spurious* paradox, is so tempting.

Then, what shall we do if scepticism is arising from our deeply rooted commitments? At least the dialectical situation is largely different. I think the following three points are important: first, it is not necessary for the sceptic to argue for any claim. All she needs is something that we, as anti-sceptical epistemologists, have taken for granted. Wright (1991, 89) also notes that a sceptical argument consists of several seemingly plausible premises and seemingly valid inference but reaches at unacceptable conclusion B, which can be formally put as $(A1 \wedge A2 \wedge A3) \rightarrow B$. Then the denial of B amounts to the denial of $(A1 \wedge A2 \wedge A3)$. Surely, a justification for the

¹⁴ This point is illuminated in Pritchard (2014, 220).

denial of combination ($A1 \wedge A2 \wedge A3$) is not immediately a denial of A1, A2 or A3. That is to say, without further diagnosis, we only know that the combination of the three claims is problematic, but it remains unclear which one exactly causes the problem. Therefore, we don't require further support for any single claim involved in the sceptical argument unless we find one guilty and take it as the source of the problem.

Second, a satisfying response to the sceptic requires more than blocking her argument. It is argued that sceptical challenges can be motivated by the fundamental assumptions that we also find plausible. Consequently, in order to offer an intellectually reassuring response, it's not enough to block the sceptical argument. Surely, this might be an effective strategy when scepticism is understood as an independently motivated philosophical position. If we think of scepticism this way, we would call for an argument for this position. And if under scrutiny this argument rests on suspicious assumptions, we would find it unpersuasive and therefore this position would be indefensible. But now scepticism only relies on our own platitudes, it indicates nothing more than a deep problem in our own position. Therefore, apart from blocking the sceptical argument, we have to show what we traditionally accepted is misguided and henceforth expose its power to seduce us into scepticism. As Wright (1991, 89) remarks:

One must not be content to reply [to a sceptical argument] on attacks on the stability of the conclusion, or on the mutual coherence of the premises which are used to support it.....defusing a paradox demands a properly detailed diagnosis and expose of its power to seduce.

Third, to label the sceptical argument as self-defeating would be ineffective. An argument is self-defeating if one of its premises or assumptions is incoherent with its conclusion. Accordingly, to take the sceptical argument as self-defeating amounts to saying that the sceptical conclusion is inconsistent with some premises or assumptions that the sceptic must rely on. Consequently, scepticism cannot be consistently held. For instance, one might argue that the sceptic must admit that we have meaningful

language, that we have thought, and that we have beliefs in order to launch the sceptical attack. If these assumptions (or their necessary conditions) are inconsistent with the sceptical conclusion, then radical scepticism is self-defeating. This way of responding to the sceptic has been widely discussed.¹⁵ However, this strategy is dialectically disadvantageous. For the sceptical argument rests on nothing but our seemingly plausible platitudes, what have been defeated are not only scepticism, but also our deeply justified concepts and rationales. Thus the self-defeating character of scepticism would highlight our endorsement of a self-defeating epistemological theory. Therefore, the mere announcement that the sceptical claim is self-defeating, meaningless or unintelligible would not bring much intellectual comfort to us, but rather deepen our worry. The worry is that how can we actually hold some claims that are independently plausible but jointly incoherent? Thereby, we should be wary of the self-defeating accusation. However, if we supplement with a diagnosis as to why we are misled into such a self-defeating predicament, this strategy would still be appealing.

As I shall look for the best argument for radical scepticism, I now proceed to transform the sceptical paradox into the following sceptical argument.¹⁶

*The Sceptical Argument*¹⁷

- (4) S cannot know \neg SH.
- (5) If S knows that E, then S must be able to know \neg SH.
- (6) Therefore, S cannot know that E.

Presumably, when I talk about the best argument for radical scepticism, I intend to talk about the *strongest* argument that features in its *logical force* and *well-supported premises*. To be more specific, the argument for scepticism should be *strongest* in that:

¹⁵ This approach typically involves using transcendental arguments to argue against the sceptic. For relevant discussions, see Bennett (1979), Strawson (1985), and Stroud (1984).

¹⁶ A paradox is not an argument, but we can surely construct an argument based on the paradox.

¹⁷ This is just to transform the sceptical paradox into an argument. For more detailed ways of presenting the sceptical argument, see section 2.

(I) its conclusion is universally devastating and modally strong; (II) it consists of highly intuitive premises and thus it is well-motivated.

Understood this way, the argument for scepticism can be strong in the following aspects:

(A) The generality of conclusion. As to claim (6), since E can be substituted by any everyday proposition, any piece of knowledge in our everyday life would be at risk when facing the sceptical attack. To see this, we can replace S and E with any person and (almost) any everyday proposition, as most of our everyday beliefs are known to be inconsistent with some sceptical hypotheses or other. Thus, we can produce a new sceptical argument against any piece of everyday knowledge. Countless arguments can be repeated in this way if we need, so the generality of the conclusion amounts to a total rejection of our external world knowledge.

(B) Modal operators. Sceptical claims can be evaluated with or without the modal operators involved. 'Cannot' in premise (4) that S cannot know \neg SH should be interpreted as saying that it is impossible for S to know the denial of SH in any circumstance. It is this reading that reveals the radical nature of the sceptical challenge. The reason is that what scepticism maintains is not that we fail to acquire knowledge because we are not careful enough when forming beliefs, or that there are practical constraints on our cognition so that we don't have knowledge at this stage. Understood this way, scepticism will be nothing more than a reminder that we are not perfect in terms of belief formation and belief evaluation. However, scepticism is claiming that knowledge is by no means possible for us, no matter what effort we could make in order to perfect our cognition.

(C) Paradox. By framing a paradox, the sceptic is not only able to easily construct a sceptical argument on this basis, but also she can reveal a tension amid our basic intuitions and notions in epistemology. In this sense, the sceptical element lives within our epistemological theorising. Moreover, viewed from this paradox, scepticism makes minimal ontological commitment. By minimal I mean that it does not always trade on dualism. It is partly true that when an agent S is required to rule out error possibility, the sceptic usually appeals to a sceptical hypothesis such as evil demon or

BIV. And because of this appeal, the sceptic assumes a difference between our mental representation and the mind-independent reality. With this metaphysical gap taken for granted, scepticism finds no difficulty in entering our knowledge house from the back door. However, it is not the case that if we reject dualism, scepticism would be refuted as a result. The case is, depressingly, scepticism can be run on idealism as well. John Greco (2008, 118) illustrates this point by discussing how Descartes' sceptical argument can run on Berkley's idealism. According to Greco, although Berkley admits that all that exist are minds and ideas, actual tigers and hallucinations of tigers are different. The former consist of a bundle of ideas that are coherent and stable, while the latter are not well-ordered. With this distinction in play, together with the idea that the evidence of my perception is the sensory experience I have at the moment, current appearances do not rule out the possibility of forthcoming unstable and incoherent illusion. For momentary appearances, their initial stability and coherence are compatible with pending instability and incoherence of illusion. For example, my present experiences as if a tiger at a moment t (a period of time) may either lead to an actual tiger, or give way to hallucinations of a tiger if the experience stops being well-ordered later on. If one cannot discriminate these two cases at t , scepticism ensues. The moral we can draw from the above discussion is that scepticism ensues on any metaphysical position as long as we assume a minimal distinction between appearance and reality. This distinction, no need to be cashed out, is very plausible, since we take it for granted that things are not always as they appear. Without this distinction, we are not even in a position to tell true belief from false belief. The reason is that, we cannot believe something mistakenly if things are always as they appear. Obviously, this is not true. Most of our beliefs are fallible and we make mistakes at times. With this minimal metaphysical claim in play, scepticism rests on nothing particular but our platitude in philosophical discourse. In a nutshell, sceptical paradox is well-formulated and ontologically minimally-committed. Consequently, we are facing a challenge from the very internal aspect of epistemology, perhaps philosophy more generally. In order to make the challenge more explicit, I will examine two crucial arguments for radical scepticism in the next section. They

are the closure-based sceptical argument and the underdetermination-based sceptical argument.

2. Closure and Underdetermination

Despite the apparent plausibility of every single claim in the sceptical paradox, the predicament is that we cannot hold them all together. The three claims in question generate a logical inconsistency. We can manifest this inconsistency by taking (1) and (2) as our premises, and then by *modus tollens* we arrive at that S cannot know an everyday proposition E. Obviously, S cannot have everyday knowledge is inconsistent with (3). This argument, or known as the closure-based sceptical argument, can be put as follows:

*The Closure-Based Sceptical Argument*¹⁸

(CK1). S cannot know \neg SH.

(CK2). If S knows that E, then S must be able to know \neg SH.

(CK3). So, S does not know that E.

What we have arrived at is an astonishing conclusion that S does not know that E, and this is inconsistent with our common sense that we know many of the everyday propositions we take ourselves to know. And surprisingly, this challenge relies on highly intuitive premises and valid inference, i.e. it is well-motivated and well-defended. Hence, if we are forced to accept this conclusion, our ordinary knowledge would be discarded completely. If we insist (2) and (3) instead, then we can infer, by *modus ponens*, that we know the denial of the sceptical hypotheses, which is incompatible with (1). If we hold (1) and (3) already, then a contradiction would arise when (2) joins the combination, thus we have to deny (2) on pain of contradiction.

¹⁸ This formulation comes from Pritchard (2005a, 38).

What we discussed above is one way of motivating sceptical argument. Nevertheless, it is suggested by some epistemologists, such as Anthony Brueckner (1994) and Duncan Pritchard (2005a), that the sceptical argument can also be run without appealing to the closure principle.¹⁹ If scepticism can be maintained in another way, then any satisfactory response to scepticism is required to consider two forms of sceptical arguments. The alternative approach is based on the underdetermination principle. It can be expressed as follows:

The Underdetermination Principle

(UP) For all S , p , q , if S 's evidence for believing p does not favour p over an incompatible hypothesis q and S knows the incompatibility between p and q , then S 's evidence is not sufficient in justifying S in believing p .²⁰

This principle is plausible because if my evidence does not favour p over its alternative q , then p is not better supported by my (total) evidence. That is to say, relative to my evidence, p is not epistemically more favourable than q . Therefore, if I am justified in believing p only if p enjoys better support from my evidence, then I am not justified in believing p . After all, I don't possess any piece of evidence that favours p over q , so my belief that p is not sufficiently justified.

With the principle so formulated, the sceptic may appeal to an instance of (UP): If my evidence for believing that I am now living in Edinburgh does not favour the hypothesis that 'I am a brain-in-vat', and I know that these two hypotheses are incompatible, then my evidence is not sufficient in justifying my belief that I am now living in Edinburgh. Basing on the underdetermination principle, the sceptic can advance an argument as follows:

The Underdetermination-Based Sceptical Argument

¹⁹ It is notable that there are more ways to motivate radical scepticism, e.g., the argument from fallibility and the argument from dogmatism.

²⁰ Anthony Brueckner's own formulation is slightly different from (UP), but the difference does not matter to the argument.

(UP1) If S's evidence for believing p does not favour p over an incompatible hypothesis q and S knows the incompatibility, then S's evidence is not sufficient in justifying S in believing p .

(UP2) S's evidence for believing p does not favour p over q and S knows that p is incompatible with q .

(UP3) Thus S's evidence is not sufficient in justifying S in believing p . (It is obvious then S is not justified in believing p , which may directly lead to S's failure in knowing p .)²¹

There are several considerations regarding the formulation I present here. Firstly, there is an explicit condition that S knows the incompatibility between the two hypotheses p and q . According to Brueckner's (1994) original formulation, there is no clear requirement that S knows the incompatibility.²² Without this constraint, we could ask whether it's possible for S to hold two incompatible beliefs/hypotheses given that she doesn't know the incompatibility between the two. It seems possible since we may not always be aware of the logical connection between two propositions. If two incompatible propositions are both well evidentially supported for a person S, then S tends to believe both as long as he is unaware of the logical relation underlies.

Secondly, we have assumed two further theses in the UP-based sceptical argument. One is that justification is based largely, if not completely, on evidence. We may further conclude that if we don't have sufficient evidence for a belief, then we lack justification for that belief. The other is that justification is an indispensable part of knowledge. Presumably, this conclusion would fail if we argue that, contra traditional tripartite account of knowledge, justification has nothing to do with knowledge. This option seems possible, but I will still take justification as a necessary condition, if not sufficient, for knowledge.

At this point, the underdetermination-based sceptical argument is as potentially

²¹ This formulation is primarily due to Duncan Pritchard (2005a, 40).

²² Anthony 's (UP): For all S, ϕ , ψ , if S's evidence for believing that ϕ does not favour ϕ over some incompatible hypothesis ψ , then S lacks justification for believing that ϕ .

devastating as the closure-based sceptical argument. To see this, we just need to replace p with any quotidian proposition, replace q with a sceptical hypothesis (like ‘I am a BIV’), and replace S with any person. And we get the same result in every replacement: S ’s evidence is not sufficient in justifying S in believing any ordinary proposition. This result amounts to our failure and inability to know anything about the external world. Being such generally devastating and modally strong, UP-based sceptical argument arrives at the same conclusion as CK-based sceptical argument via a different route.

Now that we have two ways of motivating scepticism, it is natural to ask what the relationship between these two approaches is. If they both arrive at the same conclusion, would they be equivalent or is one of them more fundamental? To answer this question, we need to compare these two arguments. I hope that, through the comparison, I can make it clear what consists of an intellectually satisfactory response to radical scepticism.

3. Closure and Underdetermination: Equivalent or Independent?

In order to evaluate the two closely related principles, we can draw on some previous discussions. Here, I propose to examine a debate on this issue. This debate begins from Anthony Brueckner (1994), with Stewart Cohen (1998) and Duncan Pritchard (2005a) as interlude, and ends with Kevin McCain (2013).²³ There have been a variety of ways to formulate the two principles in question, but the basic ideas behind these formulations are similar.²⁴ Recall the closure-based sceptical argument:

1. S cannot know that she is not a victim of Brain-in-Vat.
2. If S knows that she has two feet, then S knows that she is not a victim of Brain-in-vat.

²³ See other response like Yalcin. U. D. (1992), but for current purpose, these three representatives are sufficient.

²⁴ See Brueckner (1994), Cohen (1998), Vogel (2004) and Pritchard (2005a).

3. So S does not know she has two feet.

In this argument, what links S's ignorance of the denial of the sceptical hypothesis to her failure to know an ordinary proposition is the closure principle. We have formulated the closure principle in the last section, and it says:

(CK) For all S, p, q, if S knows that p, and S can competently deduce q from p, then S is in a position to know that q.²⁵

If S's total evidence justifies p, and S is also able to deduce q from p because S knows the inferential relationship between p and q, then it is hard to see how S would not have evidence that is sufficient to justify q. I assume that knowledge requires justification and justification comes from one's evidential support.²⁶ I make these assumptions because they can help us compare the closure principle and the underdetermination principle, for the latter focuses on one's evidence for a belief while the former does not explicitly say what constitutes epistemic justification. Therefore, for the sake of argument, I will construe the closure principle along the evidentialist line. If this move is temporarily permitted, then we can derive CJ from CK.

(CJ) For all S, p, q, if S's total evidence justifies p, p is incompatible with q and S knows this incompatibility, then S's evidence justifies not-q.

There is an important constraint on the formulation of CK and CJ, that is, the logical relationship between p and q must be known by S. Why should it be so? The reason is,

²⁵ This formulation is mainly from Duncan Pritchard (2005a, 38).

²⁶ One may question this assumption by saying that justification is not necessary for knowledge and that justification needs not to be based on evidence. However, a quick response is that knowledge is rational in that we can adduce reasons/evidence to explain how we know something. By giving such an explanation, we use evidence to support our beliefs, and therefore our beliefs become justified and reasonable. Though evidentialism has its difficulties, I take the main idea to be plausible: only when S's belief is sufficiently supported by evidence, S's belief is justified.

if the logical relationship between two propositions is so obscure and complex that S is not in a position to be aware of it, let alone fully understand it, then how could we rationally attribute knowledge about a new proposition to S given that logical inference is the only way of knowledge justification in this case. Another point is, when I talk about S's knowledge of the logical relationship between two propositions, I intend to mean that S is aware of this relationship and S can competently deduce one proposition from the other.

After we put the closure principle this way, it is time we revisit the underdetermination principle.

(UP) For all S, p, q, if S's evidence for believing that p does not favour p over some incompatible hypothesis q and S knows the incompatibility, then S's evidence is not sufficient to justify S's belief p.²⁷

Here I also propose a simplified version of (UP), that is (UP*), and what (UP*) says is actually equivalent to (UP)

(UP*) For all S, p, q, if S's evidence justifies p, p and q are incompatible, and S knows the incompatibility, then S's evidence favours p over q.

With these formulations in play, what we shall do next is to compare them. What is the aim of the comparison? The basic idea is that, since both principles can motivate the sceptical argument, it seems natural to anticipate independent answers to each of them. However, as Brueckner (1994) argues that the two principles are equivalent, we may therefore need only one answer. This view, nevertheless, soon faces challenges from different aspects. Therefore, it is necessary for us to re-examine the relationship between the two principles before we proceed to work out our anti-sceptical strategy.

²⁷ This formulation is mainly from Anthony Brueckner (1994) and Duncan Pritchard (2005a).

3.1 Derivation Revisited

For the sake of argument, let's temporarily assume that the two principles are equivalent, and that we can deduce CK from UP, and UP from CK. In examining each derivation, we shall use simplified CK and UP, that is CJ and UP*.

It is obvious that CJ and UP* share a common antecedent, that is 'S's evidence justifies p, p is incompatible with q and S knows the incompatibility.' However, their consequents differ. Firstly, I will examine Cohen's argument that UP* is entailed by CJ.

From (CJ) to (UP*)

- (1) If S's evidence justifies p, and p and q are incompatible, then S's evidence justifies not-q [CJ].
- (2) S's evidence justifies p, and p and q are incompatible and S knows the incompatibility. [common antecedent of (UP*) and (CJ)].
- (3) S's evidence justifies not-q [from 1, 2].
- (4) S's evidence does not justify q [from 3].
- (5) S's evidence justifies p and S's evidence justifies not-q [2 & 3].
- (6) S's evidence favours p over q [from 4, 5].²⁸

Here we arrive at the consequent of UP*, which means that we can successfully derive UP* from CJ. Note that in the above inference we implicitly appeal to a principle as follows,

(J) If S's evidence justifies p, then S's evidence does not justify not-p.

This principle underlies the inference from (3) to (4). At first pass, this principle is highly intuitive, but clarification is still needed. What it says is not that evidence

²⁸ See Cohen (1998, 150-51).

cannot favour inconsistent propositions. Rather the principle means that if the total evidence justifies a proposition, then the same evidence will not justify the negation of that proposition. An example may help illustrate this point. Suppose I am currently typing words with a keyboard on my desk, and the perceptual evidence I have now equally favours propositions ‘I am typing at home’ and ‘I am typing at my friend Peter’s home’. The reason is that Peter’s room has the same layout and facilities as mine. So in this case my total perceptual evidence favours both hypotheses and it is obvious the two hypotheses are incompatible. However, if my evidence favours just one proposition, say I see a unique mark on my keyboard which is not shared by my friend Peter, then my evidence would succeed in justifying the proposition ‘I am typing at home’ and does not favour the other proposition. Next, I will look at Brueckner’s derivation in the opposite direction, i.e. from UP* to CJ.

From (UP*) to (CJ)

- (1) For all S, p, q, if S’s evidence justifies p, p and q are incompatible and S knows the incompatibility, then S’s evidence favours p over q. (UP*)
- (2) S’s evidence justifies p, and p and q are incompatible and S knows the incompatibility. (common antecedent of (UP*) and (CJ))
- (3) S’s evidence favours p over q. [from 1, 2]
- (4) S’s evidence does not favour q over p. [from 3]
- (5) S is not justified in believing q. [from 4 and UP]
- (5*) S is justified in believing not-q.²⁹

The central issue of the debate is on the inference from (5) to (5*). Cohen (1998) and Pritchard (2005a) both contend that the inference from (5) to (5*) is problematic, while Brueckner (1994) and McCain (2013) argue for its validity. It seems then a further review will be of great help before making a final conclusion.

A natural doubt concerning the inference from (5) to (5*) could be easily raised,

²⁹ See the original argument in Brueckner (1994, footnote 7).

that is what motivates us to hold (5*) given the truth of (5). Presumably, it could be that S's evidence might favour p over q while the evidence is not strong enough to justify either p or q. Or we can put it this way, S's evidence favours p over q if p has relatively more evidential support, while S's evidence justifies p if p has sufficient evidential support.

However, Brueckner takes the inference from (5) to (5*) to be unproblematic, in that we have assumed our evidential justification in p and the incompatibility between p and q. Therefore, p has stronger evidential support than q, and it is strong enough to rule out the alternative possibility q. In addition, given that p and q are incompatible, S can be justified in believing not-q from being justified in believing p on the same evidential basis. That is what Brueckner aims to say.³⁰

Nonetheless, this conclusion is not that straightforward. Let us return to (5). As Pritchard (2005a) shows, conclusion (5) is weaker than the consequent of (CJ), i.e. (5*). Only if we arrive at (5*) rather than (5) can we demonstrate that CJ is deducible from UP*, and further the equivalence of the closure principle and the underdetermination principle.

In order to make the inference more acceptable, can we argue for a principle as follows?

(J*) If S is not justified in believing p, then S is justified in believing not-p.

However, I find (J*) dubious. Here are two counterexamples.

A. Given the consistently good academic performance of David so far, one is not justified in believing his failure in a recent exam, so one is not justified in believing 'David failed in the math exam last Friday' (p). However, can one be justified in believing the negation of 'David failed in the math exam last Friday' accordingly? That is 'David did not fail in the math exam last Friday' (not-p). If this principle is correct, then it seems that one gains extra evidence apart from what the antecedent

³⁰ See also Brueckner (1994, footnote 7).

offers. Given p , one is uncertain about p 's being true. While in $\text{not-}p$, one is evidentially justified to rule out the possibility of p 's being true.

B. Given only that a point has a colour and that it is not red, I am not justified in believing that the point is blue, but in this case am I therefore justified in believing that the point is not blue?

The moral we can draw from the above examples is that merely lacking evidence/reason for p 's being true does not make p false. To put it another way, lacking evidence for p is different from having evidence for $\text{not-}p$. Since this principle is unattainable, we cannot deduce (CJ) from (UP*) by appealing to (J*). It seems then CJ is indeed stronger than UP*, and UP* cannot entail CJ. However, alternative ways to argue in line with Brueckner are still possible, and this is what McCain (2013) intends to do.

3.2 McCain's Argument

In order to fully appreciate McCain's argument, three assumptions which McCain makes are to be revealed in advance. To start with, the relation between evidence and propositional justification can be cashed out in terms of probability. In this sense, we can rewrite expressions in natural language as follows:

- (1) $\text{Pr}(p/e) > \text{Pr}(q/e)$ means S's evidence e favours p over q
 - (2) $\text{Pr}(q/e) > .5$ means S's evidence propositionally justifies q .
 - (3) $\text{Pr}(q/e) < .5$ means S's evidence propositionally justifies $\text{not-}q$.
 - (4) $\text{Pr}(p/e) <= \text{Pr}(q/e)$ means p and q are incompatible.
 - (5) $0 <= \text{Pr}(q/e) <= 1$ means q is either possible or impossible given evidence e .
- (McCain 2013, 293)³¹

Moreover, McCain assumes a distinction between propositional justification and

³¹ McCain explicitly admits (1)-(4), but I think (5) is also implicitly assumed in his argument.

doxastic justification.³² Generally speaking, propositional justification concerns whether a proposition P is justified for one to believe it, while doxastic justification concerns whether one is justified in believing a proposition P. We can put them as follows: (where P is a proposition, S is a person and E is S's total evidence)

P is propositionally justified for S iff E is sufficient to justify P.

S is *doxastically justified* in believing that P iff i) E is sufficient to justify P; ii) S believes that P; iii) S forms her belief that P on the basis of E.

An everyday example would help illustrate the contrast between two types of justifications. Imagine Mary is watching BBC news, and she is informed that there was a terrorist attack in Paris on 13th November. Given that BBC news is very reliable and Mary knows that, her evidence is sufficient to justify the proposition that there was a terrorist attack in Paris on 13th November. So the proposition that there was a terrorist attack in Paris on 13th November is propositionally justified for Mary. However, Mary may actually come to believe this proposition on a different basis. She didn't form her belief because of this piece of BBC news. Rather she believes this proposition because she reads a post in an on-line forum where rumours and reliable information are mixed (and she even knows that this forum is unreliable in most cases). If this is the way how Mary comes to form her belief, Mary would not be doxastically justified in believing the proposition, but the proposition itself is nonetheless (propositionally) justified for Mary. Doxastic justification requires that one should base one's belief on evidence that sufficiently justifies the proposition. That is to say, the evidence that justifies the proposition has to be the reason that causes one to believe the proposition. Otherwise, one would lack doxastic justification. In his work, McCain formulates the closure principle, the underdetermination principle and other relating principles in terms of propositional justification, thus it is rather helpful to notice this difference before we evaluate his argument.

³² For the distinction, see Audi (1983), Feldman and Conee (1985).

Lastly, given our conception of justification and the principle J, it is plausible to formulate a new principle regarding the weak role of closed justification as follows.

(WCJ*)For all S, p, q, if S's evidence justifies p, and S knows that p is incompatible with q, then S's evidence does not justify q.³³

It is obvious that (J) can be construed as an instance of WCJ*. To see that, let us assume S trivially knows that p entails p, so p entails not (not-p). In this sense, p is incompatible with not-p. Then according to WCJ*, if S's evidence justifies p, S's evidence does not justify not-p. In a nutshell, WCJ* entails J.

With the three assumptions in mind, McCain (2013, 297) argues that UP* entails CJ through the following reasoning.

- (1) S's evidence justifies p, and p and q are incompatible, e is the evidence S has. (Premise)
- (2) $\Pr(p/E) > 0.5$ (S's evidence justifies p, premise)
- (3) $\Pr(-p/E) < 0.5$ (S's evidence justifies $\neg(p)$, 1)
- (4) $\Pr(p/E) \leq \Pr(-q/E)$ (Since p and q are incompatible, then p entails $\neg(q)$)
- (5) $\Pr(q/E) \leq 0.5$ (premise and WCJ*)
- (6) $\Pr(q/E) \leq \Pr(-p/E)$ (Since p and q are incompatible, q also entails $\neg(p)$)
- (7) $\Pr(q/E) < 0.5$ (5 and 2) (S's evidence justifies not-q)
- (8) $\Pr(-q/E) > 0.5$ (S's evidence justifies not-q)

In terms of propositional justification, it seems that the above reasoning is quite compelling. And this argument has made Brueckner's argument more clear and persuasive, at least from the probabilistic point of view. If this argument is sound, then

³³ This principle is slightly but unimportantly different from Pritchard (2005a)'s (WCJ). Pritchard emphasises the entailment between p and not-q while I put it as the incompatibility between p and q. Similar principles see McCain (2013)'s principle (INC*) and Cohen (1998)'s (INC). INC makes no claim that S should be aware of the relationship between propositions, while (INC*) limits in propositional justification.

are we in a position to conclude that CJ is derivable from UP*? I suppose not, and here are two straightforward objections.

One is mainly from Cohen (1998, 151). He argues that only if one assumes the closure principle can one bridge the gap between (5) and (8), i.e., bridge the gap from not being justified in believing p to being justified in believing not- p . More specifically, what Cohen intends to show is that the last step of deriving CJ from UP* relies on an instance of CJ. In Brueckner's case, as S 's evidence justifies p and p and q are incompatible, then we need a principle like 'if S 's evidence justifies p and p entails not- q , then S 's evidence justifies not- q ' to make the reasoning go through. Likewise, in McCain's case, one crucial step of his reasoning is ' $\Pr(q/E) \leq \Pr(-p/E)$ '. How do we actually get such a formula from p 's being incompatible with q ? The answer may appeal to a theory of probability. However, what matters here is not whether such a formula is acceptable, but rather we are asking what is assumed in doing this. The answer is, one has assumed understanding of the logical term (e.g., incompatibility, inconsistency, entailment) involved in ' p entails q ' or ' p and q are incompatible'. The nature of the closure principle is that knowledge can be extended via knowing deductive relations between propositions. Thus, if we gain knowledge via logical deductions, we have implicitly assumed the closure principle.

The other objection concerns McCain's remark on the consequence of his argument. Instead of admitting that UP* is virtually equivalent to CJ, which the argument seems to support, he opts to deny the plausibility of INC* and hence reject the equivalence of UP* and CJ.

(INC*) For all S , u , w , if S 's evidence propositionally justifies u and S knows that u entails not- w , then S 's evidence does not propositionally justify w . (McCain 2013, 297)

Note that this principle differs from WCJ* only in that INC* specifies justification as propositional justification. McCain rejects this principle precisely because he finds counterexamples to INC*. It seems to McCain that we know Quantum Mechanics and

General Relativity are two incompatible theories, and we have strong evidence for thinking both theories to be true despite their inconsistency. Thereby, this case might reveal the falsity of INC*. However, I contend that this argument is not convincing.

There are several ways of reading this case. One possibility is that if true means acceptable, then that both theories are true means nothing but that scientists accept those two theories. Apparently, a theory can be accepted, primarily, because it is true or it conforms to reality. And truth of a theory also explains why such a theory can succeed in explaining and predicting empirical phenomena. However, being true is not the only reason for accepting a theory. Scientists favour a theory which is empirically adequate when talking about its truth may lead to a heavy theoretical burden, or lack of sufficient empirical confirmation. As Van Fraassen puts it, 'acceptance of a theory involves as belief only that it is empirically adequate' (Van Fraassen 1980, 12). In this sense, Quantum Mechanics and General Relativity, regardless of the incompatibility between them, are being accepted simultaneously not because they are justified evidentially, but due to their contributions to saving the empirical phenomena.

Another reading is, even though scientists indeed hold some propositions of the Quantum Mechanics or General Relativity to be true, there may not be a general judgement about the two theories as a whole. In this case, since the truth of either theory does not obtain, we cannot therefore conclude that two incompatible theories are justified to be true and are advocated at the same time. The issue here is that, their truths are yet to be determined. Upon these two readings, there is no direct support to McCain's conclusion. Since what McCain seeks is a possibility in which two incompatible propositions are both justified to be true but are maintained nonetheless. However, these two readings either suggest that there is no objective truth in play here, or illustrate a lack of determined truth for the targeting theory as a whole. In either case, this example has no direct bearing on his discussion here.

Apart from the two readings just mentioned, we can indeed come up with a relevant interpretation. Does claiming that we have strong evidence for believing those two theories amount to saying that those theories are justified by evidence? If so,

this case goes against McCain's probabilistic view of evidence. According to this view, if Quantum Mechanics is justified by some evidence E , then $\Pr(QM/E) > .5$, and so does General Relativity, that is $\Pr(GR/E) > .5$. Additionally, if those two theories are incompatible as McCain admitted, then $\Pr(QM/E) \leq \Pr(-GR/E)$. However, given that $\Pr(GR/E) > .5$, it is obvious that $\Pr(-GR/E) < .5$, so how could it be possible that $\Pr(QM/E) \leq \Pr(-GR/E)$? Instead of assuming the probabilistic view of evidence to be false, I suppose that the term 'evidence' in play here is misunderstood. When McCain talks about the evidence which is used to support respective theories, he intends to mean different evidence rather than total evidence at hand. By appealing to different evidence for General Relativity and Quantum Mechanics, it becomes more reasonable to insist on the inconsistency of the theories while maintaining that each theory is strongly supported. Nonetheless, in the realm of epistemology, we call for total evidence rather than independent evidence. In terms of total evidence, it could be that either Quantum Mechanics or General Relativity is favoured, but it is impossible for those two theories to be justified by the same evidence at hand. If theory A is justified, then it means at least one piece of evidence favours theory A exclusively and its rival theory B is not on a par when facing this evidence. Otherwise two theories would be equally favoured. With evidence understood this way, I suppose that this case put forward by McCain does not qualify as a counterexample to INC* or WCJ*.

3.3 Conclusions and Remarks

Let's get back to the question what the relation between the closure principle and the underdetermination principle is. In line with Brueckner, I admit that CJ entails UP*; contra Brueckner and McCain, I argue that CJ is not entailed by UP*. Moreover, as we still have more principles in play in the above discussion, then a list of temporary results may help us figure out the final conclusion.

- A. CJ and J entails UP*;
- B. UP* and WCJ cannot entail CJ;

- C. WCJ* entails J;
- D. UP* is equivalent to WCJ*

My review of the derivation from two logical directions can support result A and B, and that J can be construed as an instance of WCJ* illuminates result C. For result D, there is something to say. In Pritchard (2005a, 48), he puts forth the main argument. I shall briefly present his argument here. Firstly, we can prove WCJ* entails UP*. And for the sake of argument, I will assume the common antecedent of WCJ* and UP*, namely that S's evidence justifies p, p and q are incompatible and S knows the incompatibility.

- (1) For all S, p, q, if S's evidence justifies p, and S knows that p is incompatible with q, then S's evidence does not justify q. (WCJ*)
- (2) S's evidence does not justify q. (common antecedent and WCJ*)
- (3) S's evidence favours p over q. (S's evidence justifies p)

From (2) to (3), it is assumed that if a proposition p is justified by evidence, then it is favoured by evidence at a degree higher than any known incompatible proposition. That is the assumption we have granted in formulating CJ and UP*, i.e. justification is evidential in its nature. Then, we will see how UP* entails WCJ*.

- (1) For all S, p, q, if S's evidence justifies p, p and q are incompatible and S knows the incompatibility, then S's evidence favours p over q. (UP*)
- (2) S's evidence favours p over q. (common antecedent and UP*)
- (3) S's evidence does not favour q over p. (from 2)
- (4) S's evidence does not justify q.

From the above derivation, we can see that WCJ* entails UP* and vice versa. And with the four temporary results in play, I shall begin to investigate the possible consequences. It seems that whether we receive WCJ* plays a vital role in framing

our response to the sceptic, and we have two options now.

Option A. If we accept WCJ*, then we are committed to J. And together with CJ, we should also endorse UP*(see temporary conclusions A and C). However, we cannot reject UP* in our anti-sceptical response. Since WCJ* equals to UP*, it is intellectually implausible to hold and reject a principle at the same time. Thus there is no short cut to reject CJ via rejecting UP*. We need independent responses to both CJ-based and UP*-based argument, and it is not viable to rule out UP* in the latter case. Although UP* is not open to attack in this situation, we can nonetheless maintain that our evidence favours everyday belief over the sceptical hypothesis so that the minor premise in the UP-based argument is challenged.

Option B. If we deny WCJ*, there can be two further possibilities:

B1. While denying WCJ*, if J is denied therefore, then CJ fails to entail UP*. And since denying WCJ* means denying UP*, the only task remaining is to deny CJ.

B2. If J is not denied therefore, then CJ still entails UP*. It seems then that we can reject CJ by rejecting UP*, or rejecting WCJ*. Thus, all the work will be done if we can reject WCJ*. However, since J entails WCJ* is not as obvious as WCJ* entails J, this possibility is not worth considering, at least at the current stage.

With the two options in mind, the final conclusion shall be made if we could have sufficient reason to reject or maintain WCJ*. And I suppose, WCJ* is to be adopted without causing much philosophical trouble. What motivates WCJ*, at the first pass, is a requirement upon evidence and justification. This requirement says that the relationship between evidence and justification should be rational. Specifically, WCJ*, as well as UP*, is rational in that it is based on the essential idea that we cannot hold inconsistent propositions as long as the inconsistency between the propositions is known by knowledge inquirer. If this principle is rejected for some reason, we seem to commit ourselves to a drastic change in our notion of justification and the role of evidence in justification. According to the changed view, even if S's evidence justifies p, and S knows that p is incompatible with alternative q, S's evidence nonetheless justifies q. It becomes more stunning if we substitute p with 'I am a BIV' and q with 'I have two hands'. Since my evidence justifies that 'I am a BIV' and it is therefore

impossible for 'me' to be an ordinary person, then how could it be possible that the same evidence can justify an incompatible alternative that 'I have two hands'. If this is the way out of the debate, then what is the role of evidence when being referred to support or defeat a proposition by someone? Even if a new interpretation of evidence or justification can be given here, I doubt it is of any significance to epistemology specifically and to philosophy in general.

Another point is that WCJ* is apparently logically weaker than CJ. It is easy to see this if we compare the consequent of each conditional, since they share the same antecedent. As to CJ, the consequent is 'S's evidence justifies not-q' while the consequent of WCJ* is 'S's evidence does not justify q'. From the logical point of view, if S's evidence justifies not-q is granted, then q is not justified by evidence, since the same evidence cannot justify incompatible propositions. However, if S's evidence does not justify q, it is possible that S's evidence justifies not-q or S's evidence is not strong enough or even irrelevant to justify q. Accordingly, to get the consequent of CJ requires more than the consequent of WCJ*. The point also can be put in this way, what CJ demands is having sufficient grounds to deny q while WCJ* only arrives at a lacking of reason to justify q. With this understanding, WCJ* is indeed weaker than CJ, and therefore more attainable. If WCJ* fails, then unfortunately, I suppose CJ, which is definitely stronger, cannot survive. Thus, according to the previous condition B1, all principles are rejected. In that case, this way out of the sceptical impasse is quite devastating.

In the foregoing discussion, I have reviewed McCain's argument against WCJ*, and there is another relevant discussion provided by Duncan Pritchard. In his book '*Epistemic Angst*', Pritchard tries to offer a combined Wittgensteinian-McDowellian view to deal with both kinds of sceptical problems. From his point of view, the underdetermination-based sceptical argument trades essentially on the following thesis:³⁴

³⁴ The underdetermination-based sceptical argument trades on this thesis in the sense that this thesis is an instance of (UP2), namely, that S's evidence for believing p does not favour p over q and S knows that p is incompatible with q. Note that when we understand evidence along the epistemic internalist line, evidence is our rational support.

The Insularity of Reasons Thesis

The rational support for our putative knowledge of everyday propositions doesn't favour those beliefs over sceptical alternatives. (Pritchard 2015, 55)

This thesis is about the fact that our rational support for perceptual beliefs is so weak that it does not favour everyday beliefs over those in a sceptical hypothesis. One's rational support for a belief is one's reflectively accessible evidence for a belief, thus it seems quite natural to adopt this thesis. The reason is that one cannot, as assumed by most epistemologists, distinguish everyday situations from radical sceptical alternatives introspectively. Consequently, a response to the underdetermination-based sceptical argument should consist of a denial of this thesis. If he can establish that our rational support favours everyday beliefs over those in a sceptical hypothesis, then surely the second claim in the underdetermination-based sceptical argument will turn out to be implausible. I agree with Pritchard's diagnosis on the underdetermination-based sceptical argument, and his approach is in line with my points. I will discuss his proposal in more detail in chapter four, but at this stage we can see that there is a potential way to respond to the underdetermination-based sceptical argument that does preserve the underdetermination principle.

So, where does the above discussion leave us in terms of responding to sceptical paradoxes? It seems only one option is remaining, that is we are more intellectually liable to accept WCJ* and thus two independent responses, to the closure-based argument and the underdetermination-based argument respectively, are needed. Besides, as we choose to keep WCJ* intact, UP* is not open to attack. With these points in mind, I will proceed to sketch my anti-sceptical strategy.

4. Anti-Sceptical Strategies

In order to respond to the sceptical arguments, we can outline three possible options to get rid of the predicament,³⁵ but I will soon explain why some of them are not

³⁵ Strategies discussed here are partly motivated by Cook (2013, ch.1).

good options at all.

We can call the first option *premise-rejection* strategy. Look at either the closure-based or the underdetermination-based sceptical argument; we can focus on their premises. One might contend that, despite the initial plausibility, we do have ground to know the denial of sceptical hypotheses. And this idea can be cashed out by offering a theoretical basis for rejecting the sceptical scenarios or the sceptical claims. Or one can argue that the closure principle or the underdetermination principle is in fact problematic, so it is not necessary that our ignorance of the denial of sceptical hypotheses would lead to the impossibility of knowledge.

Secondly, we have *reasoning-rejection* strategy. For the sceptical argument to be sound, it must involve a valid inference. Obviously, as we have examined, there is nothing wrong in terms of reasoning. However, if one has an independent reason to blame the reasoning of the argument, then one could dismiss any alleged contradictive, unacceptable or absurd conclusion. Obviously, not only is reasoning-rejection strategy available for the sceptical paradox, it could be extended to deal with other paradoxes in philosophy as well. But I am afraid that this strategy is not appealing at all. For this strategy provides us an easy way out of the sceptical predicament at the cost of abandoning essential equipment in philosophical practices, *i.e.*, classic logical principles, thus our strategy is surely devastating and unaffordable. Also, note that the sceptical challenge is a problem concerning our knowledge about the external world, so a good solution to this problem should at least meet the challenge from the epistemological perspective. But this approach can say nothing in this regard.

Finally, we may opt for *conclusion-acceptation* strategy. Specifically, when facing the sceptical argument, if we are forced to admit that we can't know mundane propositions as the sceptic shows, then we succeed in escaping from the paradox at the cost of abandoning knowledge nevertheless. Obviously, this option brings with little, if more than nothing, attraction and satisfaction. Since explaining and articulating knowledge had been, and always should be one of the most central tasks for epistemology. Without this aim in mind, all efforts being made in terms of grounding knowledge would be in vain if we accept either conclusion of the two

sceptical arguments. According to this strategy, if we are forced to accept the sceptical conclusion, we are nonetheless left with an intellectual failure, or in Kantian term ‘a scandal to philosophy’. Consequently, we get rid of this predicament by announcing the demise of knowledge, which is both undesirable and unaffordable.

Obviously, whether a strategy is appropriate is relative to the philosophical task. Since our central task is to give a philosophical explanation as to why knowledge of the external world is possible, we aim to expose problematic assumptions in the sceptical argument without causing much trouble in epistemology and other areas as well. Hence, *reasoning-rejection* strategy and *conclusion-acceptation* strategy are not the optimal choice.

It seems then we can only respond to the sceptical argument by adopting *premise-rejection* strategy. Still, there are some further distinctions to be mentioned. Before that, it is worth noting that a paradox often involves an obstacle. One might think that isn't the obstacle the sceptical conclusion that we cannot have knowledge of the external world? I don't agree. I contend that the sceptical conclusion is the result of the obstacle, rather than the obstacle itself. An everyday example would help illustrate this point. Suppose you find it impossible for a normal visitor to travel from Edinburgh to London within 2 hours by train, then would you take the fact as the obstacle or something that prevents you from doing this as the obstacle? I find it more plausible to choose the latter. For one may say that what makes this trip impossible (the obstacle) is the current speed limit of trains, and if we can overcome this obstacle by either taking a plane or developing a much faster train, then the trip would be possible. Similarly, the sceptical conclusion is like the travelling problem. What prevents our knowledge from being possible is the obstacle, but the sceptical conclusion is just the result of the obstacle. In the sceptical paradox, the obstacle can be problematic assumptions, misunderstood concepts, or unrestricted use of plausible principles. To solve the paradox, we need to identify the very obstacle and dispel it. In terms of how to deal with the obstacle, we can basically divide our strategies into two types.

4.1 Obstacle-Overriding Approach

One is the *obstacle-overriding* approach. In this sense, we take the obstacle to be real and then offer an independent theoretical ground to overcome it. This approach, similar to Cassam (2006, 2)'s *obstacle-overcoming* approach and Pritchard (2015)'s *overriding* strategy, is a direct way to challenge the alleged difficulty. According to this approach, even though the obstacle is insuperable, we manage to find a way to revise our theoretical commitments so that this obstacle does not stand in the way anymore. I take process reliabilism to be a proposal along this approach, and for reasons I will discuss later.

Recall the premise (SK1) in the closure-based sceptical argument, the reason for S's failure to know the denial of the sceptical hypothesis is precisely that S will have subjectively indistinguishable experience from normal situations in the sceptical setting. In (SK1), we assume that one must have rational basis in order to count as having knowledge. Rational basis consists of reasons that one has reflective access to. Obviously, this is a requirement posed by epistemic internalist.³⁶ However, according to process reliabilism, one can have knowledge if one has a reliably formed true belief.³⁷ How can one form a belief in a reliable way? First, a way of forming belief is a method or a process that in virtue of which the belief is acquired. It is reliable if this belief-forming method/process is truth-conducive. That is to say, a belief formed this way tends to be true. How can one's belief-forming method and one's rational basis come apart? To see this, let us have a look at the chicken sexer case.³⁸ The sex of new-born chicks is hard to discern because they look pretty similar, but chicken sexers can reliably separate male chicks from female chicks. However, they are

³⁶ Note that here epistemic internalism is understood along accessibilist line. Accessibilism states that, what S can know by reflection alone constitutes S's internalist epistemic support for S's belief. However, internalist can also endorse mentalism (see mentalism in footnote 140). For accessibilism, see Chisholm (1977). For mentalism, see Conee & Feldman (2004).

³⁷ This is only a crude account provided by Goldman (1986). Defenders of reliabilism have provided many amendments and clarifications. For now, details are not my concern. I will only focus on the obstacle-overriding character of reliabilism, rather than examining whether it's philosophically viable.

³⁸ This case has been widely discussed in Foley (1987, 168-69), Zagzebski (1996), Sainsbury (1996), Wright (1996), Brandom (1998) and Pritchard (2005b).

unaware of the source of their own reliability; whatever leads them to be reliable at judging the sex of chicks is not something that they can determine by reflection alone. In this case, a chicken sexer has a reliable way of forming beliefs, but this belief-forming method is not reflectively accessible to her. Apparently, we would hesitate to grant that they know how to discern the sex of a chick because they cannot tell how they do it. However, according to reliabilism, they do have knowledge because they satisfy the externalist requirement of knowledge, and they are not required to know the reliability of their belief-forming process. Accordingly, even though they lack rational basis for their beliefs, as long as their true beliefs are formed in a reliable way, they count as having knowledge.

How can reliabilism resist the closure-based sceptical argument? The answer is that, even though one cannot know the denial of the sceptical hypothesis, one has independent ground to know an everyday proposition. Specifically, one cannot know that the sceptical hypothesis does not obtain because we presupposes the epistemic internalist view of knowledge. *Contra* internalism, reliabilism contends that one can independently know an everyday proposition, such as that one have hands, without satisfying the internalist requirement. Precisely, if one's belief that I have two hands is formed in a reliable way, then one's belief counts as knowledge.³⁹ The epistemic status of this belief won't be affected even if one cannot know that one is not a victim of the sceptical scenario. In this sense, we find that even though we lack knowledge about the external world because we fail to meet the epistemic internalist requirement, we can nonetheless acquire ordinary knowledge by satisfying the reliabilist conditions. An analogy may help to illustrate this point. Suppose we want to travel from A to B, but one way connecting these two places is blocked by an obstacle that is seemingly insuperable. Someone manages to find a new way through which we can get B. Obviously, the obstacle in the previous way remains but our purpose is nonetheless achieved. In this case, the old way is the epistemic internalist way while the new way

³⁹ Technically, reliabilism is a theory of justification. When recast as a theory of knowledge, the reliabilist could argue that reliable true belief does not entail knowledge. Rather, it's reliable true belief in the absence of any defeaters. See discussions in Goldman (1979), Lyons (2009) and Beddor (2015).

is discovered by process reliabilism. Hence, we may think that internalism is problematic because it motivates a sceptical result, and reliabilism is more viable because it can deal with the sceptical challenge.

I will assume that reliabilism can defend knowledge. However, I contend that this strategy is not ultimately satisfying partly because it adopts the obstacle-overriding strategy. What reliabilism can say is that our pre-theoretical intuition about knowledge is along the internalist line, and because this intuition results in sceptical predicament, we need to revise our intuition in order to get rid of the sceptical paradox. It is so revisionary that we have to abandon our pre-theoretical platitudes for achieving knowledge. However, as I have noted, the sceptical problem is a paradox. In this sense, the challenge is not that we don't have knowledge in our everyday life. Rather, it is that we are unable to give a philosophical explanation as to how knowledge of the external world is possible, given the apparent obstacles in both the closure-based and the underdetermination-based sceptical arguments. It is the theoretical explanation that fails to account for our mundane epistemic practices. If reliabilism is right, then we have to abandon the internalist understanding of our epistemic practice. The sceptic may rejoinder that this response does not engage the problem at all, for the sceptic is questioning our rational basis for everyday knowledge. Reliabilism can provide an externalist approach to knowledge, but the obstacle remains where it is. After all, we still lack rational basis for our everyday beliefs. Alternatively, if we grant that reliabilism settles the sceptical problem, we have to modify our epistemic intuitions so that we are in accordance with the theory. But notice that this theory is discontinuous with our normal epistemic intuition, so we may find it unpalatable to a certain extent. Undoubtedly, we attempt to resolve the sceptical problem with minimal revision. Unless reliabilism is the only option, we won't find it ultimately palatable. The upshot is that either reliabilism provides no response at all to the sceptical challenge, or it is not the best response we should opt for.

Now, there is an issue regarding the formulation of sceptical arguments in this thesis. In the previous formulation, the sceptic challenges the justificatory status of our beliefs. That is, the sceptic is questioning whether our beliefs about the external

are justified so that they can be regarded as knowledge. Hence, the focus of the sceptical arguments is on the justification condition of knowledge. However, as I have shown, reliabilist can say that the justification condition of knowledge is satisfied according to the epistemic externalist conception of justification. Although reliabilist can provide an explanation as to why knowledge does not necessarily require the possession of rational support/rational basis, we can nonetheless find a dilemma here. On the one hand, we may grant that some knowledge can be defended along the epistemic externalist line, but not all. For paradigm everyday knowledge, such as that I know that there is a book on my table, how could I lack rational ground for such knowledge? Very plausibly, in our everyday life, I can cite my perceptual experience as rational ground for my knowledge. And this process does not require any special cognitive capacity. Ordinary sense perception would suffice. If our paradigm knowledge has to be defended along the externalist line, then we will end up with a big concession to the sceptic, which is not a desirable outcome. On the other hand, the sceptic can reformulate her argument so that it is the rational ground of our knowledge that is at issue. Hence, the reliabilist response does not work. For, in order to counter the reformulated sceptical attack, we must show what the rational ground for our everyday knowledge is. Rational ground is a rational basis on which we arrive at knowledge, and crucially, rational ground must be reflectively accessible to us. Here are the reformulated sceptical arguments (where RK stands for rational knowledge):

*The Closure_{RK}-Based Sceptical Argument*⁴⁰

- (CR1) S cannot have rationally grounded knowledge that q (e.g., I am not a BIV).
(CR2) If S has rationally grounded knowledge that p (e.g. I am reading a paper), and S competently deduces from p that q, thereby forming a belief that q on this basis while retaining her rationally grounded knowledge that p, then S has rationally grounded knowledge that q. [The closure_{RK} principle]

⁴⁰ This formulation is adapted from Pritchard (2015, 41).

(CR3) So, S does not have rationally grounded knowledge that p.

*The Underdetermination_{RK}-Based Sceptical Argument*⁴¹

(UR1) If S's rational support for believing that p does not favour p over an incompatible sceptical hypothesis q and S knows the incompatibility, then S does not have rationally grounded knowledge that p. [The underdetermination_{RK} principle]

(UR2) S's rational support for believing that p does not favour p over q and S knows that p is incompatible with q.

(UR3) Thus S does not have rationally grounded knowledge that p.

Evidently, in the reformulated sceptical arguments, it is the rational ground/ rational support for knowledge that is at issue. The sceptical attack is now questioning whether we can provide rational support for our everyday knowledge, and an appropriate answer to this challenge is what I intend to develop in this thesis. Hence, in the following chapters, I will use the reformulated sceptical arguments instead.

4.2 Obstacle Dissolving Approach

Another anti-sceptical approach is *obstacle-dissolving* approach.⁴² Compared with the *obstacle-solving* approach, *obstacle-dissolving* approach aims to arrive at a more ambitious conclusion. It is ambitious in that it is a (perhaps the only) philosophically more satisfying approach. Not only the obstacle would be eschewed in some sense, but also this approach would label the identified obstacle only as a philosophical illusion that results from bad philosophical theorising or questionable theoretical commitments. With this diagnosis in play, it follows that we can have a better understanding of the nature of the subject matters in question.

⁴¹ This formulation is adapted from Pritchard (2015, 30).

⁴² Cassam (2006, 2) calls this approach *obstacle-dissipating* approach, and Pritchard (2015) calls it *undercutting* strategy.

With the two potential strategies in mind, I still intend to make it clear which one has dialectical advantages. I will first suppose that each approach can succeed in eschewing the sceptical predicament, that is to say, each offers a plausible philosophical explanation regarding how the sceptical paradox can be avoided. In this respect, they are on a par with each other. However, it seems that the *obstacle-dissolving* strategy includes a diagnostic part that says something on why this obstacle looks *bona fide* but is in fact illusory. The diagnosis is significant in that it comforts our intellectual worries.

In order to see this, let's imagine a case. A huge rock lies in the way, so people who drive cannot easily get through. One way to deal with this rock is to drive off the plain road and go some bumpy path. Even though people can get rid of the huge rock successfully, they still worry about this obstacle when going the same way once again. Another way to deal with the rock is to move it away from the traffic path and place it elsewhere or simply crash it. In this way, those who easily get through would also feel easy when return. Of course, in either way the rock is real and lies over there, but at least we have a sense of relief in the second case. However, if the obstacle is not really there, then the treatment would be different. At least, it would be unwise if we attempt to overcome an illusory obstacle; rather, an effective therapy will simply defuse the illusory obstacle and dispel our misplaced worry about it.

Similarly, any direct refutation to the sceptical problem, even though it can guarantee that our knowledge about the external world is secured and free from the sceptical attack, cannot provide an intellectual relief to our thinking of our epistemic standings and human conditions in general. In the sceptical paradox, we sense an uneasiness caused by the alleged obstacle, thus we need, if possible, not only a way out of the intellectual predicament, but also a diagnosis on how we are pulled into this impasse by naturally implanted power in our reasoning. If there is no genuine paradox, then all the intellectual discomfort would disappear. Then, it seems that the first advantage of *obstacle-dissolving* strategy is to relieve our intellectual uneasiness.⁴³

⁴³ Pritchard (2015) has the similar view towards undercutting strategy.

Another point I want to mention is how the anti-sceptical strategy relates to the study of philosophical scepticism. In terms of the significance of scepticism, Barry Stroud writes:

I think that whatever we seek in philosophy, or whatever leads us to ask philosophical questions at all, must be something pretty deep in human nature, and that what leads us to ask just the questions we do in the particular ways we now ask them must be something pretty deep in our tradition.(Stroud 1984, Preface X)

From this quotation, it is suggested that by conducting an inquiry into philosophical scepticism, we do expect a satisfying answer to this problem. However, no matter whether that goal can be achieved, what is more valuable is an understanding of the fundamental concepts in our epistemological theorising, since the enquiry helps us deepen our understanding of human nature and conditions. In this sense, we are not fighting against a theoretical rivalry but examining some commitments that we deeply and normally take for granted. Thus, while responding to the sceptic, we are at the same time exposing our alleged pre-theoretical intuition to philosophical analysis. What we can find through the epistemological research, in my view, is a better understanding of our epistemic standings. Suppose scepticism is regarded as a position, then the failure of the scepticism is merely a successful defence of what we already had. And this is something like a territory defence launched by a country. While making scepticism domesticated, we are facilitating our intellectual progress in an indirect way. A progress in dissolving scepticism is therefore an achievement in understanding our epistemic standings and dispelling theoretical illusions. In this sense, scepticism is a driving force for contemporary epistemology, not in that the sceptic forces non-sceptical epistemologists to bring out refined and developed theories or arguments, but because scepticism, while being philosophically interesting and domesticated as a paradox in our theory, pushes us further back to a genuine starting point for a theory of knowledge. This starting point is a real problem for our theory of knowledge, as Strawson (1985, 6) once noted, ‘to try to meet the sceptic’s

challenge, in whatever way, by whatever style of argument, is to try to go further back.’

Now that it becomes clear how we should think of the sceptical problem and what strategy we should adopt, I will bear in mind two things:

- (1) Diagnose at least one claim in each of the sceptical arguments.
- (2) Take an obstacle-dissolving rather than overriding stance.

To be more specific, I attempt to cash out these two points by:

- a) Diagnose the $\text{closure}_{\text{RK}}$ principle (CR2) in the $\text{closure}_{\text{RK}}$ -based sceptical argument.
- b) Diagnose (UR2) in the $\text{underdetermination}_{\text{RK}}$ -based argument, *i.e.*, that S’s rational support for believing that p does not favour p over q and S knows that p is incompatible with q.
- c) Responding to the two arguments in an obstacle-dissolving approach.
- d) Integrate the two independent responses together and come to a combined treatment of the sceptical problem.

The third point has been well argued, but other points need more clarifications. For a), I would investigate into a Davidsonian response to radical scepticism. This response features in a Davidsonian diagnosis as to why the $\text{closure}_{\text{RK}}$ principle (a refined version of the closure principle which adds the requirement that knowledge requires rational support) does not apply to our evaluation of the sceptical hypothesis. Therefore, instead of arguing that the $\text{closure}_{\text{RK}}$ principle is *problematic*, I will contend that our assessment of the sceptical hypothesis is a *misuse* of the principle. I will present this view in chapter three.

As to b), I will consider the epistemological disjunctivism developed by McDowell (1995; 2011) and Pritchard (2012; 2015). Epistemological disjunctivist objects that S’s evidence does not favour an everyday belief over its sceptical

counterpart. In particular, in the domain of perceptual knowledge, they argue that S's evidence in good cases is factual, while S's evidence in a sceptical scenario is not. On this basis, an epistemological disjunctivist can submit that in good cases, the sceptical hypothesis and the ordinary belief are not equally supported by our perceptual evidence. I will discuss this view in chapter four.

For the last point, it is a requirement put forward by Pritchard (2015). He recognizes that two responses should be integrated in order to fully respond to the sceptical problem. I admit that this is a demanding task, since two theories may be effective in arguing against one form of scepticism individually, but not the other form. In order to correlate the two responses together, we have to further look at whether these theories are internally supportive and compatible. A frustrating case might be that, we have two theories to cope with the closure_{RK}-based and the underdetermination_{RK}-based sceptical arguments respectively, but these two theories are incompatible in that they endorse quite different views towards the nature of knowledge, the role of justification or the nature of the sceptical threat. Alternatively, we can even imagine such a possibility: a theory offers us a diagnosis according to which we need to abandon a theoretical commitment in order to escape from one form of the sceptical paradox. However, this step backward may be so radical that the other form of the sceptical paradox is over-dissolved. By over-dissolved I mean that, we abandon more commitments than necessary. A radical retreat might solve the sceptical problem, but at the cost of hindering our pursuit of knowledge in the long run. At this stage, I will take Pritchard's fourth requirement as plausible but further examination would be conducted when necessary.

With these strategic considerations in mind, I will investigate into transcendental arguments in the next chapter.

5. Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I first distinguish different types of scepticism and take radical scepticism as my only target. According to radical scepticism, knowledge of the

external world is impossible because we have insuperable obstacles that are posed by the closure_{RK}-based argument and the underdetermination_{RK}-based argument. In order to meet the challenge, I review the relationship between the two arguments and conclude that they are independent, and therefore we need two corresponding responses. When arguing against the scepticism, it is vital that we understand it appropriately. To this end, I examine Stroud's view that scepticism is a paradox. However, scepticism is not a *bona fide* paradox, because it is not a purified version of our everyday epistemic practices. To be specific, it is a spurious paradox resulting from problematic theoretical assumptions masquerading as pre-theoretical intuitions. However, a spurious paradox also needs to be diagnosed. Hence, I sketch possible anti-sceptical strategies. By contrasting obstacle-solving approach with obstacle-dissolving approach, I argue that the latter approach is preferable in that it features a diagnostic component through which we can seek intellectual comfort. In the next chapter, I will take a close look at transcendental arguments. My inquiry centres on the goals, the problems and the prospects of transcendental arguments.

Chapter Two

Transcendental Arguments

0. Introduction

In the previous chapter, I have discussed the nature of the sceptical problem and articulated the constraints on any satisfying response we can come up with. In this chapter, I will examine the relationship between transcendental arguments and radical scepticism.

It is generally agreed that the reason why transcendental arguments are brought into focus in a philosophical context is largely due to Immanuel Kant, even though philosophers prior to Kant have occasionally appealed to them.⁴⁴ Though Kant uses specific terms such as ‘transcendental deductions’, ‘transcendental proofs’ and ‘transcendental expositions’, the more general approach underlying his transcendental strategy has informed our current understanding of transcendental arguments. Kant aims to refute scepticism about the existence of mind-independent objects in his *Critique of Pure Reason*.⁴⁵ In order to do this, Kant starts from the premise that one is a subject with self-conscious experience, and then he proceeds to investigate the necessary conditions for the possibility of self-conscious experience. When he concludes that the existence of physical objects is such a condition, it becomes obvious that the sceptic is wrong in doubting that there is an external world. It is so precisely because the sceptic also buys into the premise that she is a self-conscious subject. Arguing this way, Kant shows a distinctive response against the sceptic in which the sceptical conclusion undermines its very premises.⁴⁶ A historical survey of

⁴⁴ See Stern (2000, 3), Barton (2006), and Stern (2015).

⁴⁵ Note that his more general aim is to answer the question whether synthetic a priori judgment is possible.

⁴⁶ For detailed discussion on Kant’s transcendental project, see Brueckner (1983, 1984). The basic point is that the sceptical position is incoherent. For, they accept the premise of a transcendental argument while they reject the conclusion, which states the necessary condition of the possibility of the premise. However, I take radical scepticism to be a paradox rather than a position, and I will discuss this issue in due time.

how transcendental arguments are used in different contexts might be helpful in this regard, but I intend to avoid exegesis and move on to a general account of transcendental arguments.

In what follows, I will sketch transcendental arguments in a broad sense and review their problems. Rather than to dwell on Kant's own transcendental arguments, I will instead focus on how to understand and modify transcendental arguments so that they can remain plausible and promising. In order to understand transcendental arguments properly, I propose to ask two crucial questions in the following discussions. First, what are transcendental arguments? Second, how should we understand the relationship between transcendental arguments and radical scepticism? Or put it another way, what is the anti-sceptical import of transcendental arguments?

1. Transcendental Arguments: Definition and Characteristics

What are transcendental arguments? It sounds like a typical question we can raise in our philosophical discourse. One may expect the answer to be a definition of transcendental arguments, but the paradigmatic cases of transcendental arguments are heterogeneous on the one hand, so that a unified definition is nearly impossible⁴⁷; and on the other hand, identifying some key features of transcendental arguments would suffice for our current goal, i.e., investigating into whether deploying transcendental arguments, as an anti-sceptical strategy, is effective.

Let's have a look at some characteristics of transcendental arguments identified by Stern (1999, 2-4), he writes:

A: That one thing X is a necessary condition for the possibility of something else Y, so that the latter cannot obtain without the former.

⁴⁷ Stern (1999, 3) gives examples including Kant's transcendental deduction in the *Critique of Pure Reason*; Strawson's reconstruction of Kant's deduction in *The Bounds of Sense*; Davidson's defence that belief is in its nature veridical, Putnam's refutation of Brain-in-Vat in *Reason, truth and History*. Some more controversial examples, such as Aristotle on the principle of non-contradiction, Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* and Wittgenstein on private language, etc. are also mentioned.

B: The nature of the subject matter Y is to be experience, language, belief and intentionality.⁴⁸

C: X is to have some anti-sceptical effect.

I will explain these features in order. Regarding A, it says that X is among the possibility conditions for the obtaining of Y. Stern (1999, 3) interprets A as involving a metaphysical and a priori claim. It is so because what A says is that Y cannot obtain unless X is satisfied, and it is the case not only in the actual world, but also in any possible world. Here, necessity and possibility are both read metaphysically. This metaphysical claim is central to all transcendental arguments, but it is suspicious for the following reason, namely, how can we justify a general modal claim such as (A)? After all, it is not grounded by empirical facts and it cannot be established purely by semantic analysis or definition. Kant suggests that we arrive at this sort of conclusion by synthetic a priori knowledge, but this response sounds mysterious and needs more clarification.⁴⁹

In terms of B, it is vital that Y be something the sceptic will accept. It can be experience, as Kant originally presents, and it can also be language, belief and intention. Why these kinds of things? It is because we need a premise that the sceptic is committed to so that she cannot deny any conclusion that follows from the premise, provided the inference is valid. As long as the sceptic grants the premise, transcendental arguments will have anti-sceptical import. Stern (2015) is right in submitting that transcendental arguments will characteristically be first personal by beginning from how *I* or *we* experience, think, judge and believe. For, a first-personal psychological fact is something a sceptic would find plausible since she is also a subject that experience, think, judge and believe. Without those psychological activities, there is nothing for the sceptic to question, and it would be impossible for her to generate the sceptical idea or express it in a language. However, it is possible

⁴⁸ I think Stern is only giving some examples of Y, rather than providing a complete list.

⁴⁹ One crucial problem is that what an analytic proposition is, if synthetic proposition is understood as non-analytic.

that the premise of a transcendental argument does not have to be a psychological fact. As long as it is a claim that the sceptic accepts, it could well be a proper premise for a transcendental argument. When radical sceptics (as defined in the first chapter) are regarded as our dialectical rivalry, surely a psychological fact will be easily granted by them. For, even though they doubt any substantial claim about mind-independent fact, they don't deny any personal experience. What they find suspicious is that given any subjective experience, one can know that the mind-independent world is some particular way.

As to C, X can have anti-sceptical import in that X is a condition that is inconsistent with the sceptical claim. For example, when a sceptic assumes that there is a genuine possibility that our beliefs could be massively wrong, if X demonstrates that belief is in its nature veridical, X would have anti-sceptical import in that it renders the sceptical possibility unattainable. Note that the anti-sceptical effect of X is special, for the sceptic has no plausible way to reject it.⁵⁰ On the one hand, she is committed to the premise Y, so she cannot challenge the premise in the first place; on the other hand, if she were to follow the argument, she would be rationally committed to the conclusion as well, because Y is impossible unless X obtains. Suppose the sceptic denies the conclusion, she will be accused of not the falsity of her claim, but rather the inconsistency of her position and the unintelligibility of her claim. Understood this way, transcendental arguments are often described as labelling scepticism as self-defeating and therefore simply cannot get off the ground.⁵¹

2. Problems and Prospects

In this section, I will first explore two kinds of transcendental arguments and their respective problems. After that, I will discuss Cassam's criticism against transcendental arguments in general.

⁵⁰ For sure, this argument must be sound in the first place. Otherwise, the sceptic can easily reject the conclusion.

⁵¹ For this understanding, see Stern (1999), Davidson (1999b).

2.1 Ambitious Transcendental Arguments

Ambitious transcendental arguments start from an undisputed psychological fact, and end with a disputed non-psychological conclusion. For instance, in the Transcendental Deduction, Kant argues from the psychological fact that we have experiences to the conclusion that there exist external objects. Given that the conclusion of an ambitious transcendental argument is about the truth of a non-psychological claim, we can also understand ambitious transcendental arguments as world-directed.⁵² It seems that ambitious transcendental arguments are philosophically aspiring because it arrives at a mind-independent fact from a psychological fact. However, filling the gap between a psychological fact and a non-psychological fact is indeed demanding, and this task in turn renders this form of transcendental argument problematic. To see the problem, I will review Barry Stroud (1968)'s famous attack in this regard.

Central to Stroud's argument is a dilemma for transcendental arguments. According to this dilemma, either transcendental arguments are superfluous in that they must trade on verificationism or idealism in order to have anti-sceptical effect; or transcendental arguments cannot have any epistemological bite if they don't rely on these dubious principles. In either case, transcendental arguments are ineffective.

Stroud first identifies a privileged class of propositions. Propositions in this class must be true in order for us to have meaningful language. For instance, in order to have any language, one candidate proposition is that there is meaningful language. The reason is, the falsity of this proposition would entail that there is not a meaningful language. However, suppose that S is such a proposition in this privileged class,

...the skeptic can always very plausibly insist that it is enough to make language possible if we believe that S is true, or if it looks for all the world as if it is, but that S needn't actually be true. (Stroud 1968, 255)

⁵² We can also say that ambitious transcendental arguments are truth-directed. However, one may find this feature trivial because transcendental arguments aim to establish some truths, either non-psychological or psychological. Hence, world-directed is more accurate in that ambitious transcendental arguments only aim to establish non-psychological facts.

In order to better illustrate this point, we can look at the template of ambitious transcendental arguments. The first one is an instance of an ambitious transcendental argument (ATA):

(ATA1) Y

(ATA2) In order for Y to be possible, X must be true.

(ATA3) Y is actual, hence X is true.

However, the sceptic insists that the template should rather be characterised as follows:

(ATA*1) Y

(ATA*2) In order for Y to be possible, it is enough *we believe* that X is true.

(ATA*3) Y is actual, hence *we believe* that X is true.

Is (ATA*2) plausible? At first sight, the sceptic needs to argue for this claim. However, the dialectical point is that the sceptic may well grant this conclusion, while proponents of transcendental arguments would find this conclusion too weak. After all, our belief that X is true does not entail that X is true. How does our belief that X is true suffice to make Y possible? Transcendentalists⁵³ would find this deflated conclusion unsatisfactory. It seems that the sceptic is suggesting that in order for Y to be possible, we can distinguish two steps: the first step is that we believe that X is true, and the second step involves determining whether X is true. According to the sceptic, the first step is sufficient for Y to be possible. Nonetheless, transcendentalists need to defend that our merely believing that X is true, or that it seems as if X is true, is not sufficient to make Y possible. What is further required is that our knowing that X is true. That is to say, transcendentalists are required to further determine whether what we believe to be the case is the case. Obviously, there is a clear distinction between

⁵³ By transcendentalists, I mean the proponents of transcendental arguments.

the way the world is and the way we believe the world to be. To determine whether X is true, transcendentalists must appeal to a bridging principle. If this task cannot be fulfilled, the ambitious transcendental argument would be incomplete. To bridge the gap, transcendentalists can trade on either verificationism or idealism. The verification principle, roughly put, says that if a fact-stating sentence is meaningful, then it is in principle possible to be empirically verified.⁵⁴ To verify a sentence is to know its truth in certain conditions. In this sense, for a transcendentalist to know that X is true is to find a way to verify X in certain circumstances. Idealism holds that there is no mind-independent reality, and ideas or thought make up the entirety of reality. On this picture, it is an immediate conclusion that the way how things appear to us necessitates the way how things are, and therefore there is no gap between our belief that X is true and the fact that X is true.⁵⁵ There is no point to examine whether either verificationism or idealism is plausible here. What is at issue is that only by appealing to either of them can transcendental arguments fill the mind-reality gap, otherwise the second step cannot be fulfilled.⁵⁶ In this sense, the anti-sceptical work is done by verificationism or idealism, and transcendental arguments are superfluous. This is the first horn of this dilemma.

We can avoid the first horn by refusing to buy into either idealism or the verification principle. Consequently, transcendentalists are forced to retreat to the view that we believe that X is true is the necessary condition for the possibility of Y. However, this retreat falls short of fulfilling the Kantian ambition:

That he could argue from the necessary conditions of thought and experience to the falsity of ‘problematic idealism’ and so to the actual existence of the external world of material objects, and not merely to the fact that we believe that there is a world, or that as far as we can tell there is. (Stroud 1968, 256)

⁵⁴ To say that it is in principle possible means that it is logically possible. Empirically verifiable means that we are able to specify empirical evidence based on which we know whether the sentence is true or false. See A.J. Ayer (1952) for detailed discussion of verificationism.

⁵⁵ This inference is made on the assumption that on idealism one can’t be wrong about how one is appeared to.

⁵⁶ Some philosophers argue that some forms of content externalism can bridge the gap as well. For examples along this line, see Putnam (1981) and Davidson (1973).

If transcendentalists abandon the Kantian project of uncovering the mind-world connection and rest content with having established just another psychological claim, then transcendental arguments are disappointing because they fail to rebut the sceptic. Therefore, we see the second horn of the dilemma. The two horns of the dilemma both undermine the philosophical significance of ambitious transcendental arguments.⁵⁷

To recap, ambitious transcendental arguments are either superfluous in that they must trade on verificationism or idealism to bridge the gap between a psychological fact and a non-psychological fact, and therefore the anti-sceptical work is done primarily by verificationism or idealism; or, given that they don't establish a non-psychological conclusion, they are disappointing because they fail to answer the sceptic.

Stroud's dilemma is a fatal attack on ambitious transcendental arguments. Rather than to argue against Stroud, many epistemologists are persuaded and therefore resolve to reformulate transcendental arguments so that they can remain fruitful while avoiding Stroud's dilemma. Among different responses to the Stroudian challenge is the quest for a modest transcendental argument (MTA).⁵⁸ The basic idea behind this move is to deny that we should abandon transcendental arguments once and for all because of the Stroudian difficulties, and instead we should re-examine how transcendental arguments might be best deployed. According to this strategy, we need to advance transcendental arguments in a modest fashion, while attempting to preserve their anti-sceptical import.

2.2 Modest Transcendental Arguments

In what way a transcendental argument can be modest? According to Stroud, a modest transcendental argument aims to establish necessary links between our ways of

⁵⁷ The philosophical significance of transcendental arguments lies in their anti-sceptic import.

⁵⁸ For a summary of responses, see Stern (2015). For philosophers who endorse the modesty move, see Stroud (1994; 1999), Stern (2000; 2007).

thinking. He proposes the question:

Are there ways in which we must think about the world, ways in which we must believe things to be non-psychologically, or independently of us, in order for us to have the ability to attribute psychological states such as thoughts or beliefs or experiences with determinate contents to people we believe to be in the world? (Stroud 1994, 243)

According to Stroud, rather than attempting to prove the truth of a non-psychological claim, modest transcendental arguments aim to uncover some necessary ways in which we believe, think and experience, given that we believe that we have thoughts and experiences in the first place. Understood this way, the necessity between the premise and the conclusion does not cross the appearance-reality gap, but rather resides in the psychological domain. And the conclusion of a modest transcendental argument is directed not at the truth of a mind-independent fact, but at an inevitable way of thinking in our cognitive system, if we have beliefs and thoughts at all. In this sense, Stern (2000, 10) argues that modest transcendental arguments are belief-directed. A quick worry about this move is that since this retreat is shown to render ambitious transcendental arguments philosophically insignificant, would transcendentalists find this move too concessive? I think this worry is unnecessary. Since transcendental arguments are supposed to be anti-sceptical, as long as we can spell out the anti-sceptical import of modest transcendental arguments, this retreat does not automatically render the modest variant philosophically unpalatable. To see how we do this, Stroud poses the question that, in a Davidsonian way, what are the conditions of attributing thoughts, beliefs and experiences with determinate content to human persons?⁵⁹ To answer this question, Stroud writes:

To acknowledge that people think and experience the world in certain ways, the thoughts and experiences that we think of them as having must be intelligible to us. We ascribe to ourselves and others thoughts and beliefs we understand. In ascribing such thoughts, we must make sense not only of the contents of the

⁵⁹ He admits that this is illuminated by Davidson's theory of 'radical interpretation'. See Stroud (1994, note 21).

thoughts and beliefs in question, but also of people's having them. We can do that, I believe, only because we connect the thinking of the thoughts or the holding of the beliefs with the world we take them to be about...For that we need beliefs about the world, as well as beliefs about what thoughts and beliefs people have. What we believe about the connection between them is what enables us to ascribe them to people. We understand ourselves and others only by placing them in a world we believe in and to some extent understand. Our beliefs in psychological facts therefore go hand in hand with our beliefs in non-psychological facts of the world around us. (Stroud 1999, 164)

Here, Stroud's point is that in ascribing a belief to S, we must consider the content of the belief and S's having this belief. The former requires that we figure out the content of the belief, and the latter concerns whether holding this belief is intelligible for S. A Davidsonian line holds that we can make sense of people as having beliefs only if we find their beliefs intelligible to us, since we must be able to recognize that one has a belief. This recognition essentially involves the determination of the content of a belief. The content of a belief is determined both by its typical cause and other relevant beliefs.⁶⁰ This can be best illustrated by considering the radical interpreter case. A radical interpreter tries to understand the speaker's language and beliefs. However, given the assumption that the interpreter has no prior knowledge of what the speaker means and what the speaker believes, she must start the ascription from observing utterances of the speaker. Afterwards, she will assign meaning and belief to a speaker in order to explain why the speaker holds a certain sentence true at a certain circumstance.⁶¹ However, the meaning of a sentence and the speaker's belief are co-varied in accounting for one's holding a sentence true. To see this, imagine Smith says that Y '桌子有一本书', we can have two plausible interpretations:

- (a) Smith believes that there is a book on the table, and '桌子有一本书' means that there is a book on the table, hence Smith holds Y true.

⁶⁰ See more on this point in Chapter Three.

⁶¹ Davidson thinks that to utter a sentence at a circumstance is, basically, to hold a sentence true at that circumstance. This assumption makes sense because normally we say what we believe to be true. There are cases we do otherwise, but these cases can be intelligible only if we make the assumption in the first place.

(b) Smith believes that there is a vase on the table, and ‘桌子有一本书’ means that there is a vase on the table, hence Smith holds Y true.

These two interpretations both can explain why Smith holds Y true, and therefore we cannot rationally reject either of them by reference to this observational evidence alone. Moreover, possible interpretations for an utterance are countless, so our belief ascription seems impossible from the start. However, we can appeal to the principle of charity, which says that the interpreter must find the speaker sharing mostly true and coherent beliefs, by the interpreter’s own light. By adopting this principle, we can keep beliefs of a speaker fixed and then proceed to assign meanings to their sentences. Setting aside the complexities of radical interpretation, I contend that the principle of charity captures the essential point that we will, by and large, attribute beliefs that we find intelligible to a speaker.⁶² For, if the content of a belief is unintelligible to us, then it is unclear why we would ever attribute such a belief to others in the first place. After all, even if we do this, our belief attribution does not bring us any closer in terms of understanding others and the world shared by us. This consideration can yield a thesis about belief attribution:

(BA) In order for beliefs attribution to be possible, we must *believe* that most of the attributed beliefs are true and coherent.

Presumably, this thesis intends to say something against the sceptical assumption that there is a genuine possibility that there is *massive error* in our beliefs. I put this idea as follows:

(ME) Even though we attribute beliefs, it is possible that the attributed beliefs are massively wrong.

⁶² For a more detailed discussion on how to understand Davidson’s response to radical scepticism, see Chapter Three.

How can we spell out the anti-sceptical import of (BA)? Before we do this, I suggest we first distinguish two questions. Whether a modest transcendental argument is sound is one thing, whether the modest transcendental argument in question can have anti-sceptical import is another thing. For sure, a modest transcendental argument can have anti-sceptical effect only if this argument is sound. But since now we are investigating into how to understand the epistemological promise of modest transcendental arguments, I suggest that we, for this purpose, grant that this thesis can be established and turn to examine where the conclusion leaves us with respect to the sceptical challenge. The truth is, even if the basic idea of modest transcendental arguments is plausible at first look, it remains to be shown how they can have interesting anti-sceptical import.

In this regard, Stroud's response centres on two notions, namely, *indispensability* and *invulnerability*. Since our discussion now is mainly epistemological, the main objects that have indispensability and invulnerability will be limited to beliefs. According to Stroud, the claim that 'a belief A is indispensable to a certain way of thinking B' amounts to A's being unavoidable if B obtains. Specifically, if we accept B, A must be in a certain way inevitable. In the above case, the belief that most of the attributed beliefs are true and coherent is indispensable to the belief that we have attribution of beliefs. A belief is invulnerable in the sense that 'it could not be found to be false consistently with its being found to be held by people.' (Stroud 1999, 166)

It is not hard to see that the indispensability of a given belief can be established via a modest transcendental argument, since the premise of the argument is an undoubted way of thinking or experiencing, while the conclusion is a necessary way of believing in order for the premise to be possible. The necessary link between the premise and the conclusion precisely reveals the indispensability of the conclusion, but only relative to the premise. That is to say, if we don't accept the premise in the first place, then the indispensability of the conclusion simply cannot obtain.

For invulnerability, it indicates that a belief is invulnerable to a certain assessment. This particular assessment consists of one's acceptance of the undoubted premise and the denial of the conclusion. For example, given (BA), anyone who attributes beliefs

to people at all could not find that the beliefs they attributed to be largely or entirely false. Why is this so? The main reason is, to accept that we attribute beliefs to others and to deny that we attribute mostly true beliefs are inconsistent. For our holding that the beliefs we attributed to others are largely true is a necessary condition of our even finding that others have beliefs at all.

I will further stress the following three points. First, indispensability entails invulnerability, but not vice versa. For, a belief's indispensability to an unquestionable premise, say our having thoughts or beliefs at all, implies our inability to find that belief to be false if we hold the premise. After all, to find a belief false is the result of an assessment of this belief, but this assessment itself has involved belief ascription, which in turn requires that we endorse the indispensable belief in the first place. On the contrary, a belief's being invulnerable does not entail that it is indispensable. A belief can be invulnerable to our assessment due to our inability to get relevant information. For instance, when we ask what is going on inside the black hole, we find it (nearly) impossible to answer this question. The main reason is we are unable to get any information about it, even light cannot escape from the gravitational pull generated by the black hole. Whenever we try to assess this belief, we fail because this task is beyond our cognitive capacity. However, this belief is not indispensable to our everyday beliefs in the sense that we cannot form other everyday beliefs unless we also have this belief.

Second, the invulnerability applies to very general beliefs, and to people whom we find intelligible. For if the belief in question is very specific, more often than not it would be indispensable only to a very specific premise with which very few people would agree. In that case, the invulnerability would not be of much significance. Therefore, in order to establish wide-range invulnerability, the premise must be widely accepted, and the conclusion would be consequently general. Specifically, in the case of scepticism, what the sceptic doubts is very general. She holds that our beliefs about the external world might be massively wrong. In order to fully engage with the sceptical challenge, we start with a premise that the sceptic finds plausible and then arrive at an indispensable belief. Accordingly, if one accepts the premise, one

should rationally endorse the indispensable belief in the conclusion and appreciate the invulnerability as well. The invulnerability applies only to people who find the premise plausible. For if one rejects the premise, then the indispensability of the conclusion will be undermined, and so does the invulnerability.⁶³ However, once our premise is very general and fundamental, if someone doubts this premise, we would find her unintelligible. For if one denies that we have thoughts and beliefs, I can hardly see a basis for making this person intelligible to us.

Third, even if invulnerability can have anti-sceptical implications, it is not a denial of scepticism. Scepticism says that knowledge about the external world is impossible. To show that scepticism is wrong is to show that we do know the external world. If invulnerability cannot guarantee that we have knowledge of the external world, what reassurance does it provide? Or, in what sense we can dismiss the sceptical challenge? Stroud says that if we accept (BA), then

We could never see ourselves as holding the beliefs in question and being mistaken.⁶⁴ We could not consistently find that human beings are simply under the misapprehension or the illusion that those things are true—that they think they are true, but that really they are not. (Stroud 1999, 168)

Stroud is saying that scepticism, so long as it accepts our premise, would not pose a challenge. The reason is, one cannot find that one is holding the invulnerable belief and one is mistaken. That is to say, that we have the invulnerable belief in question has precluded us from discovering the belief to be false. The regarding of the belief as false is unintelligible to us, therefore the sceptical challenge that hinges on this possibility cannot pose any intelligible threat. Accordingly, we don't bother to take the scepticism seriously. However, this conclusion is conditional. For one thing, our response does not show that we can have knowledge of the external world, rather it only establishes that the sceptical challenge is not something we should take seriously.

⁶³ There is one possibility that the indispensability of the conclusion might obtain in virtue of some other premises the individual holds. However, if we exclude this possibility, then the indispensability of the conclusion simply cannot obtain if one rejects the premise.

⁶⁴ The belief in question is the invulnerable belief that most of the attributed beliefs are true and coherent.

For another thing, this response is effective only relative to a particular kind of scepticism. To be specific, only if the sceptic shares our premise, the invulnerability of the belief can have anti-sceptical consequences. Nothing in this response implies that the belief in question is indispensable to any alternative conception of a world, or that we could never give up the invulnerable belief.

I have reviewed the core idea of Stroud's understanding of the goal and the epistemological significance of modest transcendental arguments. However, regarding his understanding, there are several objections. In what follows, I will present some critical objections and then explore how modest transcendental arguments can survive under the attack.

2.2.1 Indispensability, Justification and Truth Conduciveness

One crucial objection to the viability of the modest transcendental argument strategy concerns whether the indispensability of a belief can justify this belief. One might wonder whether, even if a belief is indispensable to us (and therefore invulnerable), this feature should explain why our holding this belief is justified? After all, if we have no reason to accept this belief in the first place, our having it, though unavoidable, is irrational. We can bring this point into sharper focus by considering Moore's paradox.⁶⁵

Here is Moore's paradoxical sentence: 'I believe that it is raining, and it is not raining.' At first sight, this sentence looks logically possible, for one's belief about P does not necessitate the truth of P. And in everyday life, it is not unusual to find one's belief false. However, one cannot assert this sentence. The reason is, for any proposition that one asserts, by asserting that proposition one represents oneself as believing that proposition. Specifically, to assert the Moore's sentence is to assert that I believe that it is raining and I believe that it is not raining. In this case, one represents oneself as believing the second conjunct—which conflicts with the

⁶⁵ This challenge has been suggested by Brueckner (1996) and Vahid (2011).

explicitly stated content of the first conjunct. Therefore, this assertion will land us in a pragmatic contradiction.⁶⁶ But notice that this is not a logical contradiction, so we can still think or understand this sentence perfectly. What we cannot do is to assert it.

Can we draw a parallel conclusion regarding the situation of Stroud's sentence? Here is the sentence Stroud has in mind: I believe that most of the attributed beliefs are true and coherent, but it is not the case that most of the attributed beliefs are true and coherent. Vahid (2011) argues that there is no essential difference between Moore's sentence and Stroud's sentence. For one thing, two conjuncts in the Stroud's sentence have coherent truth conditions, so they are not a logical contradiction.⁶⁷ For another thing, when we assert this sentence, what is asserted by the second conjunct contradicts the explicit content of the first conjunct; therefore the assertion lands us in a pragmatic contradiction.⁶⁸ However, what is shown is only that we are unable to assert the conclusion. This fact does not establish that we are epistemically justified to believe the conclusion of a modest transcendental argument.

Brueckner (1996) has a similar worry. He contends that if we respond to the rain sceptic along a Stroudian line, our response seems unsatisfactory. Imagine I claim to know that it is raining, and the rain sceptic argues that Moore's sentence is logically possible, then how I know that this possibility (it is not raining) does not obtain. I then reply, in a Stroudian fashion, that I cannot consistently believe that Moore's sentence is true, for if the first conjunct is believed, then the second conjunct cannot be consistently believed (and vice versa).⁶⁹ Accordingly, I submit that the rain sceptic

⁶⁶ One point to be gleaned from the Moore's paradox is that (at least) belief is a norm governing proper assertion.

⁶⁷ To believe a logical contradiction is epistemically irrational, therefore in this case one is not epistemically irrational to believe both conjuncts.

⁶⁸ What is asserted by the second conjunct is that I believe that it is not the case that most of the attributed beliefs are true and coherent. While what is asserted by the first conjunct is that I believe that most of the attributed beliefs are true and coherent. Thereby, there is an obvious contradiction.

⁶⁹ Brueckner (1996) puts Stroud's original argument as: if the first conjunct is true, then the second conjunct cannot be consistently believed and vice versa. And he later argues that what needs to be shown is if the conjunct is believed rather than true. However, I think Stroud has done this. Stroud (1994, 246) explicitly says that 'if I discovered and so believed that the second conjunct was true (it is not raining), I could not then consistently believe that it is raining, so the first conjunct would then be false. And if I did believe that it is raining, and so the first conjunct were true, I could not then consistently believe that the second conjunct is true.' Obviously, Stroud is saying that one conjunct is believed to be P rather than one conjunct is true. Is there a difference between one conjunct is believed and

does not pose a challenge at all and I can ignore this possibility because I cannot consistently entertain it. This response seems unsatisfactory, for one surely has better way, say having a careful look at outside, to determine whether it is in fact raining. Moreover, notice that what Moore's sentence, as well as Stroud's sentence, says is that if I believe that the first part of the conjunct is true, then I cannot consistently believe that the second part is true, and vice versa. In order to avoid inconsistency, the sceptic may ask us to reconfigure our belief system in light of the sceptical challenge. This configuration consists of not believing the first part of the conjunct. Stroud puts it:

If the most that [the modest strategy] can establish is that we cannot suppose certain of our beliefs to be false while still holding to the idea that we have those very beliefs, it might be found tempting at that point to extend the challenge or the doubt to those psychological phenomena themselves. We might be brought to wonder whether we are even right in thinking that we have those very beliefs after all. (Stroud 1994, 250)

A rain sceptic can surely doubt whether we are right in thinking that it is raining, and we will find this move intelligible or even right in some cases. However, if a radical sceptic goes so far that she even doubts that we have beliefs and thoughts, what can we do? I don't think this is our worry anyway. The kind of radical scepticism with which we are engaging now will not buy into this idea. As I have noted, radical scepticism is a paradox and it trades nothing more than claims that we also find plausible. On this picture, we surely will reject that we don't have beliefs and thoughts. The sceptic shares with us a starting point that we have beliefs and we can epistemically evaluate them. Where we diverge is the result of the evaluation, i.e., whether these beliefs are justified and whether we can have knowledge on this basis. Thereby, the sceptical challenge we are dealing with does not make this move, and even if there is a kind of scepticism that doubts our having thoughts and beliefs, it would not be my concern here. With this in mind, we can dismiss this worry. But we

one conjunct is believed to be true? I don't think so. To believe P is simply to believe that P is true. For if otherwise one would not choose to have a belief attitude towards P.

still need to show why we are justified in holding any indispensable belief.

Before moving on, I think we need to distinguish several kinds of justifications. Justification is relative to our goals, that is to say, different goals bring about different conceptions of justification. Firstly, we have truth-conducive epistemic justification. In epistemology, there is a shared view that the goal is to maximize true beliefs and minimize false beliefs. With this goal in mind, a belief is justified in an epistemic sense if the justification is *truth-conducive*, or call it type I epistemic justification.⁷⁰ That is to say, when a belief is justified, we should expect that this belief is more likely to be true than if it were not. In particular, a belief can be epistemically justified because it is supported by sufficient evidence or reasons.

Secondly, Wright (2008, 505) argues that there is a second kind of epistemic justification, which I call it *belief-managing* epistemic justification, or type II epistemic justification. This type of epistemic justification does not come from rational support; rather it is generated by the compliance of the constitutive norms of beliefs. These norms serve to manage our belief system, and our compliance of them is mandatory in that they ensure that our belief system manages to achieve its characteristic goals (such as attaining true beliefs and avoiding false beliefs). Note that the Type II epistemic justification only applies to non-beliefs. For beliefs, they are normally type I epistemically justifiable because their own truths can be assessed by reference to evidence; while for non-beliefs, they lack evidential support, and therefore we have no reason to believe them true. In this sense, what is type II epistemically justified cannot be a belief. Since we are now discussing our indispensable ways of thinking, I call this non-belief doxastic attitude *commitment*. In particular, if a commitment is type II epistemically justified, I call it *rational commitment*. In this sense, a commitment is justified in that it meets some of these constitutive norms so that it ensures that the goal of our belief system can be achieved. For instance, in order for our belief system to avoid false beliefs, we must comply with the coherence norm. This is because if two beliefs are incoherent, then one of

⁷⁰ For proponents of this view, for example, see Foley (1987) and Bonjour (1998).

them must be false, therefore we are rationally required to reject one of them. Otherwise, our belief system would contain one more false belief. In my view, if a commitment is capable of being justified, it is the epistemic consequences of making the commitment that determines whether this commitment is justified.⁷¹⁷²

Thirdly, we have *prudential* justification. Provided our goal is to live a good life, a belief is justified in a prudential sense if it can help bring about good life. For instance, the belief that I will get recovered soon will be prudentially justified for a patient, because this belief would help her remain confident in her recovery, even though she may lack sufficient evidence for this belief.

Return to the worry about indispensable beliefs. Transcendentalists are required to show whether these beliefs are epistemically justified rather than prudentially justified. Indispensable beliefs can be epistemically justified in two senses: either they are based on truth-conducive evidence or reasons (i.e., type I epistemically justified), or they are in accordance with constitutive norms of beliefs (i.e., type II epistemically justified).⁷³ In this regard, I will review one line of response provided by Walker (1999), Stern (1999) and Sosa (2011). The basic idea behind this line is that indispensable beliefs can be justified because they are coherent with other beliefs we hold. However, we will soon find that this line of response cannot explain why indispensable beliefs are epistemically justified in the truth-conducive sense.

According to Ralph Walker (1999), second-personal transcendental arguments answer the problem of whether we are entitled to believe logic or induction. He draws a distinction between third-personal and second-personal transcendental arguments, the former tries to establish certain truths about the world while the latter only aims to

⁷¹ Epistemic consequences are results that have epistemic value, such as having true beliefs, having false beliefs, avoiding cognitive paralysis, maintaining epistemic rationality, etc. In this sense, the non-epistemic consequences of adopting a belief will not be considered, such as practical benefits.

⁷² Also note that this way of understanding epistemic justification is along the epistemic consequentialist line. Epistemic consequentialism, roughly put, holds that the epistemic status of a mental state (such as a belief) is determined by its epistemic consequences. If one's adoption of a belief has epistemically positive outcome (such as the attainment of true beliefs or the avoidance of false beliefs), then this belief is epistemically justified.

⁷³ The conclusions of modest transcendental arguments are indispensable ways of thinking. For convenience, I call them indispensable beliefs. However, if they are type II epistemically justified, we should consequently call them indispensable commitments.

show that certain beliefs are indispensable for thought. It is clear that second-personal transcendental arguments are precisely what we call modest transcendental arguments in the above discussion. As his main target is Hume's scepticism of induction, we can draw a lesson from his discussion. How can second-personal transcendental arguments explain why we are entitled to rely on induction? Walker argues that,

There is no serious alternative available to us. To attempt to adopt an alternative would be to place oneself wholly beyond argument. If then we have no choice in whether we adopt these norms, what could be the point of suggesting we are not entitled to? (Walker 1999, 23)

It seems that Walker is suggesting that our belief about inductive inference is indispensable to us and our inability to consider an alternative would automatically make us entitled to this belief. But why is this so? To refute Hume's scepticism about induction, Walker reminds us, is to demonstrate that our belief about inductive inference is rational rather than only a matter of custom or habit. Specifically, it is rational not because induction can yield truth, but because 'there is no other way in which we can coherently think about things.' (Walker 1999, 16)

Can we read Walker as saying that our beliefs in induction and logic are (epistemically) justified in the truth-conducive sense? As I have noted, if we take a belief to be epistemically justified in the truth-conducive sense, we should expect that this belief, while being supported by evidence or reasons, is more likely to be true than if it were not. However, Walker only remarks that believing them (indispensable beliefs) is the only way to make our thoughts coherent, and we are none the wiser as to whether these beliefs are supported by evidence.

In order to explain why our having indispensable beliefs is type I justified, Walker may need to further argue that the coherence of a belief is an indicator of its truth. Specifically, he can add that since indispensable beliefs are coherent with other beliefs we hold, they are therefore true. Otherwise, indispensable beliefs cannot be type I epistemically justified. Vahid (2011, 406) thinks that 'Walker's argument, as a means to the obtaining of thought and experience, at best confers justification on the

belief in question only in a non-epistemic sense.’ Vahid contends that Walker’s goal is to make thought and experience possible, and this goal is actually to achieve certain psychological states. Notice that this goal is different from the epistemic goal we have specified, therefore Vahid takes Walker’s response to be ineffective. Is there a way we can supplement Walker’s strategy? In this regard, it might be helpful to look at Stern’s and Ernest Sosa’s approaches.

Stern thinks that modest transcendental arguments have anti-sceptical consequences.⁷⁴ He first makes a distinction between epistemic scepticism and justificatory scepticism. The epistemic sceptic requests that we demonstrate that we have knowledge with conclusive grounds, while the justificatory sceptic asks to be shown that:

In believing *p*, we can give grounds that *by our lights* we are entitled to appeal to in this context, in accordance with our doxastic norms, to make the belief reasonable (if not certain). (Stern 1999, 52)

Understood this way, justificatory scepticism is trading on a conception of justification that is deployed by our doxastic practices.⁷⁵ One can sense that Stern’s understanding of justificatory scepticism is somehow related to our elaboration of radical scepticism *qua* paradox, for both scepticisms hinge on our own epistemological concepts and principles and they both ask us to show whether our beliefs are justified according to our norms. Stern admits that his target is justificatory scepticism, and therefore he tries to demonstrate how modest transcendental arguments can yield anti-sceptical consequences.

Crucial to Stern’s argument is the idea that coherence is a norm, and thereby the indispensable belief in question, insofar as it increases the coherence of a belief-set, will be justified. Stern puts the coherence norm as follows:

If *S*’s belief-set is more coherent with the belief that *p* as a member than without

⁷⁴ In Stern (1999, 51), he calls modest transcendental arguments ‘belief-directed transcendental arguments’.

⁷⁵ I mean the doxastic practices of the sceptic’s interlocutor.

it or with any alternative, then this belief is justified for S. (Stern 1999, 54)⁷⁶

What this norm says is that one's belief is justified for one if it enhances the coherence of one's belief system. To see why this is a norm, Stern argues that we can see 'how far it underlies judgements we make about the rationality of particular epistemic decisions we take or can imagine taking.' (Stern 1999, 61) Since the justificatory sceptic questions whether our beliefs result from correct application of our deepest intellectual procedures, we should find out what these procedures are. To do this, we can examine our epistemic practices and see whether coherence is an implicit norm we actually use when taking a belief to be justified. He considers examples in moral theory and logic, and I believe that, apart from his examples, the following consideration will help him establish his point. Notice that in our epistemic practices, we aim to form true beliefs and avoid false beliefs. For this purpose, one may advocate the truth norm of belief, which says that one may believe p iff p is true.⁷⁷ If we accept the truth norm of belief, then a coherence-based norm seems to follow naturally. For, if two beliefs are incoherent, then one of them must be false. Hence, if we are rationally required to avoid false beliefs by the truth norm of belief, then we are also required to avoid incoherent beliefs. In this sense, coherence is an epistemic norm governing our epistemic practices. Now that coherence is a norm, how can we determine whether a belief enhances coherence? Stern claims that the test for coherence is to take the belief in question as error, and then to see whether this move would carry down another belief one already has. A belief can carry down another belief because it can undermine one's reason for another belief. For example, if I have some beliefs regarding the existence of cats, trees and other everyday objects, then the belief that there is an external world would increase the coherence of my current beliefs and therefore be justified for me. To see this, I could take this belief to be false, that is to say, I believe that there is no external world instead. In that case, I would then have a principled reason to disbelieve that there are cats, trees and many

⁷⁶ Stern notes that for this characterization of the coherentist norm, see Dancy (1985, 116).

⁷⁷ For proponents of this view, see Shah & Velleman (2005), Boghossian (2003), and Wedgwood (2002).

other mundane objects. While the negation of the particular belief would carry down many other beliefs I already have, the belief will make my belief-set more coherent. Therefore, this belief is justified for me.

Before moving on, I will take a look at the conflict between a belief and a belief-set. This conflict essentially reflects, in Stern's words, one's attempt to reconcile the falsity of a belief and one's accepted belief system. We can notice that when the conflict arises, one's main goal is to retain beliefs that constitute one's belief system. It means that one's primary concern here is conservative, i.e., one is to retain one's beliefs rather than to determine whether a particular belief is true.

If we take coherence as a norm, then we can respond to the justificatory sceptic by saying that modest transcendental arguments can play an important role. For what a modest transcendental argument does is to show that if we don't believe *p*, our belief-set would be less coherent. This is because one's belief that *p* is true is necessary in order for us to have beliefs at all. Moreover, as coherence is a norm we actually employ, we also show that how a certain type of belief meets our standard.

However, Stern needs to address the objection that mere coherence is not truth-conducive. According to the objection, for a set of coherent beliefs *A*, there can be many alternative sets. An alternative set *B* consists of beliefs that are incompatible with beliefs in set *A* but are coherent. However, if there are many equally coherent but incompatible sets, and if few of these sets requires a contact with reality and can therefore be formed independently of our experience, then mere coherence cannot be a good indicator of truth.⁷⁸ Laurence Bonjour puts the point as follows:

Coherence is purely a matter of the internal relations between the components of the belief system; it depends in no way on any sort of relation between the system of beliefs and anything external to that system. Hence if, as a coherence theory claims, coherence is the sole basis for empirical justification, it follows that a system of empirical beliefs might be adequately justified, indeed might constitute empirical knowledge, in spite of being utterly out of contact with the world that it purports to describe. Nothing about any requirement of coherence dictates that a

⁷⁸ This point is from Murphy (2006). For a good summary of objections of coherentism, see Conee (1995).

coherent system of beliefs need receive any sort of input from the world or be in any way causally influenced by the world. (BonJour 1985, 108)

Setting aside the difficulty temporarily, Stern reaffirms that internal justification is enough:

Some, of course, will be dissatisfied with the apparent modesty of this position, and insist that to be complete, the appeal to purely internal standards of justification must be grounded in a demonstration that these standards are truth-conducive, in such a way that if we take the belief that *p* to be justified by some norm, it is certain or more than likely to be true. The familiar difficulty with this project, however, is that once this external conception is brought in, the sceptic will find it too easy to dispute any such truth-claim against which our justificatory norms can be gauged. In my view, the better approach is to admit that this external meta-justification is unavailable, but to deny that our norms are thereby robbed of their justificatory capacity, in so far as they seem to offer the best guide to truth from where we are. (Stern 1999, 59)

Stern's response looks weak, because if justification is not an indicator of truth, then it does not qualify as type I epistemic justification. After all, epistemic justification is supposed to bring out our epistemic goal, namely, to maximize true beliefs and minimize false beliefs. If our justification fails to serve this goal, how could it be type I epistemic justification? Can Stern attempt to establish a stronger conclusion then? It is not clear whether this can be easily done. Sacks (2000, 280) identifies a tension in Stern's position. According to Sacks, Stern adopts a coherentist account of *justification*, but not a coherence account of *truth*. However, if Stern also buys into a coherence account of truth, then it seems that he is committed to idealism⁷⁹; for if what is coherent is therefore true, then the internal relationship among beliefs can determine what the reality is. That is to say, the truth of a belief is not determined by how the world is, but by coherent support from other beliefs. If this were true, then Stern's move would be very suspicious. But if Stern adopts a correspondence theory of truth, then Sacks believes that we would find it difficult to argue for this hybrid of positions. If Stern refuses to give a better account of truth, then his proposal would

⁷⁹ Or he is committed to some kind of anti-realism or relativism.

not be satisfying.⁸⁰

What about Sosa's account in this regard? Particularly, I would like to look at Sosa (2011, 153)'s discussion of the problem of *Disablex*. *Disablex* is a cognitive disabling pill. It can terminally disable one's cognitive faculties and create coherent illusions of reality. If one has taken such a pill, then one's trust of the exercise of one's faculties would be misplaced. Then, how can we rule out that we have never taken a

⁸⁰ To precisely cash out the idea that coherence is truth-conducive is difficult. Apart from the standard objections to coherentism, researchers have recently argued for various impossibility results. This is a complex issue, and I can only cover the basic idea in this note. For discussions of the impossibility results, see Klein & Warfield (1994), Huemer (1997), Bovens & Olsson (2000, 2002), Olsson (2005a; 2005b) and Bovens & Hartmann (2003). According to Olsson (2007, 269), 'the impossibility results indicate that there is no way of measuring coherence that makes that notion come out as being truth conducive.' The general idea behind Olsson's criticism is that coherence is not truth-conducive even in the weak sense (with *ceteris paribus* clause, independence and individual credibility). Consider the typical case where we measure coherence among the content of witness reports. If coherence can be truth-conducive, Olsson proposes the following three qualifications:

1. Reports should be collectively independent. The reason is, if reports are fudged so that they are well-matched and coherent, then surely they cannot provide an indicator of truth;

2. Reports should be independently credible. If there is an agreement among notoriously unreliable witnesses, then can we really be more confident that we can arrive at a true conclusion? As Olsson (2002, 260) puts it, 'coherence cannot create credibility out of nothing, but can at best amplify credibility that is already there'. A report is credible means that it is partially reliable, and a partial reliability lies between full reliability and irrelevance. Olsson (2002, 260) puts it formally as: if a report E has the content A, then $0 < P(A) < P(A/E) < 1$. A report E is relevant if it raises the probability of the content A; and if E is irrelevant, then E will be useless for A. Full reliability needs to be ruled out because if the content of each report is 1, then the joint probability of propositions would also be 1. In this case, coherence is useless because it cannot raise the probability whatsoever.

3. Coherence can be truth-conducive at best with a *ceteris paribus* clause. That is to say, more coherence results in higher likelihood of truth, other things being equal. Olsson (2005b, 395) argues that the *ceteris paribus* clause is necessary in that a less coherent system of reports maybe more probable if its reports are individually more credible. Therefore, if we don't keep factors that are irrelevant to coherence fixed when evaluating the truth-conduciveness given a measure of coherence, then our evaluation would be incorrect. Particularly, individual credibility is such a factor. The central idea behind the clause is that our evaluation only concerns the relationship between coherence and probability, and thereby any factor that may influence probability and has nothing to do with coherence should remain fixed.

Olsson (2007, 271) presents the structure of his proof as follows. Consider a set S of propositions, and a measure C of coherence. C is informative in that it does not assign the same coherence value to S if the probability assignment of S changes. Take two probability assignments P and P* to propositions in S, and therefore we have different coherence values. Then, we can construct a counterexample to the truth conduciveness of the measure C by varying the probability of reliability. According to the measure C, Olsson (2007, 271) says, 'if P makes S more coherent than P* does, then we fix the probability of reliability in such a way that S comes out as more probable on P' than on P. If, on the other hand, P* makes S more coherent, then we choose a value for the probability of reliability so that P comes out as more probable.' For a detailed and formal proof, see appendix B in Olsson (2005a).

If the impossibility results are true, then an increase in coherence among the contents of beliefs does not amount to an increase likelihood of truth. Also, a belief's being coherent with other beliefs does not make the belief itself more likely to be true. Therefore, if one tries to explain the truth of indispensable beliefs by appealing to the notion of coherence, one would need to argue against the impossibility results. Surely, this is a demanding task.

Disablex? This problem is pressing because if from our own rational point of view we cannot know that we are reliably attuned to our surroundings through our sensory receptors, then our perceptual knowledge of the external world is at risk.

Before engaging in Sosa's argument, it would help to recall Sosa's distinction between animal knowledge and reflective knowledge.⁸¹ According to Sosa (2011, 12), 'animal knowledge is first-order apt belief, while reflective knowledge is animal belief aptly endorsed by the subject'. A belief is apt if its truth manifests the believer's competence. (Sosa 2011, 1) That is to say, a belief is apt if its truth is because of the believer's epistemic competence. While an apt belief suffices for animal knowledge, reflective knowledge requires more. In order to have reflective knowledge, one must have a meta-competence in recognizing that the first-order belief is apt. In the recognition, one is assessing the risks in first-order performance. Here risks are associated with how fragile the competence is or its appropriate conditions are when the agent issues the performance.⁸² If the agent fails to handle risks properly, then the belief is not meta-apt. With this distinction in play, I will proceed to look at Sosa's response to the problem of Disablex.

At first sight, it is surely a possibility that we did take such a pill. But how can we properly assume that we in fact have taken such a pill? Can we rely on our faculties to determine that we have taken such a pill? It seems not. Because if we rely on our faculties to tell whether we have taken such a pill, we need to be committed to the reliability of our faculties so that we can reasonably trust the deliverances of our sense organs. And if this commitment is made explicit, an immediate conclusion is that we have not taken such a pill. Here is Sosa's reasoning:

- (1) If we have taken the pill, then our faculties would be unreliable. (The advertised effect of Disablex.)
- (2) In order to acquire evidence for that we have in fact taken the pill, we must rely on our faculties in the same way as we normally do.

⁸¹ See this distinction in Sosa (1991; 2009b; 2011).

⁸² See Sosa (2011, 7).

(3) If we must rely on our faculties to acquire evidence, then we are committed to the reliability of our faculties.

(4) If we are *committed* to the reliability of our faculties, then we must be *committed* to our never having taken the pill.

Notice, (4) is not the transposition of (1). What follows directly from (1) is that if our faculties are reliable, then we have never taken the pill. So, this reasoning does not establish that we have never taken the pill. Rather, I think Sosa is suggesting this form of belief is problematic: I believe that I have taken such a pill, and I believe that I have trustworthy evidence for it. This conjunction is problematic because, if I believe that I have taken the pill, then I should believe that my faculties are unreliable and therefore I cannot possess trustworthy evidence that I have taken the pill. On the contrary, our evidence acquisition practice relies on the commitment that we have never taken such a pill, which in turn gives us an entitlement to dismiss the proposition that we have taken the pill. In a nutshell, this form of belief is incoherent. Can one just affirm the first conjunct, without having to affirm the second? It seems not. For, if there is no evidence/ reason for a proposition, simply believing it would be epistemically irresponsible.

Note that there are three possible doxastic stances towards the proposition that one's faculties are cognitively reliable: belief, disbelief and suspending judgement. Which one is the most reasonable then? Sosa (2011, 155) argues that even if you acquire considerable evidence that you have taken such a pill, you can neither be *unequivocally* justified in believing that you have taken Disablex, nor can you be justified in suspending judgement on this issue, because either of these two stances is self-defeating. If you believe that you have taken such a pill, then you should therefore take your cognitive faculties to be unreliable. However, can we imagine a case in which I come to believe that I have taken such a pill? In particular, I may possess the following evidence: a) my friend Jane says that she gave me a Disablex to ingest; b) my friend Lynn claims that she cannot perceive something that I perceive right now. Can the two pieces of evidence support the proposition that I have taken

such a pill? In one sense, they can. For, they make the proposition more probable. However, the reasoning involved in this case is problematic:

- a) Jane says that she gave me a Disablex to ingest.
- b) Lynn claims that she cannot perceive something that I perceive right now.
- c) Therefore, I have good evidence for believing that I have taken a Disablex. (If coherent evidence increases, then I can even have considerable evidence for the proposition.)

This reasoning is self-defeating in that our justification for the conclusion will undermine our justification for the premises. To be specific, if I have good or even compelling evidence for that I have taken a Disablex, then I should be committed to the proposition that my faculties are unreliable. But if my faculties are unreliable because of the Disablex, then how can I take a) and b) to be evidence rather than illusions? After all, a) and b), as evidence, must be acquired from my perceptual experiences. If they are only illusions, then surely they lack genuine support for the conclusion. So, it is only after that I have been committed to the reliability of my faculties that I can reasonably acquire these two pieces of evidence. That is to say, in Crispin Wright's terminology, a) and b) fail to 'transmit warrant' for the conclusion.⁸³ Therefore, it is self-defeating for one to evidentially believe that one has taken such a pill.

Then, why cannot one suspend judgement on this issue? For, if one suspends judgment on this issue, it means that one consciously declines to affirm and decline that one's faculties are reliable. If this attitude can be maintained rationally, it must be accompanied with good reasons, for otherwise one's doxastic attitude would be inappropriate. One possible reason is that one has equal evidence for and against the proposition that one's faculties are reliable, so one cannot rationally decide whether

⁸³ For his discussion of warrant transmission failure, see Wright (1985; 2004). A warrant for P is, roughly, something that is in favour of accepting P. Warrant can be evidential or non-evidential. Wright calls non-evidential warrant entitlement. It is a proposition that to be warranted, rather than a belief. So, I will identify warrant with propositional justification.

one should affirm the proposition or decline it. However, if this is one's reason for hosting the twofold conscious state, one will still face the self-defeating reasoning aforementioned. Particularly, one's evidence against the proposition that one's faculties are reliable will always involve a self-defeating reasoning. Therefore, to hold the twofold conscious state is self-defeating as well.

The upshot is that the only fully rational answer to the question as to our reliability is to believe. And on this basis, Sosa (2011, 157) claims that one can further deduce that one has never taken any Disablex and that one's faculties do not have disabling origins. Further, Sosa has some comments:

Firstly, apart from establishing that a certain doxastic stance is indispensable, we do possess a reason to believe that we have not taken the pill. According to Sosa, to believe that we have never taken the pill is more coherent than its alternatives (at least, it is not epistemically self-defeating), so in this sense this stance is clearly our best rational option. And if it is shown to be our best rational option, why do we lack a fine reason for it? And is this reason an epistemic reason? Presumably, it is an epistemic reason in that this rational choice is made for the sake of epistemic self-sustainment. If Sosa's argument is sound, then this rational choice is what he calls epistemically obligatory. Surely, what is epistemically obligatory is therefore a consideration in the epistemic domain. However, is this epistemic reason somehow connected to truth?

Secondly, Sosa is aware that there is a conflict between the two dimensions of assessments. On the animal level, one could have evidence strongly supporting that one has taken the pill with high first-order reliability, but as we have discussed earlier, this proposition cannot be coherently endorsed. That is to say, on the reflective dimension, and on pain of self-defeat, one's only rational option is to believe that one has never taken the pill. This outstanding conflict between the two dimensions of assessment, in Sosa's view, has no easy solutions.

Comparatively speaking, Sosa's approach is better than Stern's because the former can account for the reliability of beliefs. In particular, Sosa can explain how coherence is connected to truth. On animal level, if one's reliable faculties work well, one will have largely true (accurate) belief about the external environment. And one's

competence does not require one's rational endorsement of the reliability of one's competence. So the problem of truth is prior to and is independent of the problem of justification. The problem of justification, however, arises on the reflective level, where one 'endorses the reliability of the competence exercised, or of the appropriateness of the conditions for its exercise, or both.' (Sosa 2011, 150) On the reflective level, if one adopts the only fully coherent stance, then one will trust the deliverances of one's faculties. In particular, one will believe that one's beliefs delivered by one's faculties are, in the long run, mostly true, and mostly true because one is causally connected to the world.

For Stern, however, there isn't a good way to talk about truth on the basis of coherence. Therefore, he has to make a concession that, even though coherence does not necessitate truth, it is not robbed of its justificatory status. This concession is forgivable in that Stern only aims at responding to the justificatory sceptic. However, as Sosa's approach fares better in this regard, there is a chance that we can come up with a better response according to which coherence does speak to truth. Then, where does Sosa's account leave us? Mi (2014, 121) comments that Sosa's transcendental argument does not establish that scepticism is false.⁸⁴ The reason is, on the animal level our evidence does not necessarily support anti-scepticism or scepticism; while on the reflective level, what is actually established is that, among three doxastic stances to the question whether our faculties are reliable, believing that our faculties are reliable is a more coherent choice.

Even if we can show that it is more coherent to believe that our faculties are reliable, and this is indeed an epistemic reason, something still falls short. Note that what a defender of indispensable beliefs needs to do is to show that we have epistemic reasons for indispensable beliefs in the exact sense that epistemic reasons make the beliefs *themselves* more likely to be true. If we can grant that that we must believe that our faculties are reliable is an indispensable belief, and that there is a good epistemic reason (it is the only fully coherent option one can have to the question as to

⁸⁴ This paper refers to 米建国 (2014).

one's reliability) for this belief, does this reason alone make the belief *itself* more likely to be true? This question is precisely a question concerning whether mere coherence can yield truth. Again, Sosa does not say much in this regard. What he has said is that our trust of our faculties will enable us to acquire more reliable beliefs. Specifically, if our faculties are reliable and work well, we will have many true beliefs. However, having many true beliefs does not help answer the question whether our faculties are reliable. One crucial problem is that we cannot rely on our accumulations of true beliefs, or track record, to justify the general reliability of our faculties because this is epistemically circular. After all, if we have not been committed to the general reliability of our faculties, it seems that we lack a reason to trust the deliverance of our faculties. Unless Sosa can show that coherence alone suffices to yield truth, he cannot provide a satisfying answer to this question whether we have type I epistemic justification for indispensable beliefs.

However, as I have noted, there are two kinds of epistemic justifications. If one aims to show that an indispensable belief is type I epistemically justified, one has to spell out how a certain feature of this indispensable belief (e.g. it is a coherent belief) makes the belief true. This is a difficult task, because it is not clear how coherence alone can be truth-conducive. Unfortunately, we find that both Walker and Stern confine themselves to this conception of epistemic justification and therefore struggle to give a satisfying answer.

Alternatively, one can choose to show that an indispensable belief is type II epistemically justified. In particular, one is not obliged to explain why this belief is true. What is required is to show how this belief can ensure our belief system achieve its characteristic goal. For instance, in Sosa's case, by adopting the indispensable belief that I have never taken the pill, I will be confident in the reliability of our faculties, and thereby we can acquire more true beliefs. Suppose we do otherwise, we would be reflectively sceptical about any empirically acquired proposition because the deliverance of my faculties is suspicious. Along this line, we may find Sosa's response more plausible. And I think this is a better way of understanding the function of coherence in epistemic justification.

My discussion in this section suggests that, when relying on the notion of coherence, it is difficult to justify indispensable ways of thinking in the type I sense, but it is plausible to justify them in the type II sense. Therefore, the worry that we have no epistemic reason for holding indispensable commitments is dispelled. In the following section, I will propose a new modest transcendental argument, and its conclusion is type II epistemically justified as well.

2.2.2 An Extended Rationality-Based Account of A Modest Transcendental Argument

My account consists of three components: the idea of methodological indispensability and methodological invulnerability; the idea of über hinge commitment, as defended by Pritchard (2015); and the idea of extended-rationality, as developed by Coliva (2015). I will elaborate these three ideas in order.

2.2.2.1 Methodological Indispensability

Recall Stroud's central claim that modest transcendental arguments establish indispensable beliefs, and indispensable beliefs enjoy a special status: they are invulnerable. I think we can develop this idea by further specifying in what sense a belief is indispensable. In particular, I propose methodological indispensability. As I have noticed that a belief is always indispensable relative to a certain premise X that we have granted, I roughly put methodological indispensability as follows:

Methodological Indispensability

A belief that P is methodologically indispensable (relative to X) if the practice that underlies our endorsing X essentially requires that we believe that P.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ In particular, Ranalli (2013, 140) suggests that there is methodological indispensability.

Regarding methodological indispensability, we can take it to be practice-based indispensability. I suggest that we take our endorsement of X as a product of a practice. For convenience, we plug in the premise that we have beliefs. This premise is arguably the result of our epistemic practices. Our epistemic practices consist of attributing beliefs, forming beliefs, withholding beliefs, suspending judgement, etc. In our epistemic practices, we attribute beliefs to ourselves and others, so the claim that we have beliefs becomes undeniable to us. And if the belief that P is methodologically necessary for our epistemic practices, then we must believe that P for the purpose of retaining our epistemic practices and the undeniable premise that we have beliefs. From methodological indispensability, we can arrive at methodological invulnerability:

(MI1) A belief that P is methodologically indispensable (relative to X) if the practice Y that underlies our endorsing X essentially requires that we believe that P.

(MI2) We can only determine the truth of P in virtue of engaging in the practice Y.

(MI3) To engage in the practice Y, we must presume the truth of P in the first place.

(MI4) Therefore, it is inconsistent between finding P false in virtue of engaging in the practice Y.

(MI5) Hence, P is methodologically invulnerable to the practice Y.

Here is the general idea. A belief that P enjoys methodological invulnerability in the sense that we could not discover P's being false consistently with our engaging in the practice within which we could possibly discover its falsity. Put it another way, we can only determine whether P is false by engaging in our epistemic practice Y. However, believing that P is methodologically indispensable to our epistemic practice Y in the first place, so we cannot stop believing that P while engaging in the epistemic practice. Therefore, to discover that P is false while relying on our epistemic practice

is inconsistent, and P, because of its methodological necessity,⁸⁶ is (methodologically) invulnerable to our rational evaluation that embedded in our epistemic practices.

2.2.2.2 Pritchard on Wittgenstein's Hinge Commitments

We could find this line of thinking in Wittgenstein's *On Certainty*:

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

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

But it isn't that the situation is like this: We just *can't* investigate everything, and for that reason we are forced to rest content with assumption. If I want the door to turn, the hinges must stay put. (OC, §§341-3)

In this quotation, Wittgenstein is offering a conception of the structure of reasons.

On this picture, our rational evaluations can take place only if some propositions are exempt from doubt. These propositions are what Wittgenstein calls 'hinge propositions'. This view is strongly supported by reflecting on our everyday epistemic practices of giving reasons. In our everyday epistemic evaluations, we adduce reasons for our beliefs and doubts. Our reasons can provide rational support only if they are more certain than those they are supposed to support, otherwise we tend to be more suspicious of the reasons.⁸⁷ However, giving reasons must come to an end, or otherwise there would be an infinite regress. The end of our rational support is something undoubted, i.e., hinge propositions. They must be there in order for our epistemic evaluations to take place. In this sense we are at least committed to some

⁸⁶ P has methodological necessity in the sense that P is methodologically necessary for our epistemic practices.

⁸⁷ Suppose my friend told me that Edinburgh is in Scotland. I am wondering whether I should believe this, and here is another two pieces of evidence I possess: a drunk told me that Edinburgh is in Scotland, and Wikipedia says that Edinburgh is in Scotland. In normal cases, I would find the first piece of evidence unreliable because a drunk is less trustworthy than my friend, but the second piece is reliable because Wikipedia's information is more reliable than my friend's verdict. Therefore, it is the second piece of evidence, rather than the first, that provides rational support for the proposition that Edinburgh is in Scotland.

hinge propositions, or call them hinge commitments.

And the requirement that an evaluation context have hinge propositions is non-negotiable. It is not the case that some rational evaluations rest upon hinge commitments and some are not. Rather, without hinge commitments, our epistemic evaluations just cannot happen. As is stressed by Wittgenstein, this is the logic of our rational evaluation. I suggest we interpret this point as saying that in order for our rational evaluation to take place, hinge commitments are methodologically indispensable. We can illustrate this point by taking our rational evaluation as an epistemic practice, and then since this epistemic practice essentially requires hinge propositions, hinge propositions become methodological necessity for this practice.

One might think that our hinge commitments will naturally become indispensable beliefs, but I think this is too quick. In order to find out a proper candidate, among all hinge commitments, that enjoys methodological indispensability, it would be helpful to look at Pritchard (2015)'s discussion on different kinds of hinge commitments. In particular, he contends that hinge commitments include the über hinge commitment, personal hinge commitments and anti-sceptical hinge commitments. The über hinge commitment is that one is not radically or fundamentally mistaken in one's beliefs. It is obvious that the über hinge commitment is quite general, but it can be made more specific via our personal hinge commitments. Or, we can say that personal hinge commitments can codify the über hinge commitment. For example, I can codify my über hinge commitment by having a personal hinge commitment that I have two hands. In this sense, personal hinge commitments manifest one's über hinge commitment in a certain context. Crucially, there is a major difference between personal hinge commitments and the über hinge commitment. One's personal hinge commitments may change with the contexts.⁸⁸ In context A, that I have two hands is one's personal hinge commitment. But imagine a new context B, I undergone a

⁸⁸ A context is one's belief system at a time, and one's belief system changes due to one's new experience in one's life. Understood this way, the shift between contexts is gradual and not radical. And in any context, one will choose some propositions to express one's hinge commitments. For instance, I may use I have hands to express my personal hinge in one context, but in a different context (e.g., after accident, I lost my hand so this proposition is no longer a way to codify my über hinge), I choose to use a different proposition to express my personal hinge.

serious car accident and I was told by a doctor that I had lost both hands. In this case, the evaluation context B is quite different from the context A. The proposition that I have hands is a personal hinge commitment in context A, but not in B. I am not saying that in context B there is no personal hinge commitment, what I am saying is that the proposition in question is no longer a personal hinge commitment. This case suggests that a proposition might be personal hinge commitment in one context, but it might not function as a personal hinge commitment in another context. Therefore, it is not the case that one proposition will always be personal hinge proposition.

However, one's über hinge commitment will remain unchanged. To deny one's über hinge commitment amounts to taking oneself as unintelligible and irrational. For if it is the case that I am radically or fundamentally mistaken in my beliefs, why should I believe that I have a belief? After all, if most of the beliefs I attribute to myself and others are false, my epistemic practice of attributing beliefs must be fundamentally problematic and therefore needs to be abandoned. And if one believes that there is no belief, then even the sceptic would find one unintelligible.⁸⁹

As to anti-sceptical hinge commitment, it is one's negative attitude to a sceptical hypothesis, such as that I am not radically deceived by evil demon. In everyday contexts, one will not think of sceptical possibilities because they are far-fetched, but one could be made aware of them by introducing them in a different context (such as in a philosophical context). The anti-sceptical hinge commitment is specific because it exhibits a negative attitude to a sceptical hypothesis, but one will not possess such a commitment unless one is in a context where the sceptical challenge is standing out. Understood this way, one's personal hinge commitment is a positive way of codifying one's über hinge commitment while one's anti-sceptical hinge commitment is a negative way of codifying one's über hinge commitment. Both ways of codification manifest one's über hinge commitment.

With the taxonomy of hinge commitments in mind, it seems that the über hinge

⁸⁹ Here sceptics would be limited to those who share the premise that we have beliefs. In the first chapter, I have discussed that radical sceptic argues that we have beliefs but our beliefs are not justified and therefore knowledge is not possible.

commitment is fundamental. It is fundamental primarily because it is not context-variable. To say that it is context-variable means that it would change with the contexts. Therefore, the über hinge commitment is valid in all contexts. It must be in place for any epistemic evaluation to take place, so any context in which the über hinge commitment is not presupposed will be unintelligible. And it is this feature that makes it suitable for an indispensable belief. For even though personal hinge propositions and anti-sceptical hinge propositions are undoubted and inevitable in a context or a set of contexts, there is still a possibility that they might stop being hinge propositions in some contexts. Accordingly, personal hinge propositions and anti-sceptical hinge propositions will be locally indispensable, while the über hinge proposition will be globally indispensable. Note that this point is consistent with the local nature of epistemic evaluation, for what I am now contending is that any local evaluative system must have the über hinge proposition in place. And it is the über hinge proposition in play that prevents the evaluation from being a universal one.

In what follows, I will present a Wittgensteinian modest transcendental argument:

A Wittgensteinian Modest Transcendental Argument

P1: We can epistemically evaluate a belief.

P2: In order to make any epistemic evaluation possible, one must commit to the über hinge proposition in the first place, i.e., that one is not radically or fundamentally mistaken in one's beliefs.

C: Hence, one must commit to one's not being radically or fundamentally mistaken in one's beliefs.

Some clarifications are in order. First, the premise P1 is a psychological fact. But it emphasizes the practice-based feature of beliefs. That is to say, we take beliefs to be the product of belief attribution, and belief attribution is one form of our epistemic practice. Therefore, if our epistemic practice cannot be retained, we could not have beliefs. The fact that we epistemically evaluate beliefs is what the sceptic cannot deny. For were she to deny this, her claim that our belief regarding the external world is not

justified would not be possible. After all, we could think of radical scepticism as demonstrating a negative result of an epistemic evaluation. According to this evaluation, we cannot have knowledge because our rational evaluation shows that our beliefs are far from being justified (for instance, one cannot rule out the possibility that one is a BIV). Since we are epistemically rational and responsible, we should reconsider our epistemic status in light of the sceptic's verdict. Therefore, to accept that we can conduct epistemic evaluations of our beliefs is a necessary step for the sceptic to present her view and pose a challenge. Thus, we surely have a premise that a modest transcendental argument could deploy.

Regarding P2, it reflects Wittgenstein's view on hinge commitment and epistemic evaluation. In order for any epistemic evaluation to be possible, it is methodologically required that one must have the über hinge commitment (that one is not radically or fundamentally mistaken in one's beliefs). Since any typical transcendental argument will involve a necessity claim, does our Wittgensteinian modest transcendental argument meet this requirement? It surely does. P2 says that the über hinge commitment is necessary for any epistemic evaluation to take place, and since our beliefs can only be attributed via a form of epistemic evaluation, we can conclude that the über hinge commitment is necessary for our having beliefs at all. The über hinge commitment is necessary for our epistemic evaluation, that is to say, our über hinge commitment acquires its indispensability relative to the premise that we have beliefs. As I have noted earlier, I take indispensability in this case as methodological indispensability.

For P3, it is a theoretical commitment rather than a non-psychological fact, which is in accordance with the spirit of modest transcendental arguments. One may wonder why the conclusion is not a belief. Note that when we talk about belief, it is knowledge-apt belief that is of primary interest to epistemologists. A knowledge-apt belief aims at truth.⁹⁰ That is to say, we should bear a belief attitude towards a true proposition and we should not bear such an attitude if the proposition is false. It

⁹⁰ For proponents of this view, see Shah & Velleman (2005), Boghossian (2003), and Wedgwood (2002).

follows that if one has no reason for thinking a proposition true, then one should not bear the (knowledge-apt) belief attitude towards the proposition. Obviously, the truth of a hinge proposition is in principle unknowable. For nothing can speak in favor of or against its truth. Therefore Pritchard (2015, 90) stresses that one cannot *believe* hinge propositions. For this reason, our attitude towards the hinge proposition is commitment rather than belief.

If we grant that the Wittgensteinian modest transcendental argument is plausible, I will proceed to examine what anti-sceptical consequences we can draw from this argument. Recall the problem for Stroudian modest transcendental arguments. It is argued that even though an indispensable belief is invulnerable, it remains to be shown why our holding the indispensable belief is epistemically justified (rational). Moreover, any potential account should not ignore the requirement that epistemic justification/rationality should at least speak to truth-conduciveness.

2.2.2.3 Coliva on Extended Rationality

Annalisa Coliva has recently proposed an extended-rationality-based approach to defending general assumptions such as that ‘there is an external world’. The problem she is addressing is very similar to what we are discussing here. Firstly, we both seek a way to epistemically justify propositions that are fundamental in our epistemic practices, though with different purposes. We need epistemic justifications for indispensable beliefs so that we could defend modest transcendental arguments, while Coliva intends to meet the Humean challenge that we lack (epistemic) justification for these general assumptions. Secondly, both our proposals are inspired by Wittgenstein’s remarks in *On Certainty*, so the shared Wittgensteinian spirit would bring about more illuminations. With these two points in mind, I will examine her core claim that we can have epistemic justification for these assumptions and that we are able to characterize the truth of the assumptions in a minimal way.

So how can we epistemically justify these assumptions? According to Coliva, one tends to believe that one lacks epistemic justification for these assumptions if one

endorses a narrow conception of epistemic rationality. She puts it as follows:

Epistemic Rationality_{SK}: it is epistemically rational to believe only evidentially warranted propositions. (Coliva 2015, 130)

Here, evidential warrant means justification based on evidence. At first pass, this version of epistemic rationality looks plausible. To see why it is *prima facie* plausible, recall our discussion in section 2.2.1. It has been made clear that to be epistemically rational is to do something that will facilitate the fulfilment of our epistemic goal, and our epistemic goal is to maximize true beliefs and minimize false beliefs. With these two points in mind, epistemic rationality_{SK} seems appealing because if a proposition is not evidentially warranted, what reason do we have for believing it true? And if we have no epistemic reason to believe it true, then our believing it would not help achieve our epistemic goal. After all, given our epistemic goal, only if we believe true beliefs and disbelieve false beliefs would help achieve the goal, and hence be epistemically rational. Therefore, believing a proposition which is evidentially unwarranted would be epistemically irrational.

However, Coliva argues that we should endorse an extended version of epistemic rationality:

Epistemic Rationality_{ER}: it is epistemically rational to believe evidentially warranted propositions and to accept those unwarrantable assumptions that make the acquisition of perceptual warrants possible in the first place and are therefore constitutive of ordinary evidential warrants.⁹¹ (Coliva 2015, 129)

If epistemic rationality_{SK} is plausible, why should we endorse epistemic rationality_{ER}?

Coliva has some significant motivations. First, epistemic rationality_{SK} will motivate

⁹¹ For Coliva, general assumptions constitute ordinary perceptual warrants because we need those assumptions to surpass *cognitive locality*. This idea is from Wright (2004, 173). It means that experiences can be subjectively indistinguishable regardless of whether or not they are caused by physical objects. That is to say, one's experience as if p (e.g. there is a red table) can provide warrant for p (there is a red table) only if one assumes that one's experience is caused by the external world. Without this assumption, the same experience can equally support other proposition (e.g., I am hallucinating a red table) which is incompatible with p. Thereby, it is one's experience and the assumption that provide warrant for p.

Humean scepticism. As we have noted, hinge commitments are necessary in order for epistemic evaluations to take place. However, there cannot be rational evaluation of hinge commitments, no matter positive or negative. For any reason in favor of or against the hinge commitments would be less certain than hinge commitments, therefore no justification can be conferred to them. Where Pritchard calls this feature of hinge commitments *groundless*, Coliva names it *unwarrantable*. It is crucial to notice that hinge commitments are unwarranted and unwarrantable, and the fact that they are unwarrantable explains why there are unwarranted. However, if these assumptions are unwarrantable, one might worry why our epistemic evaluations are secure. The worry comes from the idea that our epistemic evaluations rely on these unwarrantable assumptions. And if these assumptions are unwarranted, they could well be arbitrary or false, then how our epistemic evaluations based on them could be any better in terms of epistemic standings. This line of thinking can provide a resource for scepticism, therefore epistemic rationality_{SK} is problematic.⁹²

Second, we should reconsider the constitutive role of these assumptions in our epistemic practices. Following a Wittgensteinian spirit, Coliva buys into the picture that (empirical) epistemic rationality depends on our epistemic practices. Such practices consist of forming, evaluating and withdrawing from ordinary empirical beliefs.⁹³ Coliva contends that epistemic rationality depends on our epistemic practices, and our epistemic practices in turn rest on these general assumptions, then these assumptions are inside the scope of epistemic rationality. Moreover, these assumptions are constitutive of the epistemic rationality, they become part of it. I think her point is that epistemic rationality regulates and guides our (empirical) belief-involving practices. In particular, epistemic rationality requires that we attain

⁹² Here is the resource for scepticism: if these assumptions are arbitrary, and we have no epistemic justification for them, then we cannot rule out the possibility that these assumptions might be false. And if these general assumptions might be false, then the epistemic rationality of our epistemic practices would be undermined.

⁹³ See Coliva (2015, 199). Note, even though we may have other aspects of epistemic rationality, Coliva limits her discussion to empirical epistemic rationality. By empirical epistemic rationality, she means the rationality produced by our forming, assessing and withdrawing beliefs that are about objects in our surroundings on the basis of perceptual experience. Empirical beliefs are our concerns here (both for sceptics and non-sceptics), so this limitation is plausible.

true beliefs and avoid false beliefs in such practices. This requirement is common to rationality_{SK} and rationality_{ER}. However, consider that epistemic rationality as such relies on our epistemic practices and that epistemic practices essentially rest on general assumptions (at least the über hinge proposition), there is a sense in which we should endorse general assumptions simply because we aim to apply epistemic rationality. Presumably, it would be epistemically rational to do something for the sake of epistemic rationality. Therefore, general assumptions lie in our epistemic rationality and they are just part of it. A Kantian way of putting this point, Coliva suggests, will be helpful:

Epistemic rationality extends to its very conditions of possibility, namely, to the unwarranted assumption that there is an external world (and others), that allows one to acquire warrants for ordinary empirical propositions. (Coliva 2015, 129)

For sure, these general assumptions are necessary conditions for epistemic rationality. Without them, acquiring warrants for ordinary empirical propositions will be impossible. Furthermore, these assumptions are neither irrational nor a-rational. So far as our epistemic rationality extends to them, they are in the scope of epistemic rationality. Therefore, there is a sense in which they are epistemically rational. However, saying that they are epistemically rational is different from saying that an ordinary empirical belief is epistemically rational. As to the latter, an ordinary belief is epistemically rational because it is supported by evidence. What about the former? Coliva (2015, 129) says that they are ‘basically epistemically rational’, because general assumptions are constitutive of epistemic rationality. She appeals to an analogy to explain this difference. Consider chess, we have rules that regulate our moves and all kinds of valid moves in a chess game. Surely, the rule of chess is part of the game and it is constitutive of the game because it defines what moves are acceptable and what are not. Therefore the rule of chess is more basic compared with various valid moves in chess. Likewise, for our epistemic practices, they include forming, evaluating, withdrawing beliefs that are based on our perceptual experience and assumptions that make these activities possible. These assumptions play a

rule-like role while all the belief-involving practices are like different moves in a chess game.

If we adopt epistemic rationality_{ER}, then what response can we provide to the sceptic?

Firstly, we are mandated by the lights of epistemic rationality to assume these general assumptions. In order to retain our epistemic practices, we have to assume these assumptions. We hold these assumptions not because we cannot help but assume them; rather it is because these assumptions are basic aspects of our epistemic rationality, therefore in order to bring about our epistemic practices and maintain epistemic rationality, we assume them. This reply indicates that our general assumptions, while being unwarranted and unwarrantable, are rationally assumed. And they are rational exactly in an epistemic sense.

Secondly, as we share basic epistemic practices with the sceptic, the sceptic would be equally mandated.⁹⁴ Why do we share basic epistemic practices? I think the reason is that both non-sceptic and the sceptic are evaluating our epistemic practices, and where we diverge is the result of evaluation. The sceptic arrives at a negative result. That is to say, the sceptic thinks that our general assumptions are unwarranted and unwarrantable, so they are not epistemically rational, and further our epistemic practices fare no better. It is because of these epistemic practices that sceptics have something to evaluate from an epistemic point of view. And it is because of the sceptical evaluation that makes us bothered, for if epistemic rationality_{SK} is right, our assumptions are not epistemically rational. Therefore in order to be epistemically rational, we should not believe them. However, once we adopt epistemic rationality_{ER}, the dialectic situation will change. We can (epistemically) rationally hold these assumptions, and the sceptic is required to assume these assumptions as well. Otherwise, they will be blamed for being epistemically irrational.

Thirdly, there is one thing worth noting. That is, since our epistemic rationality is practice-based, if sceptics do not participate in the practices, they will not be

⁹⁴ I take basic epistemic practices to be belief attributions and belief evaluations.

rationally mandated by epistemic rationality_{ER}. However, this move will make the sceptical challenge less interesting.⁹⁵ Obviously, as the sceptic is trying to give us an epistemic reason as to why our beliefs are not justified (or why we don't have knowledge) according to our own norms, they need to target some basic epistemic practices that we find essential. To this end, they would not choose to keep themselves safe by not participating in our epistemic practices. To engage in our epistemic practices, I suppose, one has to grant some basic epistemic facts, (e.g. that we can epistemically evaluate our beliefs) and some intuitive epistemic principles (e.g., the underdetermination principle and the closure principle) and epistemic norms (e.g., truth norm of belief, evidence norm of belief) that we use to regulate such evaluations. The question is, can we accept these basic epistemic facts, norms and principles without endorsing the necessary condition for the possibility of our epistemic practices? The assumptions we are considering now are not specific and local; rather they tend to be general. Recall our discussion of different hinge commitments. If one thinks that personal hinge commitments and anti-sceptical hinge commitments are not universal enough, we still have the über hinge commitment. As the über hinge proposition is being committed to in every context, it covers any context we would find intelligible and rational. If the sceptic goes beyond this point, I don't see why the challenge will be of any philosophical interest to us. Since these general assumptions make our epistemic practices possible, one has to endorse the methodological necessity if one is *genuinely* accepting our epistemic practices. Therefore, without endorsing these assumptions, one's acceptance of basic epistemic facts, norms and principles would be superficial.

Further, Coliva continues to answer the question whether these general assumptions are true. Coliva seems to still have the type I epistemic justification in mind. Recall type I epistemic justification, a belief is epistemically justified if it is supported by truth-conducive reasons or evidence. Therefore, even if Coliva has

⁹⁵ Or, this move will pose a different kind of sceptical challenge, according to which we don't have beliefs and we cannot epistemically evaluate beliefs. The new challenge, while being more radical, is less philosophically interesting.

shown that general assumptions are epistemically justified, one is still tempted to ask whether they are true. I find this move unnecessary, because the proposed justification for general assumptions by Coliva belongs to the type II epistemic justification, therefore why should she bother to answer a question that is along the type I line? I will return to this issue later. Let us look at Coliva's remarks in this regard.

She first denies that these assumptions are true in a realist/anti-realist sense. According to the realist, truth is evidence-transcendent. Therefore, truth can transcend epistemic justification or epistemic rationality. After all, even though we could do our best to be epistemically justified or epistemically rational, there is still a possibility that, unbeknownst to us, things are different from what we take them to be. Since how things really are transcends evidence, our rationality would struggle to connect to it. According to the anti-realist, truth is not fully objective, it needs justification and therefore it is constrained by our cognitive ability.⁹⁶ We could understand the constraint as saying that truth is determined by our epistemic practices. We could determine whether something is true by gathering relevant evidence and evaluating all evidence we have carefully. However, this conception of truth does not bring much help, for those general assumptions are groundless. No evidence can support or oppose them, so we lack a rational basis to determine whether they are true. In a word, general assumptions are not true according to either the realist or the anti-realist conception of truth.

With this point in mind, Coliva then proposes a minimal way of understanding the truth of the general assumptions. In what sense are these assumptions minimally true? She writes:

by renouncing any robust metaphysical implication and by acknowledging that their truth depends merely on the kind of role they play in our epistemic system... To predicate their truth, rather, should be seen simply as tantamount to being prepared to act on their basis and even to judge and assert them, thus being disposed to present them as true. It means to think that they have a semantic content, which can be meaningfully negated, or inserted within conditional statements... to say that they are true is equivalent to holding that what they state

⁹⁶ See Glanzberg (2014).

is how things are, given our overall Weltbild. (Coliva 2015, 157)

I think there are primarily two points worth highlighting in the quotation. First, our general assumptions are true in the sense that they make our epistemic practices possible. They provide a basis upon which we could acquire empirical warrants and proceed to conduct epistemic evaluations. And only in our epistemic evaluations we could find out whether an everyday proposition is true or false. Therefore, general assumptions are true because they make it possible for us to acquire empirical truths and avoid empirical errors. The success of the latter kind marks the truth of our general assumptions. This sounds like a pragmatist theory of truth, because one might find that these general assumptions are true in that they make our epistemic practices possible, which we take to be very valuable.⁹⁷ However, we need to distinguish pragmatic truth from pragmatically justified non-pragmatic truth. Pragmatic truth defines truth in terms of its practical benefits; while non-pragmatic truth rejects this way of understanding truth. Nonetheless, non-pragmatic truth can be pragmatically justified. That is to say, if an assumption can help achieve our epistemic goals, such as obtaining true beliefs and avoiding false beliefs, then this assumption enjoys pragmatic justification. This idea is strikingly similar with type II epistemic justification I discussed in 2.2.1. Recall type II epistemic justification, a commitment is justified if it can ensure that our belief system achieves its characteristic goals. The commitment is (type II) epistemically justified irrespective of whether it is supported by sufficient evidence. Crucially, it is the epistemic consequences of adopting a commitment or an assumption that determines its epistemic status. In Coliva's case, the practices we are now considering are epistemic practices, so our practices are epistemically oriented rather than non-epistemically oriented.⁹⁸ And in our practices, the truth of an ordinary belief is non-pragmatic, for our determination of truth and

⁹⁷ According to William James' theory of truth, a true belief will bring about difference (being useful or beneficial to one) in one's life. A belief is made true by verifying itself in future events. See James (1907, 77-8). I don't intend to inquire further, but the basic idea of pragmatist theory of truth should be clear.

⁹⁸ To say that a practice is non-epistemically oriented means that this practice aims at non-epistemic goal, such as happiness, social justice, wealth and so on.

falsehood is largely based on evidence and justification. Therefore, our concern is non-pragmatic truth. Also, by adopting these general assumptions, we are able to conduct epistemic evaluation. And it is in epistemic evaluations that we acquire true beliefs and expose false beliefs, i.e. we achieve our epistemic goals. With these two points in mind, it should be clear that the minimal truth of general assumptions is pragmatically justified non-pragmatic truth.

Second, to say that they are true is preparing to act on their basis and holding that they state how things really are. When we say that these assumptions are true, we act on their basis. This point is quite in line with the first point. For these assumptions make our epistemic practices possible, so holding these propositions true amounts to participating in our epistemic practices. However, I find it confusing to say that these propositions state how things really are. Since there is no evidence can justify these propositions, then how can we establish that they state how things are? Coliva (2015, 149) contends that the kind of minimal truth is of an anti-realist nature, not because the truth is determined by evidence, but because ‘how we human beings experience the world around us and conceive of such an experience as bringing to bear onto mind-independent objects.’ She means that it is not the case that we test these assumptions by comparing them with things in the world. Rather, in reverse order, the world is presented in the way described by these assumptions, so there is a constraint posed by them, therefore we cannot find them false. I find this point quite confusing. Does she suggest that these general assumptions *prescribe*, rather than state how things are? If so, then it is those transcendental constraints posed by the general assumptions on how things are that prevent us from finding them false. However, isn’t this idea close to idealism? How can we spell out the difference between her position and idealism then? I will consider a possible interpretation.⁹⁹

Recall Pritchard’s distinction between three types of hinge propositions, though some propositions will be personal hinge propositions, they may lose this character in different contexts. Let us compare the personal hinge proposition that I have two

⁹⁹ Even though I don’t think it is necessary to show why general assumptions are minimally true.

hands with the über hinge proposition that I am not radically and fundamentally wrong in my beliefs. There is a contrast between these two types of propositions. Suppose in a context where one just recovers from a surgery, and one is informed that one lost a hand in a serious car crash. One also takes a careful look at one's body and finds out what the doctor says is true. It seems that in this context the proposition that I have two hands is not minimally true, because it is supported by sufficient evidence (doctor's testimony and personal perceptual experience). Therefore, based on one's evidence, one can tell that the proposition that I have two hands is not true. This case might suggest that a proposition that has semantic content and is therefore capable of being true and false will nonetheless be evaluable when the proposition in question stops functioning as the personal hinge proposition in a context. Thus, one might be tempted to find an evidential link between one's everyday belief and such a proposition. After all, evaluations of such propositions are impossible in many or most contexts, but this does not rule out the possibility that there are contexts in which we can plausibly assess them.

However, the über hinge proposition that I am not radically and fundamentally mistaken in my beliefs is importantly different. For one thing, it always functions as the über hinge proposition in every context. Therefore, to suppose that there is a context in which we can evidentially evaluate it would be ultimately implausible. For another thing, this proposition is about the truth of the totality of my beliefs, rather than about the external world. Therefore, if we care about its truth, why don't we shift our concern for its truth to the truth of our everyday beliefs? Imagine one says that her next five statements will not be radically and fundamentally wrong. If you care about the truth of this statement, would you focus on the truth of the following five statements? Moreover, even if the über hinge proposition is true, it does not follow that any particular empirical belief is more likely to be true. What is said is only that we have epistemic capability, a capability that enables us to engage in our epistemic practices and conduct epistemic evaluations in accordance with our epistemic procedures and norms. Therefore, we don't need to worry that our commitment to this proposition will affect our evaluations of everyday beliefs. Our everyday beliefs are

evaluated in an evidence-based and piecemeal way. Therefore, compared with everyday beliefs, the über hinge proposition is true in a minimal way, because it cannot be proved or falsified by any number of everyday beliefs and it is true only after we have determined the truth of countless everyday beliefs. We assume its truth in order to engage in our epistemic practices, but if the shifted focus can result in our successful differentiation between true beliefs from false beliefs, I don't see why the minimal truth of the über hinge proposition cannot be established.

A possible worry is that if we find out we have many true beliefs and relatively false beliefs, are we thereby having reasons to think that the über hinge proposition is true? Even though this way of justification for the über hinge proposition is epistemically circular, I think there is something noteworthy. The groundless nature of the über hinge proposition is a thesis about the justificatory status of the proposition. It means that no matter whether the über hinge proposition is true or false (if it is capable of being true or false), it is not epistemically justifiable. However, we manage to separate these two things. Its epistemic justification comes from its role in an evaluative system, while its (minimal) truth comes from the truth of many everyday beliefs it speaks to. In particular, even if one possesses many true beliefs, they will not justify the truth of the über hinge proposition. The only role they play is fulfilling the truth request for the über hinge proposition. After all, the truth of the über hinge proposition amounts to nothing more than that we are able to form, evaluate, retain, and withdraw beliefs based on evidence and reasons. In a nutshell, regarding the question whether the über hinge proposition is true, we don't seek to answer the question directly by finding evidence in favour of or against this proposition; instead, we shift the concern for its truth to our epistemic evaluations of everyday beliefs.

Even if Coliva can explain why these general assumptions are minimally true, I think this is unnecessary for our current discussion. The reason is, when we seek epistemic justification for these general assumptions, the following two points are clear: a. they are evidentially unwarrantable; b. they must be assumed in order for us to achieve our epistemic goals. For the first point, it has been shown that it is impossible to show why general assumptions are type I epistemically justified

because this type of justification requires truth-conducive evidence. Unwarrantable general assumptions might be minimally true, but minimal truth is not evidence-based truth. Thereby, general assumptions cannot be type I epistemically justified. As to b, it is essentially the idea of type II epistemic justification. And for type II epistemic justification, one's only concern is the epistemic consequences of adopting a particular commitment or an assumption, and the truth of the commitment or assumption is not what at issue. Therefore, one is not obliged to answer the question whether our commitments and assumptions are true. For sure, one is free to ask whether these general assumptions are minimally true, if one cannot help but ask this question, but my point is that one can nonetheless (type II) epistemically justify indispensable commitments without answering this further question.

To summarize, in the Wittgensteinian modest transcendental argument, we arrive at a methodologically indispensable commitment. This commitment is epistemically justified not because it is supported by evidence, and therefore it cannot be type I epistemically justified; rather, it is type II epistemically justified because it makes our epistemic practices possible, and it is only in the epistemic practices that we are able to acquire true beliefs and avoid false belief.

I have shown how to defend modest transcendental arguments. However, even if it is epistemically rational to hold indispensable commitments, is the sceptical challenge fully addressed? Cassam (2007) has a negative verdict in this regard, and I will discuss his points in the next section.

2.3 Transcendental Arguments and Cassam's Multi-Level Responses

Cassam (2007) develops a Multi-Level Response (hereafter MLR for short) to answer how-possible questions, and he argues that transcendental arguments are not suitable for answering how-possible questions.¹⁰⁰ In this part, I will examine his argument against transcendental arguments.

¹⁰⁰ He doesn't distinguish two kinds of transcendental arguments, so I think he intends to apply his objection to both kinds.

2.3.1 How-Possible Questions and Scepticism

What are how-possible questions? How-possible questions are usually put this way, ‘how is X possible?’ However, even though there is a similar form in posing how-possible questions, there are different types of how-possible questions. Imagine in a snooker match, John Higgins lost to a player who plays snooker for the first time. A snooker fan Ross would ask ‘how is that possible?’ This situation seems impossible because John Higgins is a top snooker player, and how could he lose his match against someone who is totally new to the sport? What is impossible in this situation is not the result, for it has been the case; rather it is that a satisfying explanation of this result seems impossible. After all, there are obstacles that a potential explanation needs to counter. For instance, how can a top player in snooker play so bad that he lost to a novice? Therefore, a response to this snooker how-possible question needs to solve this obstacle.

In contrast, there is a different kind of how-possible question. Imagine someone says that the best runner can finish 100m sprint in less than 9 seconds. Given that current world record is 9.58 seconds and that a slight improvement in 100m sprint (0.1s) is very difficult, we would ask how it is possible. In this case, we also find obstacles: a big gap between our current world record and the target, and the difficulty in running much faster than our current highest running speed. In order to answer this how-possible question, one needs to explain how we can tackle these problems and how we can make it happen.

In order not to confuse these two types of how-possible questions, I will call them type A how-possible question and type B how-possible question respectively. Both types of how-possible question are *obstacle-dependent*, for we ask how-possible question when there appears to be at least some obstacle to the existence of X.¹⁰¹ That is to say, if there is no perceived obstacle, a how-possible question simply does not arise. However, type A how-possible question and type B how-possible question

¹⁰¹ The term *obstacle-dependent* is used by Cassam (2007, 3).

are different.

As to type A how-possible question (such as the snooker match case), there is a clear implication that the asker of ‘How is X possible?’ has no doubt about the existence of X. What is at issue is how the obstacles to X are overcome or dissipated so that a seemingly impossible task X becomes factual. The point of an answer is not to dispel any doubt about the existence of X (though it will be helpful). Rather, the point lies in showing that how we deal with the obstacles to the existence of X. A satisfactory answer to type A how-possible question will not establish something new but secure what we already have, and what we can expect from such an answer is only an explanation of how X remains possible when facing several seemingly insuperable obstacles. For type B how-possible questions (such as the 100m sprint case), the questioner of ‘How is X possible?’ has doubt about the existence of X. An answer is expected to address such doubts, and the main point of the answer is to put such doubt to rest by telling us how we can make X happen (this will inevitably involve an explanation of how we overcome/dissolve the obstacles). Therefore, a satisfying answer to type B how-possible question will help establish something new.

In epistemology, we ask various how-possible questions. For instance, we ask how knowledge of the external world is possible (HPek for short). We ask HPek because there are apparent obstacles to the existence of knowledge of the external world. Obstacles can be found in the closure_{RK}-based sceptical argument or the underdetermination_{RK}-based sceptical argument.¹⁰² For instance, one obstacle is that in order to justify our everyday beliefs, we need to rule out the sceptical hypothesis. But we cannot know the denial of the sceptical hypothesis, therefore our knowledge of the external world seems impossible.

Interestingly, the sceptical challenge that our knowledge of the external world is impossible can be construed as a how-possible question (HPek). However, HPek is construed as type A how-possible question. To see why, let us recall our discussion of the sceptical paradox. Radical scepticism trades on nothing more than our platitudes,

¹⁰² For more on this point, see Chapter One.

so it is paradoxical that by our own epistemological standards we don't have knowledge of the external world. This result shows that we try to give a philosophical explanation as to why we have knowledge of the external world, but this explanation is problematic because it arrives at a paradox. In this case, we take ourselves to have knowledge of the external world, but our philosophical explanation fails to account for this phenomena. Therefore, we don't question whether knowledge about the external world is possible, what we are asking is how it is possible. For type A how-possible question, what is at issue is not whether X is possible (it is actual), rather it is that how X is possible given apparent obstacles. So, we can see the close relationship between type A how-possible question and radical scepticism.¹⁰³ Accordingly, any satisfactory response to the sceptical challenge would also be a good response to HPek. What is an appropriate response to HPek then?

2.3.2 Cassam Against Transcendental Arguments

According to Cassam (2007, 10), a Multiple-Levels Response (MLR) to how-possible questions consists of three levels. Level 1 recognizes a *means* which makes the kind of knowledge in question possible, and Level 2 is *obstacle-removing* level, at which all *obstacles* regarding the acquisition of knowledge in question are overcome or dissipated. At the final level, some *enabling conditions* for the *means* to achieve the cognitive end are identified. At the *means* level, a means is identified to illustrate how a specific kind of knowledge is usually achieved. While at the obstacle-moving level, the alleged difficulty is dealt with in order to secure the possibility of the knowledge in question. At level three, enabling conditions are revealed to make knowledge which is merely not impossible at Level 2 into possible.

An example might help illustrate how MLR works. If we ask how knowledge about the external world (HPek) is possible, Cassam's MLR would proceed as follows:

¹⁰³ See similar point in Pritchard (2009b).

Level 1: A means to get knowledge about the external world is, say epistemic seeing or seeing that.¹⁰⁴

Level 2: Given that visual experience is subjectively indistinguishable between veridical cases where one is presented external objects and Brain-in-Vat cases where one is stimulated by super computer to perceive so, an obstacle to the acquisition of knowledge about the external world is therefore, one cannot know the denial of a sceptical hypothesis. What follows would be a philosophical explanation of how epistemic seeing can overcome/dissipate this obstacle.

Level 3: Specify necessary conditions for epistemic seeing.

I don't intend to question whether MLR can provide a good response to how-possible questions, and my focus is only the matter of whether transcendental arguments, as Cassam sees, fail to answer how-possible questions.¹⁰⁵ Can transcendental arguments respond to HPEK then? In general, he puts his objection as follows:

...[I]t's still not plausible that such[transcendental] arguments are either necessary or sufficient for the purposes of answering questions like (HPEK). They aren't sufficient because they don't identify means of knowing or overcome obstacles to knowing by those means. They aren't necessary because we can explain how knowledge is possible by identifying ways or means of knowing that aren't necessary conditions...Transcendental argument is excessively general in its orientation. (Cassam 2007, 61-2)

Core to his argument against transcendental arguments is the distinction between means and necessary conditions. Cassam (2007, 52) appeals to his London-Paris travel case to distinguish means from necessary conditions in answering a how-possible question. Imagine one asks 'how it is possible to travel from London to Paris in less than three hours', you might answer 'by taking a plane or catching the Eurostar'. In this context, the answer is appropriate and sufficient in that it indeed

¹⁰⁴ Epistemic seeing is different from simple seeing. See discussion of epistemic seeing in Dretske (1969, 78-139), Williamson (2000) and Cassam (2007). Also, in chapter 4, I discuss the relationship between seeing that p and knowing that p.

¹⁰⁵ Cassam (2007, 51) attributes the view that by means of transcendental arguments is the best way to answer how-possible question to Hatfield (1990) and Collins (1999).

specifies one way to make this travel possible. Or we can put it this way, one means that meets all the requirements is picked out in this actual world. And it also makes sense that if one gives an answer by appealing to some necessary conditions for this travel, say 'Paris and London are two different places', then apparently the questioner would find the answer very odd. For, even though the answer might not be wrong, it is too general to be relevant in the context. Therefore, the very obstacle involved in this context remains unresolved. It seems that what underlies the exchange is the idea that a good answer to how-possible question is to identify a means to achieve that end rather than to offer necessary conditions.

From this case, Cassam takes it to be a central weakness of transcendental arguments that they only offer necessary conditions to how-possible questions, and this is why the response provided by transcendental arguments is insufficient. Also, since the identification of a specific means in this context suffices to answer the how-possible question, then our uncovering of the necessary conditions will be unnecessary, and this is why transcendental arguments are unnecessary for answering how-possible question. If transcendental arguments are neither sufficient nor necessary in answering how-possible question, then surely the epistemological significance of transcendental arguments is under challenge.

To spell out why transcendental arguments are insufficient for answering how-possible questions, Cassam examines whether Kant's transcendental arguments respond to the question that how perceptual knowledge is possible (HPpk for short). According to the first reading of Kant's argument, Kant tries to establish that outer experience is the necessary condition for inner experience in the Refutation of Idealism.¹⁰⁶ Here inner experience is a form of self-knowledge while outer experience is perceptual knowledge of the existence of objects. Cassam (2007, 55) says that, even though we grant that Kant can establish a necessary condition for inner experience, it is still unclear how perceptual knowledge is possible, because 'we are none the wiser as to the best way of overcoming or dissipating apparent obstacles to

¹⁰⁶ See B274-9 in Kant (1933).

its existence.' I think Cassam's point is that Kant's transcendental argument only says that if we have inner experience, then there must be outer experience. Outer experience becomes necessary for our undisputable premise that we have inner experience, and therefore we must believe that there is outer experience. However, this argument does not explain how we come to have outer experience. What is offered is only that we must have outer experience if we have inner experience, so the obstacles are left unresolved.

Another reading is to take Kant's arguments in Transcendental Deduction as What Ameriks (2003) calls 'regressive' arguments. A regressive transcendental argument moves 'from the assumption that there is empirical knowledge to a proof of the preconditions of that knowledge' (Ameriks 2003, 51). If we take preconditions to be necessary conditions, then the second reading is very similar to the first one. However, since regressive argument starts from the premise that there is empirical knowledge, which a sceptic will surely be suspicious of, its role cannot be anti-sceptical. Before determining what the function of regressive argument is, Cassam argues that there is a *generality* problem for this argument. According to Cassam (2007, 64-5), the identification of conditions of empirical knowledge must display the right level of generality. That is to say, to talk about empirical knowledge *per se*, regressive argument must stop at the right level. If it uncovers some logically necessary conditions for empirical knowledge, such as truth, belief, then it would be excessively general and cannot properly capture necessary conditions for empirical knowledge. This is because even if we have belief or truth, we are still far away from having empirical knowledge. However, Cassam thinks that if transcendental arguments focus instead on *means-specific* (specific to any means identified in level 1) necessary conditions for empirical knowledge, such as necessary conditions for epistemic seeing, then they can avoid the generality problem. But he reminds that this move is incompatible with the nature of transcendental arguments because they are 'essentially general in their orientation' (Cassam 2007, 65).

Are transcendental arguments necessary for answering how-possible questions?
Does the identification of a means of knowing suffice to answer how-possible

questions? Cassam argues that there are many ways to gain empirical knowledge. To know an empirical proposition that P, such as Cassam's own example that the cup is chipped, one can see that the cup is chipped or feel that the cup is chipped or hear from someone that the cup is chipped. (Cassam 2007, 61) None of these ways is a necessary condition for empirical knowledge, but any of them would be sufficient to answer a how-possible question. Note that by identifying these means of acquiring empirical knowledge, one must also overcome/dissipate relevant obstacles (level 2) and specify enabling conditions for a specific means (level 3). For without these two parts, the use of a means of knowing would be insufficient for a how-possible question.

In short, according to Cassam, transcendental arguments are neither sufficient nor necessary for answering how-possible questions.¹⁰⁷ And if our goal is to answer how-possible questions, MLR would be an ideal option.

2.3.3 Evaluation of Cassam's Argument

After reviewing Cassam's view on transcendental arguments and how-possible questions, I will give two remarks in this part. To be specific, 1) I agree with Cassam that transcendental arguments fail to answer how-possible questions, but I contend that this is so because transcendental arguments aim to *quiet* rather than *answer* how-possible questions; 2) Further, I argue that we can regard a modest transcendental argument as a stepping stone for a diagnostic anti-sceptical proposal. In particular, modest transcendental arguments reveal our commitments and undermine the sceptical challenge.

A key assumption in Cassam's view is that the sceptical challenge is a how-possible question, and since transcendental arguments are anti-sceptical, they need to address the how-possible question. I have shown that we can interpret the sceptical challenge as a type A how-possible question. But, when it comes to how to

¹⁰⁷ Note that Cassam (2007, 52) maintains that transcendental arguments might have legitimate role in epistemology, but not in answering how-possible questions.

be anti-sceptical, there are basically two options. One can prove that the sceptical conclusion is wrong and establish that our knowledge of the external world is possible. Alternatively, one can undermine reasons that are adduced by the sceptics to render our knowledge of the external world impossible. Further, as the sceptic is posing a paradox, we find that the obstacle is posed by some pre-theoretic assumptions deeply held by us. For the former approach, in order to show that knowledge of the external world is possible, one has to spell out by what means this kind of knowledge is achievable. This condition is necessary because even if it is wrong that P is impossible, it does not amount to that P is possible. At least, if the argument that P is impossible is wrong, then we are only assured that a certain obstacle should not stand in the way to the existence of P. But if we lack a means to achieve P, the possibility of P will remain very dim.

As to the latter approach, the focus is to undermine challenges to the possibility of knowledge of the external world. This approach has the core idea that if the sceptical challenge (or the how-possible question) is ill-formed, then what is essential is to find out what is wrong with this way of thinking. It might be useful to figure out an actual ways of achieving the knowledge in question, but this way of response would be disadvantageous in two aspects.

First, when we identify a specific means of knowing, one needs to first argue for its validity against the sceptical challenge. The reason is that if this way of knowing, say our visual perception, has been called into doubt by the sceptic, then our reliance upon it would be dialectically inappropriate. After all, we are using a method that the sceptic finds problematic to achieve knowledge, this response to the sceptic would be circular. And if this means of knowing has not been called into doubt, say epistemic seeing, then our worry would be that do we have the proposed means of knowing and is this way of knowing actually used by human beings? Accordingly, a lot of work needs to be done in order to justify this specific means of knowing.

Second, if we are dealing with an ill-formed question, what can be better than exposing the faulty assumptions that lead us into the predicament? Type A how-possible question is interesting in that we have a positive answer to whether

something is possible, but when facing some apparent difficulties, we cannot explain how something is possible. And our inability to explain may further drive us to doubt whether something is indeed possible. Accordingly, if these difficulties are illusory, why should we opt for doing extra work to reiterate that we have knowledge of the external world, rather than just expel the illusion and bring our knowledge of the external world back to table. I think it would be wise to show that our question is misplaced and therefore our knowledge will retain its default position. Crucially, since a how-possible question is asked pointedly, if there is no obstacle in the first place, there is simply no how-possible question awaiting to be answered. Motivated by this idea, proponents of transcendental arguments can even intend not to answer a how-possible question, what they try to do is to *quiet* our eagerness to *answer* a how-possible question, especially when this question is raised badly.¹⁰⁸ After all, to answer a bad question is pointless and time-wasting. It is wrong to raise a bad question, and it is further wrong to take this bad question seriously and try to answer it. I think this is the primary reason why transcendental arguments fail to answer a how-possible question. Cassam is right in submitting that merely specifying necessary conditions is not sufficient for answering how-possible questions. And by identifying a means to knowledge would suffice for answering how-possible questions. However, their failures to answer how-possible questions do not imply that they have nothing to do with a how-possible question. Importantly, they prevent us from going further in the wrong direction.

Then, what can transcendental arguments do to quiet an ill-formed how-possible question? I think this task can be fulfilled in two steps. First, we need transcendental arguments to reveal our fundamental theoretical commitments. Second, we use the

¹⁰⁸ I use a Wittgensteinian modest transcendental argument to support the view that a modest transcendental argument can aim to *quiet* a how-possible question. This feature of Wittgenstein's philosophy is also recognized by Paul Horwich. He (2012, 6) argues that Wittgenstein's metaphilosophy incorporates the central idea that philosophical how-possible questions are pseudo-questions. These pseudo-questions come from language-based confusions or constraints violation. Thereby, our job is not to find out whether the subject matter (e.g. free will and knowledge) is possible, or to prove that it really is. Instead, with the paradoxical nature of these questions in mind, we need to remove the confusion that leads to the misguided philosophical reasoning. This task is mainly therapeutic, in that we cure ourselves of an inclination to get muddled.

fundamental commitment to undermine the sceptical reasoning. If the undermining move is successful, then we manage to demonstrate why certain obstacle is not genuine and therefore our worry about it is misplaced.

This application of transcendental arguments presupposes that transcendental arguments can be diagnostic. One might think that transcendental arguments are ambitious because they are used to refute the sceptic directly, and the sceptic is refuted by proving that the sceptical thesis is wrong. Recall Kant's premise that one has experience, from which he concludes that the necessary conditions for the possibility of self-conscious experience is the existence of physical objects. If this argument is sound, then Kant succeeds in proving that the sceptic is wrong. The sceptical thesis is proved to be false, so we have a strong basis to reject it. However, this way of understanding transcendental arguments faces major problems that I have discussed earlier. Basically, it is a kind of ambitious transcendental argument that aims to establish the truth of a certain claim. The world-directed character of ambitious transcendental argument renders itself vulnerable to various attacks. However, not all transcendental arguments are ambitious, so there is a possibility that a transcendental argument can be construed modestly so that its goal is not to prove the falsity of the sceptical thesis. Rather, it aims to reveal our theoretical commitment, given certain assumptions we already have. Regarding the diagnostic feature of transcendental argument, Stern writes:

Namely, of demonstrating the artificiality of the constraints within which the sceptic is working, and which he has inherited from the epistemological tradition of which he is part. In overturning scepticism, therefore, a transcendental argument properly conceived is not meant to establish some truth that otherwise we would not be sure of, but (more negatively) to undercut the 'large piece of philosophizing' on which the sceptical position is built, but which the sceptic leaves unquestioned. It is in thereby turning the game played by scepticism against itself (to paraphrase Kant¹⁰⁹) that transcendental arguments make their real contribution to our *understanding* of scepticism, by showing that the sceptic relies on certain philosophical assumptions to get his doubt going; these assumptions are then shown to involve a conception that is too impoverished to make a coherent

¹⁰⁹ See B276 in Kant (1933).

beginning, but which, when enriched, leads the sceptical problem to disappear. Although they do indeed engage with scepticism, and although they do indeed take sceptical problems seriously, proponents of transcendental arguments may none the less allow that this project is valueless, unless it scrutinizes and rejects the philosophical picture that made such engagement seem necessary at all. (Stern 1999, 5)

As Stern says, transcendental arguments undercut assumptions that underpin the sceptical reasoning. Stern's remark is *prima facie* plausible when scepticism is understood as a position. For, if scepticism is a philosophical position, then it must be coherent in order to pose a threat to human knowledge. After all, if a sceptic endorses incoherent claims, then the sceptical challenge simply cannot get off the ground. However, as I have noted, radical scepticism is a paradox rather than a position. Recall the sceptical paradox, all claims are said to be intuitive and the sceptic does not put forward any special claim. What the sceptic does is to display three intuitive but incompatible claims that we endorse. With this point in mind, I think we need to use modest transcendental argument in a slightly different way. Crucially, there isn't a specific sceptical claim for a modest transcendental argument to argue against. Thereby, we would miss the point if we aim to challenge the sceptical position. Unfortunately, this is a popular view about how transcendental arguments should work. Recall the anti-sceptical character of transcendental arguments. The core idea is to show an inconsistency between one's endorsement of a well-accepted premise and one's rejection of the conclusion, because the conclusion is a necessary condition for the possibility of the premise. In general, if such an inconsistency is found to reside in a philosophical position, then this position would be implausible. However, since the sceptic trades on nothing more than our own claims, this way of showing inconsistency would not be helpful. After all, it only deepens our worry about our epistemic status. What is further required is to find out where we go amiss and why we are lead into the sceptical paradox. With this requirement in mind, it would be wise not to expect a modest transcendental argument to do all anti-sceptical work. Instead, we should combine it into a diagnostic anti-sceptical proposal.

How to undercut assumptions that motivate the sceptical paradox then? I think this

task can be achieved in three steps: firstly, we assume that all claims in the sceptical paradox are equally plausible, so rejecting any of them would be implausible. Secondly, we identify some assumptions that underlie every claim in the paradox. For instance, that we have contentful beliefs, or that we can epistemically evaluate our beliefs. By doing so, we go further back and see whether scepticism ensues before we encounter the paradox. Thirdly, we use the assumption as the premise of a transcendental argument and then find its necessary conditions. When the three steps are finished, we proceed to check whether the necessary condition is inconsistent with any claim in the paradox. If so, the initial plausibility of a certain claim will be undermined by this process. For we have strong reasons to take this claim as less plausible, at least when comparing it with the other claims in the paradox. After that, we need to figure out why we think that this problematic claim is innocent at first sight. Once we finish the three steps, we can escape from the paradox. However, in the worst case, if there is no inconsistency after our analysis, we would lack reasons to reject any single claim, and therefore the paradox will remain insuperable.

Recall my proposed Wittgensteinian transcendental argument in 2.2.2.2. It is argued from the premise that we epistemically evaluate our beliefs to the conclusion that we must have some undoubted propositions in place (hinge propositions) in order for the evaluation to take place. The premise of the argument is assumed by the sceptical paradox, for all of the claims in the paradox are resulted from our epistemic evaluations. If this argument is sound, then we cannot evaluate all propositions and some propositions must stand fast and serve as hinge propositions. For this reason, any epistemic evaluation must be local. And particularly, there cannot be an epistemic evaluation of one's anti-sceptical hinge proposition.

Since epistemic evaluations must be local, we can figure out a faulty assumption hidden in the $\text{closure}_{\text{RK}}$ -based sceptical argument. Recall the second claim in this argument (CR2), which says that if S has rationally grounded knowledge that p, and S competently deduces from p that q, thereby forming a belief that q on this basis while retaining her rationally grounded knowledge that p, then S has rationally grounded knowledge that q. If one does not bear in mind the local nature of epistemic

evaluation, one would incline to think that the following claim is licenced by (CR2), call this instance (CR2_{INS}):

(CR2_{INS}) If I know that I am reading a book, and I competently deduces from that I am reading a book that I am not a BIV, thereby forming a belief that I am not a BIV on this basis while retaining my rationally grounded knowledge that I am reading a book, then I have rationally grounded knowledge that I am not a BIV.

However, with the Wittgensteinian diagnosis in mind, (CR2_{INS}) appears problematic. Crucially, it assumes that the proposition that I am not a BIV is knowable. That is to say, this proposition is within the realm of epistemic evaluation. However, as we have shown, we cannot bear belief attitude towards anti-sceptical hinge proposition. Since my propositional attitude towards the proposition that I am not a BIV is not a knowledge-apt belief, it is not in the market for rational knowledge as well.¹¹⁰ With this point in mind, we manage to find out faulty assumptions that drive us from the modest transcendental argument to the paradox. From the Wittgensteinian modest transcendental argument, we realize that the local structure of epistemic evaluation, but we are tempted to conduct a universal evaluation in the paradox. In particular, our evaluation in (CR2) is based on the closure_{RK} principle, which centres on how we acquire rationally grounded knowledge via competent deduction between two propositions. Here comes a conflict, the boundary of logical inference does not coincide with the boundary of epistemic evaluation, even though we rely on logical inference to conduct epistemic evaluation in ordinary cases. If we assume that the two boundaries are overlapped, we will be tempted to rationally evaluate anti-sceptical hinge proposition. Fortunately, when this conflict is made obvious, we can reject (CR2_{INS}) because it is a misuse of the closure_{RK} principle. Thereby, the sceptical challenge disappears and our epistemic standings remain innocent.

Even though we cannot respond to the scepticism solely on the basis of a modest

¹¹⁰ This inference includes the assumption that belief is a necessary condition of knowledge.

transcendental argument, something has been called into question by advancing such an argument. That is our impoverished understanding of our starting position. We take us to have beliefs, have language and are capable of evaluating our beliefs, but we don't consider what else we must be committed to in the first place. Without these commitments, we cannot even make sense of these basic facts. However, if we are made aware of these commitments, our understanding of human status would not be too impoverished to combat radical scepticism. These commitments would help us figure out where we exactly go amiss and get stuck in the sceptical reasoning. Our awareness of these commitments is crucial. Because the sceptical challenge is said to be parasitic on our 'platitudes', if we have nothing more basic than these 'platitudes', then any response to the challenge would be highly revisionary. That is to say, we must revise our intuitions to the extent that the sceptical problem does not arise. However, if we can go further back and find a prior point where we still have a sound picture of our epistemic status, then the gap between this point and our engagement with the sceptical paradox would be the crux. When this crux is revealed, we don't need to revise our intuitions. Rather, we expose faulty assumptions that disguise as platitudes in our theory. To pinpoint where the problem exactly is will not be what modest transcendental arguments can independently do, because they can only make our fundamental commitments explicit and remind us that we should bring these commitments together to counter the disguised 'platitudes'. In this sense, modest transcendental arguments are stepping stones for our diagnostic treatment of radical scepticism.

3. Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I explore the role of transcendental arguments. I first present Stern's general account of the characteristics of transcendental arguments. After that, I critically examine the problems for transcendental arguments. When they are construed ambitiously, transcendental arguments aim to establish a non-psychological fact about the world from a psychological fact. The attempt to bridge the gap between

two kinds of facts incurs the Stroud's dilemma. When transcendental arguments become modest, their goals are to uncover some indispensable ways of believing and thinking, given some psychological facts we have granted. However, even this modest goal falls short because we need to show why we are epistemically justified in holding these indispensable ways of thinking. Epistemic justification has two kinds: type I epistemic justification and type II epistemic justification. Type I epistemic justification is acquired by gaining truth-conducive evidential support, while type II epistemic justification is acquired if the adoption of a commitment can help us achieve our epistemic goals. The first line of defence is suggested by Walker, Stern and Sosa. Their proposals feature the idea that adopting indispensable beliefs is the only coherent way of thinking, and therefore, on pain of self-defeat, we are epistemically justified in holding them. However, it is difficult to show how coherence is truth-conducive. Therefore, the first line of defence cannot establish type I epistemic justification. However, when we take incoherence as an indicator of falsity, coherence does help us achieve our epistemic goal, i.e., avoiding false beliefs. In this sense, if some indispensable ways of thinking are shown to be coherent, we would be type II epistemically justified in holding them.

Alternatively, I consider a different way of defence illuminated by Wittgenstein's discussion of hinge propositions. This proposal incorporates three ideas: methodological indispensability, the über hinge commitment, and the extended rationality. According to the (modest) Wittgensteinian transcendental argument, if we grant the premise that we can epistemically evaluate beliefs, we must then be committed to our not being radically or fundamentally mistaken in our beliefs. The conclusion is indispensable in the sense that it is a methodological necessity. Without this indispensable commitment in play, our epistemic evaluations cannot take place. Also, on the picture of extended rationality, it is epistemically rational to hold commitments that make our epistemic practices possible because these commitments are constitutive of our epistemic rationality. This line of defence explains how general assumptions make it possible for us to achieve our epistemic goals. Therefore, even though general assumptions cannot be type I epistemically justified, they are

nonetheless type II epistemically justifiable.

Cassam argues that Multi-Level Response (MLR) can fully answer how-possible questions, while transcendental arguments fail to do so in that they are neither sufficient nor necessary for answering how-possible questions. I submit that he is right about what transcendental arguments actually do in this regard, but this is because transcendental arguments can aim to *quiet* rather than *answer* how-possible questions. That is to say, if obstacles are illusory, why should we opt for doing extra work to reiterate that we have knowledge of the external world, rather than just expel the illusion and bring our knowledge of the external world back to table. I think it would be wise to show that our question is misplaced and therefore our knowledge will retain its default position. Further, what transcendental arguments can do is to reveal our commitments before our engagement with the sceptical reasoning. By making our commitments explicit, we seek to improve our understanding of our starting position, therefore we will be in a better position to diagnose where the sceptical reasoning goes wrong and why we are tempted into a paradox.

Even if there is some hope in defending modest transcendental arguments, I admit that I have only examined part of the problems.¹¹¹ As long as other problems remain unsettled, we should be wary of any application of modest transcendental arguments. However, it would be wise not to hope that modest transcendental arguments can do all anti-sceptical work. It is only an element of a diagnostic response to the sceptic. In particular, with the help of modest transcendental arguments, we step back from the sceptical paradox and reveal some necessary commitments before engaging with the sceptic. When these commitments are revealed, it is possible that a sound picture of the world has been built into our position. Therefore, by further theoretical analysis, we can show where the sceptical reasoning is wrong and how we can avoid getting

¹¹¹ In this chapter, I have considered how to defend indispensable beliefs and how to respond to Cassam's criticism. Note that apart from this two problems, there is the uniqueness objection developed by Körner (1974), and recently by Kuusela (2008). This objection, very roughly put, questions the uniqueness of our conceptual scheme. Note that indispensable beliefs are indispensable only to a given premise that we grant. If there are very different conceptual scheme to the extent that our indispensable beliefs are not indispensable in that scheme, then modest transcendental arguments would not work.

lured into the predicament. When the sceptical reasoning is undermined, we will see that we are only misled by disguised assumptions and therefore our knowledge of the external world is still possible. Accordingly, the adoption of modest transcendental arguments is not necessary if one prefers obstacle-override strategy; and the adoption of modest transcendental arguments is not sufficient because a diagnostic story requires more than revealing our theoretical commitments. It is required that we show what the faulty move in the sceptical reasoning is, given our fundamental commitments. However, the adoption of modest transcendental arguments would considerably help our diagnostic treatment of the radical scepticism.

In the next chapter, I discuss a broadly Davidsonian response to closure_{RK}-based radical scepticism.

Chapter Three

A Davidsonian Response to Radical Scepticism

0. Introduction

In this chapter, I explore a Davidsonian response to the closure_{RK}-based sceptical argument. As I have noted, this is a crucial argument for radical scepticism and therefore deserving of independent treatment. Donald Davidson is a prominent anti-sceptical exemplar in contemporary philosophy. He famously argues that *belief is in its nature veridical* (Davidson 1983, 314). If the claim were true, one significant presupposition of scepticism would fail to be satisfied. On Davidson's view, scepticism regarding the external world presupposes that our beliefs about the external world could all be false. The idea of massive error in our beliefs can be motivated by considering ordinary cases where our senses present us misleading information. If we grant that a perceptual belief is fallible in particular cases, then it seems that nothing stops us from generalizing such a possibility of error. As far as we cannot exclude the possibility of massive error, scepticism is on the way.¹¹² Davidson's theory aims to offer compelling reasons as to why such possibility is unintelligible.

Recall the closure_{RK}-based sceptical argument:

*The Closure_{RK}-Based Sceptical Argument*¹¹³

- (CR1) S cannot have rationally grounded knowledge that q (e.g., I am not a BIV).
(CR2) If S has rationally grounded knowledge that p (e.g. I am reading a paper), and S competently deduces from p that q, thereby forming a belief that q on this basis while retaining her rationally grounded knowledge that p, then S has

¹¹² Notice that apart from the idea of massive error, scepticism also needs the closure principle to bring it happen.

¹¹³ This formulation is adapted from Pritchard (2015, 41).

rationally grounded knowledge that q. [The closure_{RK} principle]

(CR3) So, S does not have rationally grounded knowledge that p.

In particular, what underlines (CR2) is the closure_{RK} principle:

The Closure_{RK} Principle

If S has rationally grounded knowledge that p, and S competently deduces from p that q, thereby forming a belief that q on this basis while retaining her rationally grounded knowledge that p, then S has rationally grounded knowledge that q.
(Pritchard 2015, 41)

What the closure_{RK} principle says is that, if one already has rationally grounded knowledge that p, one's rational ground can be preserved across a well-conducted logical inference. This principle captures the core idea that rationally grounded knowledge must be acquired via a rational process, thus competent deduction, as a typical rational process, cannot undermine our rational ground for knowledge. Therefore, the closure_{RK} principle is very plausible. Pritchard argues that what underlies the closure_{RK} principle is the idea: the reasons for believing p serve as reasons for believing any logical entailment of p. If this idea is correct, then it typically licenses our rational evaluation from an everyday proposition to a rational evaluation of our anti-sceptical proposition. Pritchard thereby names the idea the *universality of rational evaluation thesis*. (Pritchard 2015, 55)

Contemporary epistemologists generally agree that knowledge entails belief.¹¹⁴ Specifically, I now focus on rationally grounded knowledge, i.e., knowledge that is responsive to a rational process. In such a rational process, we evaluate all evidence that is in favour of or against a certain proposition. In this sense, knowledge that p is

¹¹⁴ See Lehrer (1968), Audi (1998), Williamson (2000), Feldman (2003), Rose & Schaffer (2013). Myers-Schultz & Schwitzgebel (2013) gives some counterexamples to this idea. However, in chapter four, I reformulate the idea as: If one knows that p, then one has a dispositional belief that P and one does not have any known undefeated defeater Q to P. Counterexamples only show that one can know that P without having occurrent belief that P, and my explanation is that non-epistemic masking prevents one's dispositional belief from becoming occurrent belief.

incompatible with any agnostic attitude towards the truth of p , and when we know that p we at least have good reasons for believing that p is true. Therefore, belief (that p) that is entailed by rationally grounded knowledge (that p) must exclude agnosticism about the truth of p . With this point in mind, I call this kind of belief knowledge-apt belief.¹¹⁵ Knowledge-apt belief aims at truth, so it is in the market for rationally grounded knowledge. In what follows, I will limit my discussion to knowledge-apt belief. Unless noted, my discussion of belief henceforth will refer to knowledge-apt belief. Given this, a quick point is that if we cannot bear a knowledge-apt-belief attitude towards a proposition, then this proposition is not even in the market for rational knowledge.

I will proceed as follows: In sections 1-2, I review Davidson's theory of radical interpretation, the principle of charity and triangulation. In section 3, I extract Davidson's view on doubt and belief and argue that doubt is in its nature local. In section 4, I discuss how to understand Davidson's proposal against radical scepticism. What follows in section 5 is an attempt to show how a Davidsonian response to the closure_{RK}-based sceptical argument proceeds by denying that the sceptical hypothesis does not obtain is a belief. Afterwards, I argue that the Davidsonian response struggles to answer the underdetermination_{RK}-based sceptical argument in section 6. This chapter ends in section 7.

1. Radical Interpretation and the Principle of Charity

Davidson appeals to the notion of radical interpretation in order to develop a theory of language, or more broadly, a theory of linguistic understanding. What is radical

¹¹⁵ It is knowledge-apt belief that is of primary interest to epistemologists. This kind of belief is capable of being supported by evidence, so we are in a position to rationally evaluate its truth and therefore it is knowledge-apt. If we have no epistemic reason for regarding a belief true, then it is not a knowledge-apt belief. For a comprehensive taxonomy of different kinds of beliefs, see Stevenson (2002, 119-120). He distinguishes six kinds of beliefs, including non-linguistic object-directed beliefs, non-linguistic mind-directed beliefs, linguistic object-directed primitive beliefs, linguistic mind-directed primitive beliefs, linguistic object-directed reasoned beliefs and linguistic mind-directed reasoned beliefs. I think that non-linguistic beliefs are not knowledge-apt, for the simple reason that they don't have an expressible content, so we are not in a position to determine whether a piece of evidence is in support of or against them.

interpretation? Basically, it's a fantasy scenario where one is in a completely new place, say a remote island in which one encounters an unknown aboriginal tribe. One tries to understand residents by figuring out what their beliefs are and what their utterances mean. However, the interpreter has no prior knowledge of either the speaker's beliefs or the meanings of the speaker's utterances. In such a scenario, what are available to the interpreter are only publicly observable behaviours and utterances, or more specifically, that individuals hold certain sentences true at certain times and in certain situations. The interpreter has to adopt a third-person stance to understand something internal to the speaker. Nonetheless, understanding a speaker seems to be extremely difficult as Davidson (1973) remarks, since the speaker's belief and the meaning of her utterance are interdependent in accounting for why she holds a sentence true. Call this the *interdependence problem*. Given the interdependence, it follows that the interpreter cannot assign a meaning to a speaker's utterance without specifying the speaker's beliefs, and she cannot identify the speaker's beliefs without figuring out what the speaker's utterances mean.

To see this, we can simply consider what we normally do in everyday life. We express our beliefs by uttering words or sentences. In doing this, we must also be competent in using our idiolect so that we are able to find the appropriate way to express our beliefs. For instance, if I intend to express my belief that Edinburgh is a beautiful city by uttering the sentence 'Edinburgh is a beautiful city', then I am doing so correctly since I choose the proper sentence to express the corresponding belief. Otherwise, my expression would be improper. Suppose now we are to interpret someone who utters this very sentence. How can we start our interpretation?

The problem is that we cannot assign the meaning *Edinburgh is a beautiful city* to S's utterance if we are ignorant of what S believes. By the same token, we cannot figure out what S believes unless we already have an idea of what her utterance means. When we plan to assign belief and meaning to a speaker in the course of radical interpretation, we can explain why the speaker holds a sentence true in more than one way. Suppose S utters 'X', then I take S to hold her sentence X true and give two interpretations as follows:

(Int1) S believes P

X means that P

Hence S holds X true

(Int2) S believes Q

X means that Q

Hence S holds X true

In (Int1) and (Int2), both interpretations provide an account of why S holds X true based on an ascription of S's utterance and S's belief. However, potential rival interpretations are countless. Thus, it would be very difficult for us even to interpret a single utterance. The fact that one utterance can be interpreted in multiple ways indicates that belief and meaning are co-varied in explaining why S holds a sentence true. Without more constraints, we can't determine which interpretation is the optimal or the most accurate one.

In order to resolve this problem, Davidson appeals to the principle of charity. Roughly put—Davidson gives slightly different formulations of this principle in his work (see Davidson 1967; 1973; 1974)—the principle of charity requires that the interpreter and the speaker share mostly true and coherent beliefs, by the interpreter's own light. How can this principle help solve the problem of interdependence between belief and meaning? Notice that the interdependence problem arises out of the co-variation of meaning and belief in explaining one's holding (a sentence) true attitude. That is to say, given that one holds a sentence true, we can have different interpretations and each interpretation is an assignment of belief and meaning. However, once we keep belief as a constant factor as far as possible, we can determine meaning more easily. With belief being fixed, we can ascribe meaning to one's utterance, and those ascriptions are intelligible by our own light. For example, let S say 'there's a hippopotamus in the refrigerator'. Davidson (1968: 100-101) remarks that we prefer interpreting S's utterance as saying that there is an orange in the refrigerator rather than that there is a hippopotamus in the refrigerator. The reason is that we find the former interpretation more reasonable when S's further account includes descriptions that we normally take an orange to fit better, rather than a hippopotamus. Notice, here we take our beliefs about orange into consideration when

determining the meaning of S's utterance.

Brueckner (1986) contends that guaranteeing that the interpreter and the speaker share beliefs as much as possible, as in the orange case, would result in ridiculous interpretations when the speaker and the interpreter live quite different lives, such as when an interpreter from tropical area ascribes a belief to a Siberian resident that he has never seen snow. What's worse, not only is *massive agreement* in beliefs not enough, but also it won't be better if we add that we assign similar beliefs to a speaker by referring to similar *evidence*. Compare me and my envatted counterpart. By definition, our experiences are subjectively indistinguishable. And if we understand evidence along the epistemic internalist line (e.g., accessibilism), then our internalist evidence consists of facts that we can know by reflection alone.¹¹⁶ Since me and my envatted counterpart have subjectively indistinguishable perceptual experience, it appears plausible that we can know by reflection alone the same facts and therefore we have the same evidence. Accordingly, it is required by charity to attribute true and coherent beliefs to my counterpart, but this move is at odds with the intuition that a BIV cannot have many true beliefs about her environment. Moreover, unless interpreters have generally true beliefs in the first place, their attributed beliefs to others could not be true. In other words, it makes no sense to assign true beliefs if interpreters are massively wrong. Thus, there is something wanting in defence of the principle of charity, and Davidson is also aware of the weakness. Later on, Davidson puts forward the triangulation argument to defend the principle of charity.

2. Triangulation

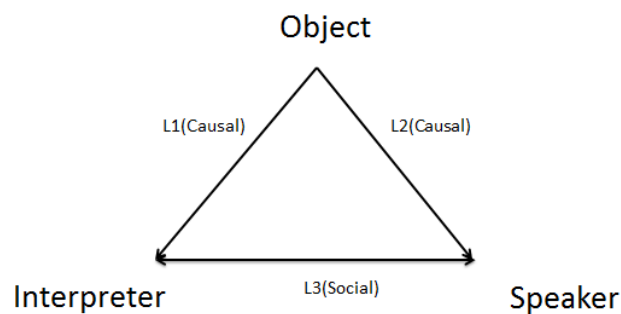
The principle of charity remains problematic in that massive agreement and similar evidence cannot guarantee that attributed beliefs are generally true. A crucial problem is that if we can't determine the cause of beliefs, it is still possible that our beliefs are mistaken in the main since our beliefs can be caused by the evil demon rather than an

¹¹⁶ Note that not all internalists would say that S and her envatted counterpart have the same evidence. For example, see my discussion on epistemological disjunctivism in Chapter Four.

objective world. Consequently, Davidson has to settle the issue how a belief gets its content. In Davidson (2001, 105), he suggests a triangulation model of radical interpretation:

If I were bolted to the earth, I would have no way of determining the distance from me of many objects. I would only know they were on some line drawn from me towards them. I might interact successfully with objects, but I could have no way of giving content to the question where they were. Not being bolted down, I am free to triangulate, one that requires two creatures. Each interacts with an object, but what gives each the concept of the way things are objectively is the base line formed between the creatures by language. The fact that they share a concept of truth alone makes sense of the claim that they have beliefs, that they are able to assign objects a place in the public world.

Here is an illustration of the idea:



A triangulation, just like a triangle in geometry, involves three points and three lines. It consists of an interpreter I, a speaker S, an object O, and lines connecting I, S and O respectively. I-O and S-O are both causal relations between a subject and the external world, while S-I form a social network between two subjects. In triangulation, both subjects respond to the object located in a shared world and react to each other's reactions. Why does Davidson appeal to such an argument? I suppose Davidson is in need of a new argument to justify the principle of charity and to establish that belief is in its nature veridical.¹¹⁷ How can this be achieved via triangulation? Davidson (2001,

¹¹⁷ Note that by 'belief is in its nature veridical' Davidson means that reflections on how we acquire contentful beliefs would reveal that our beliefs are generally true. We should not confuse this reading with the normativist view about belief. Shah & Velleman (2005) contends that it is constitutive of belief that belief is the sort of thing that is correct if and only if true. On this view, what's distinctive of belief is that it is subject to this particular standard of correctness.

151) urges that, ‘we must, in the plainest and methodologically most basic cases, *take the objects of a belief to be the causes of that belief.*’ However, in determining the cause of a belief, we have to face the ambiguity of the concept of cause. The ambiguity is two-fold. On the one hand, one cannot locate the object that causes one’s belief. The cause of one’s belief may be distal or proximal, and it may lie at any point along the I-O line; on the other hand, one cannot determine what aspects of the object typically cause one’s belief. In triangulation, what is essential is that when two causal lines converge, each can locate the cause of their respective beliefs. Why is the convergence of lines necessary for determining the cause of beliefs? The reason is, what causes my belief may stand at any point along the I-O line, and so does whatever causes your belief. Nonetheless, what causes your belief can’t be something in my mind or stimuli in by brain (i.e., proximal), therefore the cause of my belief must be somewhere in the external environment where our causal lines meet. Is the convergence enough to specify the cause of belief? The answer is no. Davidson needs the I-S line to identify the cause of belief. To see this, recall the orange in the refrigerator case. Even the interpreter and the speaker can locate where the cause of their beliefs is, they have a disagreement about what the object is. Only through further descriptions, they can settle whether the cause is an orange or a hippopotamus. Those further descriptions are not only further information that can disambiguate the cause of belief, but also a requirement for a rational belief. The role of I-S line is significantly vital in the following two aspects.

Firstly, it provides the space of error. In social communication, both the interpreter and the speaker are in a position to share and compare their reactions to the external environment. In doing so, they identify the cause of their beliefs. When one alone assigns beliefs to oneself or to others without communication, one sometimes makes mistakes. However, it is difficult for one to correct the mistake alone, because one cannot objectively distinguish what is true from what is false. After all, one cannot set up an objective criterion against which correct and incorrect applications can be judged. Thought is objective, Davidson (2001, 129) says, in that it has a content the truth value of which (with rare exceptions) is independent of the thinker.

To get the idea of we may be mistaken in our beliefs, we need to have an interpersonal interaction. In such an interaction, we correlate our reactions to the external environment with the other's reactions. When the correlation is set up, we can compare whether the external phenomena leads to the perceived associated reaction of the other. Occasionally, the expected correlation fails, so we can realize that we are mistaken. Here, Davidson is illuminated by Wittgenstein's discussion on rule following. As Davidson (2001, 129) puts it, following a rule is different from thinking that one is following a rule. The latter is at least a matter of doing as others do. Although the concept of truth is not defined by consensus, consensus creates the space of its application. In particular, the criterion of correct application is not determined by any individual alone, so social communication provides a space in which we could realize that the truth of our beliefs is determined by an objective world which we share with others.

Secondly, it seems that what is at issue here is language communication. It is true that we can identify the cause of a belief only in communication, but communication is not only a matter of language, it's also a matter of thought. In order to specify an orange as the cause of a belief, the interpreter considers several sentences of the speaker, not only the first claim that 'there's a hippopotamus in the refrigerator'. Those sentences help to determine whether the speaker is talking about an orange or a hippopotamus. Meanwhile, given that sentences express thoughts, we can infer that if the speaker's belief is about an orange, a set of further beliefs should also be endorsed by the speaker.

Obviously, Davidson is here invoking semantic holism. Semantic holism is the thesis that the meaning of a sentence is determined by other related sentences in the language. Even though it is difficult to draw a clear line where related sentences end, I suppose the core idea behind it is still plausible. We can motivate semantic holism by considering the indeterminacy of interpretation.¹¹⁸ In developing a theory of meaning for a language, one must deal with the totality of utterances in that language. However,

¹¹⁸ See more discussion in Malpas (2014).

given a certain finite amount of evidence, we can have more than one theory of interpretation that suffices to account for the evidence. Different interpretations can differ in a particular assignment of meaning and belief, but they would be equally plausible in explaining the total evidence. It is the whole sentences and beliefs that have equally satisfying explanation to one's action regardless of differences in minor places. What follows from the indeterminacy of interpretation is the holistic nature of meaning and belief rather than a practical or cognitive limitation in interpretation. Another reason to support semantic holism is to appeal to the inferential property between meaning and beliefs. For instance, 'orange' is inferentially connected to 'fruit', and further inferentially connected to 'non-meat'; similarly, my belief that this is an orange is inferentially connected to my belief that this is a fruit and that this is not meat. The holistic structure of meaning and belief not only serves as an explanatory tool in accounting for one's mental content, but also constitutes a normative regulation on any attribution of meaning and belief. Therefore, to entertain a singular proposition is not possible in Davidson's view; at least the rationality of thought and language can only be appreciated in a holistic structure.

To summarize, in the triangulation model, the content of a belief is determined by two factors. The first is the cause of the belief, which is indicated by I-O and S-O lines; the second is other relevant beliefs in the belief system, which is also a social trait embodied in the S-O line. So far, Davidson may have plenty of resources for arguing that belief is in its nature veridical, and surely one can proceed to argue against the possibility of massive error. However, I will not follow this line of response, and for reasons that I will discuss in the next section.

3. Interlude: Davidson's Anti-Sceptical Strategy

As literature shows, Davidson's conclusion that belief is in its nature veridical has different implications for anti-scepticism. On one reading suggested by Nagel (1999, 203), this claim is a direct refutation of scepticism. For, scepticism presumes that there is possibility that our beliefs are massively wrong, but Davidson's proposal aims

to establish that there cannot be massive error in our beliefs. Hence, a crucial assumption that motivates scepticism is refuted. This reading can be further supported by considering the fact that Davidson's discussion of radical interpretation and triangulation has provided a transcendental argument for his conclusion. In particular, it is an ambitious transcendental argument which concludes that no believer's set of beliefs could be massively wrong from the possibility that we have contentful beliefs. If this reading were correct, then surely we would have reasons to think that the sceptic is wrong. In 'A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge', Davidson says:

What is needed to answer the skeptic is to show that someone with a (more or less) coherent set of beliefs has a reason to suppose his beliefs are not mistaken in the main. What we have shown is that it is absurd to look for a justifying ground for the totality of beliefs, something outside this totality which we can use to test or compare with our beliefs. The answer to our problem must then be to find a reason for supposing most of our beliefs are true that is not a form of evidence. (Davidson 2001, 147)

I have not been concerned with the canons of evidential support (if such there be), but to show that all that counts as evidence or justification for a belief must come from the same totality of belief to which it belongs. (Davidson 2001, 154)

From the two passages, it seems that Davidson's strategy is obstacle-overriding in that he is using *a priori* argument to establish the contrary of what the sceptic contends. Specifically, he is providing a non-evidential reason for the general truth of our beliefs. However, this way of reading Davidson's strategy is problematic.

First, this reading suggests that Davidson is using an ambitious transcendental argument to counter the sceptic. The proposed conclusion of his argument is that no believer's set of beliefs could be massively wrong, and this is surely a non-psychological fact. As is discussed in chapter two, ambitious transcendental arguments are problematic in that they have to bridge the mind-world gap, and therefore Stroud's dilemma ensues.¹¹⁹ In order for Davidson's proposal to work, his

¹¹⁹ Here is Stroud's dilemma: ambitious transcendental arguments are either superfluous in that they must trade on verificationism or idealism to bridge the gap between a psychological fact and a non-psychological fact, and therefore the anti-sceptical work is done primarily by verificationism or

proponents must defend ambitious transcendental arguments and explain how this non-psychological fact can be satisfactorily established.

Second, as Sosa (2009, 118) remarks, if justification for the proposition that our beliefs cannot be massively wrong comes from Davidson's transcendental argument, then this justification would only be available to those who can appreciate the argument. Other everyday believers and non-Davidsonian philosophers, as long as they cannot run the argument against the sceptical challenge, will still be benighted by the sceptic. That is to say, this argument has a narrow scope of application.

Third, on a later stage, Davidson changes his attitude towards scepticism. Consider Davidson's replies to commentators:

I have vacillated over the years on how to describe my attitude toward scepticism. Do I think that if I am right about the nature of thought scepticism is false, or that scepticism simply cannot get off the ground? Passages Stroud quotes suggest the former. At the same time, I have been happy to go along with Rorty in telling the sceptic to get lost. The two poses can be reconciled by pointing out that though I think scepticism as Stroud formulates it is false, I did not set out to show this. Reflecting on the nature of thought and interpretation led me to a position which, if correct, entails that we have a basically sound view of the world around us. If so, there is no point attempting, in addition, to show the sceptic wrong. (Davidson 1999b, 163)

I now think this attempt to fending off criticism was a mistake, if for no other reason than that it would seem it would seem to credit only those whose philosophical thinking is correct with knowledge. The right thing to say is rather this: we are justified in taking our perceptual beliefs to be true, even when they are not and so when they are true, they constitute knowledge (this is what I meant by saying our perceptual beliefs are "veridical"). But since our only reasons for holding them true are the support they get from further perceptual beliefs and general coherence with how we think things are, the underlying source of justification is not itself a reason. We do not infer our perceptual beliefs from something else more foundational. (Davidson 1999c, 208)

From these two quotes, we find that Davidson reorients his anti-sceptical strategy. He aims neither to run an argument against scepticism, nor to provide reasoning-based

idealism; or, given that they don't establish a non-psychological conclusion, they are disappointing because they fail to answer the sceptic.

justification against scepticism. Rather, he is to show that our considerations of how contentful beliefs are acquired would enable us to see the veridical nature of beliefs. That is to say, prior to our engagement with the sceptical argument, reflecting on the way of our forming beliefs has entitled us to know that our beliefs are largely true. Further, everyday believers, even though they haven't considered this particular argument, have default justification in believing so. Sosa rightly (2009, 131) comments that 'we would not form beliefs having the contents of our empirical beliefs did we not interact appropriately with surroundings characterized generally as are our surroundings in the world'. With this point in mind, what the sceptic presumes just cannot get off the ground. For, there is no such possibility that we form many contentful beliefs about the world and then we find them massively wrong. The sceptic is thus posing an ill-formed question, i.e. how can we know that our perceptual beliefs cannot be massively wrong? Trying to answer the question is therefore misunderstanding the nature of our beliefs. In this sense, Davidson submits that there is no point in showing the sceptic wrong. Recall our discussion of the modest transcendental argument strategy. The conclusion of a modest transcendental argument is something we must commit to if we believe that, for instance, we have contentful belief at all. If Davidson's conclusion is construed modestly, then he does not need to cross the mind-world bridge and he can rest content with the theoretical commitment that we must believe that our belief attributions are largely true. Once the commitment is revealed, the sceptic's initial contention that we could attribute perceptual beliefs that are fundamentally mistaken is undermined. Importantly, as long as the sceptic grants that we have contentful beliefs; her worry is ill-formed. This way of reading of Davidson suggests that he is using modest transcendental argument in a diagnostic fashion because his argument undermines radical scepticism, and his theoretical diagnosis has prevented the sceptical challenge from happening.¹²⁰

Until now, we have been focused on Davidson's discussion of the veridical nature of belief. And the most he can do is to undermine the sceptical assumption that there

¹²⁰ See Pritchard (2013)'s recent endorsement of this reading.

could be massive error in our beliefs, and this line of thought can undercut the initial plausibility of the claim that we cannot know the denial of the sceptical hypothesis. However, the sceptic may ask, how can we rule out that we are recently envatted? For even if we must acquire contentful beliefs in the external world, once we become envatted we still face the sceptical predicament. The reason is, when we are transplanted from the normal world into a BIV world, we would have subjectively indistinguishable experiences. In this case, reiterating that our beliefs must be about the external world and are thereby largely true makes little help. Because the sceptic no longer relies on the possibility that we have contentful beliefs but these beliefs are massively wrong. Instead, her argument will hinge on the idea that our previous contentful beliefs will lose connection with the external world but we are insensitive to this change. What's worse, we would still form beliefs based on our non-veridical experiences, and we may continue to think that most of our beliefs are true.

To summarise, Davidson's argument can help rule out the possibility that our beliefs never get their contents from the external world, but it seems to be vulnerable to the modified sceptical attack. Does this modified sceptical attack revive the sceptical argument? In what follows, I will explore a different way of responding to the sceptical challenge. In particular, the proposed Davidsonian response diagnoses our applications of the closure_{RK} principle. Therefore, regardless of whether the recently envatted challenge still motivates the idea that we cannot know the denial of the sceptical hypothesis, we manage to find another way out.

4. Belief, Doubt and Content

When it comes to beliefs, Davidson emphasizes that a belief must have a determinate content. What determines the content of a belief then? According to the previous discussion, we can specify the content of a belief by relating it to a world of further beliefs or its typical cause. See the following remark of Davidson (1982, 99):

Not only does each belief require a world of further beliefs to give it content and

identity, but every other propositional attitude depends for its particularity on a similar world of beliefs.

By relating a belief to other beliefs, we can determine the content of the very belief in question. This claim is also supported by the semantic holism endorsed by Davidson. And since other propositional attitudes, like doubt, hope and wishful thinking, etc. depend on beliefs, we can only proceed to doubt by having beliefs in the first place.

Davidson thus gives priority to belief among different propositional attitudes. Why is this plausible? To see this, let's have a look at the following example. When S doubts that there is a tree in the garden, she must be able to explain her doubt. Such an explanation aims to justify S's doxastic attitude. To satisfactorily explain S's doubt of a tree's being in the garden, I propose, consists of two parts. Firstly, the proposition that there is a tree in the garden should at least be intelligible to S. Surely, this proposition won't be intelligible until she holds some relevant beliefs, such as that a tree is an object with branches and trunk and that a garden is a space where plants are cultivated and displayed. These relevant beliefs make it intelligible to S what it is for a tree to be in the garden. Without those further beliefs in play, her doubt regarding the proposition would be void of content and thereby nonsense. Secondly, upon this basis, S needs further to determine which doxastic attitude she should bear towards it. If S has evidence favouring her relevant beliefs aforementioned, then her doxastic attitude should be belief; on the contrary, if S has evidence suggesting otherwise, S is rational to doubt that there is a tree in the garden.

The same holds for other propositional attitudes like hope that there is a tree in the garden, or fear that there is a tree in the garden. The core idea is that, in order to have a propositional attitude towards a proposition, it is necessary to have a network of related beliefs which serve to make the propositional attitude in question intelligible and contentful. Only after it becomes intelligible to an agent what it is for a certain proposition to obtain can her doxastic attitude towards the proposition be correctly applied. Therefore, the starting point of any propositional attitude is belief, and the propositional attitude of doubt is no different in this respect.

In terms of doubt, Davidson (1999b, 165) proposes a constraint:

It is only after belief has a content that it can be doubted. Only in the context of a system tied to the world can a doubt be formulated.

Davidson's claim here can be split up into two aspects. One is how we can have a doubt; the other is about how to formulate a doubt if we had it. However, on closer inspection, I suspect Davidson has only one thing in mind. It is obvious that the logic of doubt, according to Davidson, presupposes belief with a content.¹²¹ That is to say; it is not possible to doubt that *p* unless *p* has a content, and it is only by having a prior set of relevant contentful beliefs that one can give this doubt a content. This claim is a natural consequence of the previous discussion on the order of propositional attitudes, which says that belief is prior to doubt.

Suppose then we form a genuine doubt that *p* by having a prior set of relevant contentful beliefs, why do we have to appeal to a context of system tied to the world in order to formulate the doubt? Won't it be enough for us to have a set of beliefs, worldly or otherwise, that can help us to determine the content of the proposition being doubted? Here, we need to return to the question, in virtue of what the content of a belief is determined. I have made it clear that both a set of further beliefs and the typical cause of a belief contribute to determining the content of a belief. However, the content-determining role of the typical cause is different from that played by the further relevant beliefs. In order to guarantee that our beliefs are objective, coherence between beliefs does not suffice. What is essential is that those beliefs should be about the external world, i.e., the origin of the content of beliefs is the external world. Thus, if we intend to formulate a doubt that *p*, we use our language to express this thought. Given that Davidson argues that thought and language are interdependent, it follows that the same content entertained by thought can be expressed by language. To sum up, belief and sentences owe its original content to the external world.

¹²¹ Here, what Davidson means is not that we cannot doubt proposition which have never been believed. Rather, he means that in order to doubt a proposition that *p*, we need to have some beliefs that determine the content of *P*. Specifically, we need to have semantic knowledge of concepts involved in *p*.

In what follows, I will explore the consequences of Davidson's views about doubt and belief. It seems that what is entailed by Davidson's views in this respect is that doubt can't be wholesale. Here is the reason. In order for S to have a doubt that p (where p is an everyday proposition), she must identify the content of her doubt that p. However, S can do this only by relating p to other relevant contentful beliefs which she holds; that is to say, S is required to believe for her doubt to take place. Also, since other relevant beliefs are connected to the external world, a doubt is therefore about the external world as well. Here, what S believes is fundamental to what S doubts, so S's doubt presupposes S's belief. The idea that there is a wholesale doubt is simply unintelligible, for a wholesale doubt puts all one's beliefs into question and therefore one cannot find any leftover beliefs to determine the content of those propositions being doubted. The result is that the idea of a wholesale doubt simply can't get off the ground. This is so not because there are constraints on our cognitive abilities, but rather because the essence of doubt excludes a wholesale doubt. A wholesale doubt is impossible, and thereby doubt must be in its nature local.

5. A Re-examination of the Closure_{RK} Principle

Recall the closure_{RK} principle, and let's take 'There's a rabbit in front of me' as p and 'I am not a BIV' as q, then presumably an instance of closure_{RK} would be as follows:

If I have rationally grounded knowledge that there is a rabbit in front of me, and I competently deduce the proposition that I am not a BIV from my rationally grounded knowledge that there is a rabbit in front of me and form the belief that I am not a BIV on this basis, then I have rationally grounded knowledge that I am not a BIV.

Given what I have discussed, I doubt whether this instance is plausible. I can run a competent deduction between the proposition that there is a rabbit in front of me and the proposition that I am not a BIV, but can I form a belief on this basis? Specifically,

although the proposition that there's a rabbit in front of me entails the proposition that I am not a BIV, I am wondering whether I can have a belief attitude towards the latter proposition and gain rational ground via this inference. If not, this proposition would lie beyond the realm of rationally grounded knowledge. However, it is still not clear why I am not a BIV doesn't count as a belief.

What is necessary to have a thought? Or more specifically, what does it take to have a belief? Apart from what we have discussed earlier, Davidson (2001, 104) maintains that:

In order to have a belief, it is necessary to have the concept of belief.

What is the concept of belief? One may suggest that the concept of a belief is the meaning of the concept 'belief'. In this sense, having the concept of belief is a precondition to use the word 'belief' in a sentence, which is similar to understanding the meaning of 'desk' before using the word in a sentence. However, this is not what Davidson has in mind. Davidson won't deny that there is a strong relationship between language and thought, so that in order to have a thought such as a belief, S must be able to express that belief in language. But the core idea of what is the concept of a belief is something different.

We can articulate the concept of a belief, as Davidson later suggests, by referring to the concept of objective truth. Objective truth requires that the truth of an everyday belief is not determined by any of the subject's mental states.¹²² Rather, a belief owes its truth partly to the external world. Accordingly, the truth of my belief is not determined merely by my mental states, and it is quite natural to assess my belief in part by reference to how the world is. If a belief is capable of being true or false, correct or incorrect, then having a belief that p is different from its being true that p. After all, it is possible that what I believe is not the case.¹²³ How can we cash out the

¹²² Some of our beliefs are about our mental states, e.g. I believe that I am thinking. The truth of these beliefs is determined by our mental states. However, I now only discuss everyday beliefs, that is, beliefs about contingent, empirical propositions.

¹²³ If one forms beliefs about necessary proposition, or mathematical or logical knowledge, then

possibility that my belief could be wrong? Davidson emphasizes that linguistic communication could show command of the contrast between what is believed and what is the case. Further, I contend that the possibility of a thought's being true or false is best illustrated by (i) making sense of the possibility by appealing to relevant beliefs that S holds and (ii) [...] from S's perspective.

Why is this move acceptable? The claim (i) is based on Davidson's idea just mentioned. In linguistic communication, when the difference between what is believed and what is the case is revealed, S who finds her prior belief was false must be able to make this false belief intelligible, otherwise there cannot be such thing as a recognizable error. This error is intelligible because S's belief system can explain why this belief is false and then accommodate a revised new belief. As to claim (ii), why do we have to make sense of the possibility from S's perspective? The simple reason is: when attributing a thought to someone S, we ought to consider if this thought can be held from her own light. In other words, we should take into consideration whether S has the network of beliefs to maintain the belief in question. It is for this reason that Davidson (2004, 9) remarks:

I reserve the word 'concept' for cases where it makes clear sense to speak of a mistake, a mistake not only as seen from an intelligent observer's point of view, but as seen from the creature's point of view.

Here is a case in point. If I believe that the Lake District is in Scotland, I should be aware that the belief could be false. What marks my awareness then? Is it the claim that my belief could be false? Or is it something further that could make the supposed false belief intelligible? Awareness of the possibility of being false does not bring us any closer to the intelligibility of being false, we have to establish a room for the belief to be false. How is this room to be built? From my perspective and what Davidson has argued, the room of false belief rests on many other true beliefs. To realize that this belief could be false does not require us to find more evidence to

there is no such possibility that one's beliefs would be false.

support this claim. What is required is that it must be possible for us to make sense of the belief's being false. My example continues: suppose my belief that the Lake District is in Scotland is false (it is actually false), its being false would be intelligible for the reason that I had misidentified Lomond National Park, which is instead located in Scotland, as the Lake District, or for the reason that I was ignorant of the boundary between Scotland and England, which caused my failure to recognize that the Lake District is a part of England. In this case, my false belief remains possible because its falsity can be explained by other beliefs I still hold, such as that I believe that I had misidentified Lomond National Park as the Lake District, or that I believe that I was unsure where the boundary between Scotland and England lies. The point is that a certain belief's being false does not lead to a breakdown in my belief system so that I still have beliefs to which I appeal to account for this possibility.

Here, I need to clarify what a 'breakdown' means. When we find a prior belief to be false, it is natural for us to explain this situation by appealing to some undoubted beliefs, or a step further, to accommodate this finding by revising certain other beliefs accordingly. Changing the epistemic status of a belief, i.e. being true, being false and doubtful etc., may result in a chain of changes in our belief system, and the degree of change is determined by its status in the belief system. What I contend here may sound like a Quinean picture of knowledge¹²⁴, but I shall limit my discussion to the content of beliefs only, i.e. what may cause a drastic change in the content of beliefs in the belief system. I would say nothing about adopting or abandoning beliefs for practical reasons or moral reasons.¹²⁵ To summarize, what I mean by breakdown of a

¹²⁴ According to Quine (1978), our whole system of scientific claims, or our "*web of belief*," faces the tribunal of experience as a unity. When encountered with recalcitrant experience, or experience that does not fit our expectations, we could change observation beliefs, meanings of beliefs or even logical laws to accommodate this change. Essentially, nothing in our belief system is immune to revision. However, logical laws or fundamental hypotheses of a theory are so important that any change in them would result in massive changes in our belief system. Restrained by the maxim of minimum mutilation, we tend to avoid drastic changes and make adjustments in other places.

¹²⁵ For instance, a doctor may, for the patient's benefit, tell her something that isn't true. In this case, a false belief is adopted for practical reasons. Likewise, we tend to think that cheating is morally wrong. Even though cheating can bring benefits to an individual at times, given certain moral considerations such as that we should be righteous and we should treat others fairly, we have sufficient moral reasons to abandon the belief that cheating is a good behaviour. The point is that we change beliefs for non-epistemic reasons in everyday life.

belief system is a drastic change in the content of beliefs in the system. Then what can cause such a breakdown? In my view, the answer can be found in the origin of the content of beliefs. Since a belief gets its content from other related beliefs and external causal objects, what causes a breakdown in a system must be fundamental commitments in these two aspects, i.e., those about the relations between beliefs and those regarding the external world. The former are logical truths, and the latter are our commitments to the external world.¹²⁶ There is no wonder that a change in logical truth such as declining the law of identity would have a devastating consequence in our belief system. But it is not equally clear what the consequence would be if a change occurs in our commitment to the external world. Let's now consider the following pair:

I am a BIV = the sceptical hypothesis does obtain

I am not a BIV = the sceptical hypothesis does not obtain

From our perspective, we are committed to the denial of the sceptical hypothesis, i.e., that I am not a BIV. What comes next is a supposed change in our commitment. Our commitment changes to my being a BIV, or the obtaining of the sceptical hypothesis. What follows from this change? Apparently, our ordinary beliefs regarding the allegedly external object are all changed since the causes of beliefs are only stimuli generated by a supercomputer. It seems that we can still imagine what it is to be a BIV, but there is surely something wrong with this. In normal circumstances, when we make claims such as that 'there is a tree in front of me', the relevant belief is caused by, and thereby about, a tree standing in front of the speaker/believer; while in BIV case, we find it plausible that the same sentence would be caused by and thereby about a series of stimuli regardless of the subjectively indistinguishable perceptual experience. However, what makes our claim about the change of content plausible? It is not that someone had been or is now in the exact sceptical situation, but that some

¹²⁶ For non-sceptics, we commit to the external world; while for the sceptic, they can commit to a different cause of belief, such as the evil demon or a super computer.

cases, such as dreams or hallucinations, underlie the plausibility of such claim locally. Nonetheless, the local plausibility does not easily extend to a universal plausibility, so the sceptical hypotheses usually rest on a thin sense that a sceptical scenario does not generate a logical contradiction, thus it is a metaphysical possibility. However, if I have been always a BIV from birth, chances are that I would never see that my beliefs are about stimuli generated by a supercomputer. Even though the supercomputer can bestow me any stimuli needed, my belief can never get content about the computer. What's more, I couldn't have an idea of what the objective world is. Since in order to get the content from the objective world, BIV must be isolated from the supercomputer, otherwise the belief would still be about stimuli rather than worldly objects. It is obvious that by changing our fundamental commitment to the cause of our beliefs, we are committed to changing the content of our ordinary beliefs as well. What is crucial now is that, from *my perspective*, all my previous beliefs would have their content drastically modified since they couldn't be about the external world as I earlier assumed. However, I cannot make sense any of the false belief because I don't have any contentful beliefs left to which I can appeal, thus this possibility of its being false, or the possibility that I am a BIV cannot be genuinely appreciated by me. If I cannot appreciate the possibility of its being false, then the original proposition that I am not a BIV does not qualify as a belief at all. It does not count as a belief because no one can appreciate this proposition's being false with determinate content.

Interestingly, the case would be likewise if we start from a sceptical hypothesis. If I am committed to my being a BIV in the first place, then supposing the possibility that I am not a BIV would also change the content of all beliefs already formed. All my beliefs are about computer stimuli, and none of them is caused by the external world. If I were to form any belief about the external world due to the change of my commitment, I would have to sweep all my previous beliefs and form new basic beliefs from the scratch. Since no any contentful belief remains to help me identify the content of my subsequent beliefs after I commit to my not being a BIV, this initial commitment fails to be a belief either. Thus, it seems that no matter what we are committed to in the first place, whether I am a BIV or not, as far as this commitment

leads to a massive change of the content of beliefs, it cannot be a knowledge-apt belief at all.

To sum up, in order to have a knowledge-apt belief, we must have the concept of knowledge-apt belief. We can command the concept of knowledge-apt belief by having the concept of objective truth. Objective truth requires that we are aware of and are capable of appreciating the possibility of a belief's being true or false. And this possibility cannot be appreciated unless we have some related contentful beliefs to identify the content of the very belief. Crucially, our commitment to the general cause of beliefs is so fundamental that a change in this respect would result in a total change of content in all beliefs, which leaves us no contentful belief at all to make this possibility intelligible. Therefore, it is impossible to appreciate the possibility of our fundamental commitment's being false from our own perspective. It is now clear that our commitment does not meet the requirement of having a belief. And it follows that the sceptical hypothesis does not obtain is not a knowledge-apt belief. Thus, the $\text{closure}_{\text{RK}}$ principle is not applicable to the evaluation of the sceptical hypothesis.

6. Davidsonian Argument and the Underdetermination_{RK}-Based Sceptical Argument

Now that we can respond to $\text{closure}_{\text{RK}}$ -based radical scepticism along the Davidsonian line, can we respond to the underdetermination_{RK}-based sceptical argument as well? If so, then we can rest content with this remedy for scepticism. Recall the underdetermination_{RK}-based sceptical argument:

*The Underdetermination_{RK}-Based Sceptical Argument*¹²⁷

(UR1) If S's rational support for believing that p does not favour p over an incompatible hypothesis q and S knows the incompatibility, then S does not have rationally grounded knowledge that p. [The underdetermination_{RK} principle]

¹²⁷ This formulation is adapted from Pritchard (2015, 30).

(UR2) S's rational support for believing that p does not favour p over q and S knows that p is incompatible with q.

(UR3) Thus S does not have rationally grounded knowledge that p.

The challenge posed by the underdetermination_{RK}-based sceptical argument is that, whether we are in an everyday situation or in a sceptical scenario, our rational support does not favour an everyday belief over its sceptical counterpart. Therefore, given my perceptual evidence, I cannot have rationally grounded everyday knowledge. What we have discussed so far reveals that I cannot have rationally grounded knowledge that I am not a BIV, because it is not a knowledge-apt belief. However, it is nonetheless possible for me to have rationally grounded everyday knowledge. For instance, consider my belief that there is an apple on the table. I have relevant beliefs to determine its content, and its being false is also intelligible to me. Hence, it is a belief which I can rationally evaluate. However, I may form this belief based on my perceptual experience either in an everyday scenario or in a sceptical scenario. And if my rational support does not favour my ordinary belief over its sceptical counterpart, the sceptical challenge remains outstanding. In order to respond to the underdetermination_{RK}-based sceptical argument, a Davidsonian response needs to say something about our respective rational support in a good case and in a bad case.¹²⁸ Obviously, in either situation, perceptual evidence is used to justify our beliefs. To compare our rational support in the two cases is not a straightforward thing if we proceed along the Davidsonian line. For one thing, he argues that what justify everyday beliefs are our relevant beliefs, rather than our experiences.¹²⁹ Therefore, to compare our rational support for beliefs in both cases is not to compare their respective experiences. For another thing, because he doesn't explicitly endorse a specific theory of justification, it is not clear how relevant beliefs can justify

¹²⁸ I assume that in a good case, our (veridical) experiences are caused by the external world; while in the bad case, we are in a sceptical scenario and our experiences are thereby detached from the external world, i.e., we are in hallucinations.

¹²⁹ See 'A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge' in Davidson (2001). I don't intend to defend Davidson's view here, for I only aim to show that his approach, even broadly construed, cannot deal with the underdetermination_{RK}-based sceptical challenge.

(rationally support) a belief according to Davidson.¹³⁰ With these two points in mind, we find it difficult to give a Davidsonian answer to the underdetermination_{RK}-based sceptical argument.

However, there is an interesting idea worth exploring. Recall that the content of a belief is determined by its typical cause and other relevant beliefs. For any particular belief I have, say that there is an apple on the table, its content determiners are different in different cases. In the good case, the content of my belief is determined by external objects, including (at least) an apple and a table, and my relevant beliefs such as what an apple is, what a table is and what it is for an object to be placed on another object. While in the bad case, say a BIV case, the content of my belief is determined by computer stimuli and my relevant beliefs such as what an apple is, what a table is and what it is for an object to be placed on another object. Even though it is not clear whether the relevant beliefs in the two cases are the same, it is evident that external objects and computer stimulus are entirely different. That is to say, from the subjectively indistinguishable experiences, either we take in a fact of the world, or we don't. However, the differences in the cause of our beliefs are not transparent for believers, and therefore it is possible for us to form the same belief even though we are not in the good case. Now that part of the content determiners (the causal part) in the good case is different from that in the bad case, are they comparable? I find it a tricky question. On the one hand, it seems that, in the good case, the causal part of the content determiner for my belief that there is an apple on the table favours my belief over its sceptical alternative that I am hallucinating that there is an apple on the table. The reason is, the fact that external objects cause my experience favours my belief that there is an apple on the table, but not its sceptical counterpart. On the other hand, however, this fact is not reflectively available to me via experience even in the good case. The first reason is, Davidson only allows rational support from other beliefs, so any rational support from experience is not permitted from the Davidsonian

¹³⁰ As I have argued, relevant beliefs help determine the content of a belief. But content determination does not amount to epistemic justification. Rather, it is a basis for epistemic justification.

perspective. Also, when I have the experience as if there is an apple on the table, I cannot acquire this fact via my experience. The only way I can gain it is by making a commitment. That is, only if I have already been committed to my experiences' being caused by the external world, then once I am in the good case, this fact will favour my everyday belief. Here comes the crux, in the underdetermination_{RK}-based sceptical argument, it is *rational support* that is at issue. Rational support is rational in the sense that it must be reflectively accessible to us, so we can adduce them to support our beliefs. In this sense, a causal fact does not count as rational support. Crucially, if any favouring support in the good case is external to us, it seems that there is no internalist way out of the sceptical predicament. However, if we have a better way to answer the underdetermination_{RK}-based sceptical challenge along the internalist line, then the Davidsonian attempt would be less palatable. With this point in mind, in the next chapter, I will examine how epistemological disjunctivism treats the sceptical problem.

7. Concluding Remarks

It is now clear that while the closure_{RK} principle is plausible, it does not licence the sceptical conclusion. What is pivotal is that this principle is only applicable to (knowledge-apt) beliefs. Unfortunately, our commitment to the denial of the sceptical hypothesis is not a (knowledge-apt) belief. From the Davidsonian perspective, a (knowledge-apt) belief essentially involves other content-giving beliefs. Commitment to the denial of the sceptical hypothesis is so fundamental that, when being doubted, any contentful beliefs would therefore be discarded. Hence, it will be impossible to take it as a rational, contentful and (knowledge-apt) belief. As a result, we can retain the closure_{RK} principle while evading the sceptical challenge apparently posed by this principle. In the meantime, the Davidsonian response cannot handle the underdetermination_{RK}-based sceptical challenge, because we are not shown whether our rational support in the good case favours one's everyday belief over its sceptical counterpart. Consequently, in the next chapter, I will consider a more promising

approach dealing with the underdetermination_{RK}-based sceptical argument, i.e., epistemological disjunctivism proposed by John McDowell and Duncan Pritchard.

Chapter Four

Epistemological Disjunctivism and Underdetermination_{RK}-Based Radical Scepticism

0. Introduction

In chapter three, I examined a Davidsonian response to closure_{RK}-based radical scepticism. The goal of chapter four is to explore how we can respond to underdetermination_{RK}-based radical scepticism. In particular, I will consider epistemological disjunctivism proposed by John McDowell and Duncan Pritchard. Pritchard offers a detailed defence of epistemological disjunctivism, so I will focus more on his proposal. Epistemological disjunctivism is different from metaphysical disjunctivism. The latter is concerned with the disjunctive nature of our perception while the former is concerned with the epistemological implications of this thesis.

1. Motivating Epistemological Disjunctivism

In this section, I will present and articulate the core claim of epistemological disjunctivism (henceforth ED for short), and I will discuss how we motivate the essential component of ED, namely, one's factive reason *seeing that p*.

1.1 Epistemological Disjunctivism: An outline

What's the core claim of epistemological disjunctivism? According to Pritchard (2015, 124), epistemological disjunctivism is the view that:

In paradigm cases of perceptual knowledge, the knowledge in question enjoys a rational support that is both *factive* and *reflectively accessible*...the rational support one has for one's knowledge that *p* is that one *sees that p*.

Some clarifications are in order. First, what are paradigm cases of perceptual knowledge? We can identify two kinds of cases in our perception. On the one hand, we have ‘good’ cases where one has veridical perceptual experience; on the other hand, we have ‘bad’ cases where one is in an untoward situation such that one undergoes illusion or deception. Undoubtedly, perceptual knowledge is acquired by our sense organs. However, in order to make our discussion more straightforward, we will only consider perceptual knowledge that is acquired by our visual perception. Further, good cases include optimal cases and suboptimal cases. In optimal cases, both one sees that *p* and one does not possess a misleading defeater, so one tends to believe what one propositionally sees;¹³¹ while in suboptimal cases, misleading defeaters prevent one from believing what one propositionally sees, so one does not know that *p* although one is offered the chance to know. In what follows, paradigm cases refer to optimal cases.

Second, what it is for rational support to be both factive and reflectively accessible? We can easily understand what it would be for rational support to be either factive or reflectively accessible. One’s rational support can be factive if it entails the believed proposition that it is rational support for. In particular, seeing that *p* is factive rational support. For one to see that *p*, the truth of *p* is required. That is to say, if *p* were not true, then one would not see that *p*. One’s rational support is reflectively accessible if one can be aware of one’s rational support by introspection alone. This is an internalist requirement on epistemic justification. For, if one’s support is not reflectively accessible, then this support would be opaque to one. In that case, one’s support would be beyond one’s ken and therefore one is unable to adduce the reason that is one’s rational support *as* one’s rational support for one’s belief. How could a support like this be called rational then?

¹³¹ For instance, in the optimal case, when I see that there is a tiger in the pen, I will believe that there is a tiger in the pen on this basis because there is no other reason why I should do otherwise. However, in the suboptimal case, imagine my friend who studies zoology falsely tells me that what I see is not a tiger but a lion (I am now in a suboptimal case). In this case, she presents a misleading defeater to me. If I cannot defeat the misleading defeater, then I will take her verdict as a reason against the proposition that there is a tiger in the pen. Therefore, it is rational for me not to believe the proposition because I have a reason, albeit a bad reason, against it.

Third, according to ED, one's rational support in a good case and one's rational support in a bad case are 'radically different *in kind*'.¹³² To see this, let's first consider our respective epistemic standings in different cases. Here is an intuitive idea: in a good case one is in a good position to acquire perceptual knowledge, but in a bad case one is not in a good position to know. However, given that in both cases our subjective experiences are indistinguishable, how can we explain the differences between our respective epistemic standings? One explanation is: veridical experience puts us in a better epistemic position than hallucination does, but this cannot be explained by referring to the experience, because experiences involved in both cases are subjectively indistinguishable. Rather, the difference is, in a good case, my experience is reliable and veridical. However, I cannot know, via reflection, the reliability or veridicality of my experience; therefore *from the subjective point of view* it doesn't make a difference regarding my epistemic standing.¹³³ Call this explanation the *common factor view*.

On the contrary, ED contends that the intuitive idea is to be explained by the fact that in a good case, one's rational support is one sees that p, which is both factive and reflectively accessible, therefore on this basis, one is in a position to acquire perceptual knowledge; while in a bad case, one's rational support, if there is, cannot be of the factive sort. This is the *disjunctivist* nature of ED.

Now we have two explanations regarding the intuitive idea, but why should we favour ED over the common factor view? And can we have rational support that is both factive and reflectively accessible? Moreover, for seeing that p to have any anti-sceptical import, why would the sceptic accept it? By exploring these three questions, we will examine the theoretical advantages of ED, the possibility of seeing that p, and the dialectical appropriateness of ED as an anti-sceptical proposal. In what follows, I will answer these questions in reverse order, because when seeing that p is shown to be possible and effective as an anti-sceptical strategy, it becomes clear why

¹³² Pritchard (2012, 16) makes this point.

¹³³ To say that external factors do not contribute to one's epistemic standing is obviously to endorse epistemic internalism. Externalists can argue otherwise, but ED cannot because ED is internalism.

we should favour ED over the common factor view.

1.2 Introducing Seeing That P

I will consider two approaches to motivating factive rational support. The first line of argument is proposed by McDowell (2008).¹³⁴ He runs a transcendental argument in favour of factive seeing. Another line is suggested by Pritchard (2012). He takes factive seeing to be a pre-theoretical default position.¹³⁵ When the sceptical challenge is seen as a paradox, the sceptic is said to rest on nothing more than our basic epistemic principles and concepts. That is to say, given our default position, the sceptic is able to show how inconsistency arises out of it. If the sceptic accepts our default epistemic position, then we are free to appeal to it as well. Further, if we can establish that our default position does not lead to the sceptical paradox, and that the sceptical predicament is due to faulty theoretical assumptions disguising as pre-theoretical platitudes, then we can dismiss the sceptical challenge in a satisfying manner. For McDowell, there is a direct way to establish factive seeing; while for Pritchard, factive seeing is defended by arguing against possible objections to its existence. I will look at McDowell's strategy first.

To begin with, McDowell (2008, 378) aims to advance a transcendental argument that is neither ambitious nor modest. However, I will argue that his argument is of the modest kind. Recall my discussion in chapter two, from an undoubted premise, ambitious transcendental arguments are world-directed in that they aim to uncover certain non-psychological truths. By contrast, modest transcendental arguments are belief-directed in that they aim to reveal some necessary ways of thinking. Then, in what sense does McDowell think that his transcendental argument is of a different kind? For McDowell, he takes his transcendental argument to be *diagnostic*, in the sense that by running this argument he can expose the sceptic's inability to 'make

¹³⁴ Note that McDowell also discusses disjunctivism in McDowell (1982). However, in McDowell (2008), he explicitly considers how we can use the disjunctivist conception of experience to advance a transcendental argument.

¹³⁵ For example, see Pritchard (2012, 17-8).

sense of the idea of direct perceptual access to objective facts' (McDowell 2008, 378). But why does the sceptic need to make sense of the idea? To see this, let's consider Stroud's (2000) discussion of scepticism.

As Stroud (2000, 123) puts it, when we inquire into perceptual knowledge, there is a platitude: 'human beings gain knowledge of the external world through sense-perception.' However, when we *reflect* on how sense perception works and what is involved in our sense perception, we face a paradoxical result. The sceptical paradox suggests that it is impossible to have perceptual knowledge of the external world. Importantly, scepticism is to be understood as a reflection on a reflection of human knowledge. Specifically, at the first level we think we have knowledge of the external world; at the second level, we aim to explain, by developing epistemological theories, how we come to know our surroundings perceptually; while at the third level, we reflect on our theorising and find it impossible to have perceptual knowledge. To investigate our knowledge of the external world, one may start from the optimal case and then generalize what it is for one to perceptually know the external world. In the optimal case, there is no deception or hallucination in play, one is in an epistemically friendly environment and one's faculties are functioning properly. Undoubtedly, in the optimal case we have knowledge of the external world. And specifically, one can perceptually know that p by seeing that p. However, when one considers the bad case, things become puzzling. In a bad case, one's experience is indistinguishable from that one has in the optimal case. That is, one *seems to see* exactly what one sees in the optimal case even though one is in an unfavourable situation.¹³⁶ One is thereby led to the apparently unavoidable conclusion that, even in the optimal case one does not simply see that p. The reason is, if one sees that p in the optimal case, then by having the same perceptual experience, one also sees that p in a bad case, but this result is obviously wrong. After all, in a bad case, p is false, and one simply cannot see that p.

Although we find it difficult to explain what our perception in the optimal case amounts to, there is clearly a contrast between the good case and the bad case. In the

¹³⁶ Typically, in the bad case, one can have experience as of an object without the object being present.

former case, one's experience is caused by the objective environment; while in the latter case, at least part of one's experience is not. Put another way, our experience purports to be about the external environment. That is to say, before we reflect on what our sense perception is, it is at least intelligible that our experience does sometimes take in an environmental fact.¹³⁷ Only after this idea becomes intelligible does it make sense to say that we would have the same experience even if we are detached from the environment. In a word, the mundane contrast between the good case and the bad case must be intelligible. For the sceptic, granting this point does not prevent her from advancing the sceptical argument. The main reason is, given the contrast between the two cases, if our seeing in a good case is not seeing that p, then our knowledge of the external world is impossible, because our perception is always compatible with p's not being the case. Without this basic idea in place, our theory of perception does not lead to the paradoxical conclusion. Now, McDowell questions whether the sceptic can make sense of the idea. And I formulate his reasoning as follows:

McDowell's Transcendental Argument:

- (1) It is intelligible that perceptual experience purports to be of objective environment.
- (2) In order to make it intelligible that experience has objective purport, we must be able to 'make sense of an epistemically distinguishable class of experiences'.¹³⁸
- (3) Therefore, we must be able to make sense of an epistemically distinguishable class of experiences.

For (1), perceptual experience purports to be of the external environment because when one undergoes perceptual experience, it appears to one that p.¹³⁹ And

¹³⁷ Note that McDowell's original terminology is 'experiential intake'. See McDowell (1982, 386). Also, Miller (2008, 586) uses 'take in'. I think McDowell's point is that via having factive seeing, the environmental fact is made manifest (directly available) to us, and therefore we are in a good position to know this fact.

¹³⁸ See McDowell (2008, 380).

¹³⁹ We may take p to mean how things in the environment are. Such as, there is an apple on the table.

appearances will lead one to believe that p. Crucially, what is at issue is the idea that perceptual experience purports to be of the external environment, and what is required by (1) is merely that the idea be intelligible rather than true. If the idea is required to be true, then surely the sceptic will deny this because there are undisputable cases in which one's experience is detached from the objective environment. However, the intelligibility of this idea is a weak requirement. For it to be intelligible, I think, one needs to assume that there are cases where experiences reflect our environment.¹⁴⁰ As we have discussed, if the experience is veridical, then one is in a good position to know that p if one forms belief that p on this basis; but if one is hallucinating that p, one simply cannot know that p. However, in cases where one is hallucinating, one will be misled into believing that p. That is to say, one is tempted to treat non-veridical experience as veridical experience. On the one hand, the contrast between the non-veridical experience and the veridical experience reminds us that one's perceptual evidence is fallible, in that appearance as of p is compatible with p's being false. The sceptic needs this contrast to support the claim that perceptual evidence is insufficient for believing that p, therefore she needs to retain the intelligibility of this idea.

On the other hand, if the misleading feature of non-veridical experience makes sense, then we must admit that there are cases where one's experience is veridical and one does see that p. Otherwise, it would be unintelligible where the non-veridical experience leads us to. After all, it is said that, in a bad case, we treat our experience that p the same way as we do in a good case. But it turns out that the world is not as the experience suggests, therefore our belief that p does not count as knowledge.

¹⁴⁰ In Langsam (2014, 52), he argues that intelligible means rational, and he has textual support from McDowell (2009, 257). He says that McDowell intends rational intelligibility, intelligibility, and rationality to be synonymous. By rational, Langsam takes McDowell to mean that it is rational to move from the experience that p to the belief that p. And what makes this move rational is the phenomenal character of the experience. The phenomenal character of the experience is evidence, a piece of fallible evidence suggesting that our environment is a certain way. Therefore, other things being equal, if one is responsive to one's rational support, one is rational to believe that p once one has experience that p. Although I agree with what he says, I don't see why it could be rational to believe that P if one experiences that P in the bad case. After all, to say that our default position is to believe what we experience is one thing, to say that the default position is rational is another thing. Especially, when we are made aware of the fallible feature of our perceptual evidence, to show that our default position is rational requires an explanation as to why the alternative position (such as, disbelieving what we experience or refraining from making a judgement) is less rational. Thereby, I avoid using 'rational' to elaborate McDowell's argument.

Importantly, the epistemic significance of non-veridical experience is to be understood by reference to the epistemic significance of its corresponding veridical experience. So, we reach the second claim (2): in order to make it intelligible that experience has such a feature, we must be able to make it intelligible that there is an epistemically distinguishable class of experiences. ‘Those experiences in which one sees how things are and those in which it merely looks to one as if things are thus and so’. (McDowell 2008, 380) In particular, experiences of the first kind have a special epistemic import, that is, one is afforded an opportunity to know the environment. By contrast, experiences of the latter kind do not provide one with such a chance. Hence, although two kinds of experiences are subjectively indistinguishable, they have different epistemic import for us.

I have two remarks on McDowell’s argument. Firstly, he is concerned with the metaphysical aspect of our experiences in both cases. That is to say, in a good case, our experience includes the fact that *p* as its constituent; while in a bad case, our experience does not. If McDowell’s argument is sound, then experience in the good case and experience in the bad case are of different kinds. However, since we are now addressing Cartesian scepticism, we must consider whether the Cartesian challenge can be properly addressed. Here is one way to characterize the difference between Cartesian scepticism and Kantian scepticism.

Cartesian Scepticism

Cartesian scepticism is concerned with the *veridicality* of our experiences, i.e., whether the content of our experiences is *true*. Hence, the worry is how I know things are as they appear, and whether I can infer from appearance to reality.

Kantian Scepticism

A Kantian sceptic is concerned with the *intelligibility* of our having experiences, namely, what does it take for our experiences to be about something. Hence, the worry is about the conditions of possibility that experiences purport to be of the objective reality.

To be more specific, a Cartesian sceptic asks, given our introspectively indistinguishable experiences in both cases, on what ground we can distinguish veridical experience from non-veridical experience. What is granted by Cartesian scepticism is that we have both kinds of experiences and we judge how the world is on this basis. But our inference from how things appear to how things are is fallible, because we cannot distinguish veridical experience from non-veridical experience. Kantian scepticism brings into worry what the Cartesian scepticism takes for granted, to wit, that experience possesses the requisite unity so that it purports to be about something. Hence, for Kantian scepticism, it remains to be shown what makes it possible that appearances (i.e., what Cartesian scepticism takes our inference to start from) can be representational. Now that the contrast between two kinds of scepticism is clear, we find that McDowell's transcendental argument appears to target Kantian scepticism. For, his premise is that it is *intelligible* that perceptual experience purports to be of objective environment, and he investigates into the necessary conditions for this intelligibility. McDowell's conclusion is at best a good answer to Kantian scepticism, but the Cartesian challenge remains untouched. That is, while we must be committed to the idea that there is an epistemically distinguishable class of experiences (i.e., one sees that p and one seems to see that p), it remains to be shown how we can know that p when we undergo this particular kind of experience. Therefore, in order to engage with Cartesian scepticism, there is more work to do.

Secondly, as McDowell puts it, the conclusion of his argument is about 'how we must conceive the epistemic positions that are within our reach, if it is to be possible that our experience is as it is in having objective purport.' (McDowell 2008, 387) McDowell claims that his conclusion is neither about a non-psychological fact nor about how we conceive the world to be. However, I don't see much difference between a modest transcendental argument and his transcendental argument. Recall modest transcendental arguments, they start from a psychological fact and then arrive at indispensable ways of thinking. We can have indispensable ways of thinking about the reality, but we also can have indispensable ways of thinking about ourselves, including our epistemic positions. In his case, how we must conceive the epistemic

positions is different from what our epistemic positions are. Insofar as we cannot determine what our epistemic positions are, what is revealed is only an important commitment, a commitment to our epistemic positions. One might say that a modest transcendental argument and McDowell's transcendental argument are different in terms of their premises. Obviously, one starts from a psychological fact while the other starts from an epistemic possibility. However, here is a bold conjecture: given that the premise of a modest transcendental argument is an undisputable psychological fact (e.g., we have contentful beliefs), we can always rewrite its premise by adding the phrase 'it is intelligible'. Such modification is plausible in that if a psychological fact is accepted, then its intelligibility cannot be denied, at least, by those who accept the psychological fact in question. After all, only if a psychological fact is intelligible, then it is subject to evaluation. So our acceptance of a psychological fact has presumed its intelligibility to us. Therefore, when we investigate into the necessary conditions for the possibility of a psychological fact, we are also investigating into how we must conceive if we take a psychological fact to be intelligible. I propose the following unified template for diagnostic modest transcendental arguments:

The Structure of Diagnostic Modest Transcendental Arguments

- (I) It is actual that p.
- (II) It is possible/ intelligible that p.
- (III) In order for p to be possible/intelligible, we must be committed to y.
- (IV) Therefore, we must be committed to y.

This template can have two variants. The standard structure of modest transcendental arguments is (I)-(III)-(IV), and the structure of McDowell's transcendental argument is (II)-(III)-(IV). Since (III) concerns the necessary conditions for the possibility of p, it doesn't make much difference whether p is actual or merely possible. In other words, we must be committed to y so far as we take p to be possible/intelligible, let alone cases in which p is seen as actual. Whether we go for the standard modest

transcendental argument or a McDowellian variant depends on whether (I) or (II) is used as the premise. Whether to choose (I) or (II) will further depend on which premise is accepted by transcendentalists' interlocutor, but the underlying structure is the same. One more thing, is the first premise of McDowell's argument a psychological fact? I suppose so. To say that it is intelligible that our experience has certain feature is tantamount to saying that a feature of our experience is intelligible to us. This premise expresses a psychological fact, namely, we find a proposition intelligible.

If my contention is right, then there is in fact no essential difference between a modest transcendental argument and McDowell's transcendental argument. And if McDowell's transcendental argument is only a modest transcendental argument, then his argument is revealing a crucial commitment before we engage with the sceptic. Specifically, we must be committed to the idea that experiences in a good case and experiences in a bad case are of different kinds. And upon this basis, one can further explain where the sceptic goes wrong. McDowell does not bother to answer the further question, but Pritchard has done so.¹⁴¹ Therefore, in what follows I will turn to Pritchard's ED. In particular, Pritchard further develops ED so that ED enables us to respond to the (Cartesian) sceptical argument.

According to Pritchard (2012, 19-22), there are three major objections to ED: the *distinguishability problem*, the *basis problem*, and the *access problem*. Further, inside the epistemic internalist camp, ED is against the new evil demon thesis. Pritchard has defended ED in great detail in his book, so I will critically review his response. In order to illustrate how ED can respond to underdetermination_{RK}-based radical scepticism, I will start from the new evil demon thesis.

1.3 Epistemological Disjunctivism against the New Evil Demon Thesis

When it comes to perceptual knowledge in paradigmatic conditions, ED embraces

¹⁴¹ This is due to McDowell's quietistic stance to the scepticism. For more on this issue, see Pritchard (2012, ch7) and McDowell (2009).

epistemic internalism by endorsing accessibilism. Accessibilism states that:

What S can know by reflection alone constitutes S's internalist epistemic support for S's belief.¹⁴²

Accessibilism is a prominent form of internalism.¹⁴³ Since ED is committed to accessibilism, ED seems to be also committed to the conclusion of the following argument:

- (1) What S can know by reflection alone constitutes S's internalist epistemic support for S's belief.
- (2) What S's counterpart know by reflection alone constitutes her internalist epistemic support for her belief.
- (3) S and S's envatted counterpart share the same reflectively accessible resources.
- (4) S's internalist rational support is epistemically on a par with S's envatted counterpart.

This argument looks plausible: both (1) and (2) are what accessibilism says, and since accessibilism is already granted by ED, ED should equally endorse (1) and (2); (3) describes the feature of S's envatted duplicate, that is, by having indistinguishable experiences, S and S's envatted counterpart can reflectively know the same facts. Hence, given that the reasoning is valid, ED should espouse (4). And (4) can be reformulated as the new evil demon thesis (henceforth NED for short). Pritchard (2012, 38) captures the idea as follows:

The New Evil Demon Thesis

S's internalist epistemic support for believing that ϕ is constituted solely by properties that S has in common with her recently envatted physical duplicate.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² This formulation is from Pritchard (2012, 36).

¹⁴³ For proponents of accessibilism, see Bonjour (1985), Chisholm (1988), and Steup (1999).

¹⁴⁴ See earlier discussion of this thesis in Lehrer and Cohen (1983) and Cohen (1984).

NED is commonly adopted by epistemologists, because it seems to follow naturally from both accessibilism and mentalism.¹⁴⁵ And researchers even suggest that it can be used as a basic point in philosophical theory building. That is to say, it is an evaluative thesis about the sameness of justification, and we are to explain why this is so.¹⁴⁶ However, ED rejects NED by rejecting (2). As we can see, by endorsing accessibilism, ED avows its epistemic internalist stance; while rejecting NED, ED flags its unorthodox character in the camp. But how can ED make sense of this seemingly odd combination? We may, following McDowell (1995) and Pritchard (2012), formulate a stronger version of (2), to wit, the highest common factor thesis:

The Highest Common Factor Thesis

The only facts that S can reflectively know in the optimal case are facts that S's envatted counterpart can reflectively know in a bad case.¹⁴⁷

Here, S is in the optimal case if S can see that p¹⁴⁸ and S does not possess any undefeated defeater. A good case merely involves veridical perception, but one may not form corresponding belief because one possesses a misleading defeater. The highest common factor is stronger than (2). This is because the former indicates that even in the optimal case we are epistemically on a par with our envatted physical duplicate in terms of our internalist epistemic standings, let alone the good case. And we can then formulate a challenge to ED:

¹⁴⁵ Apart from accessibilism, mentalism is also an influential version of epistemic internalism. Epistemic mentalist claims that one's mental states constitute one's internalist epistemic support for one's belief. One can, of course, use mentalism to derive the new evil demon thesis. And here is the inference:

- (1) S's mental state constitutes S's internalist epistemic support for S's belief, so is S's envatted counterpart.
- (2) S and S's envatted counterpart have the same mental states.
- (3) Therefore, S's internalist rational support is epistemically on a par with S's envatted counterpart.

¹⁴⁶ For this approach, see Silins (2005) and Madison (2014).

¹⁴⁷ This is from Pritchard (2012, 41), with slight modification. He uses good+ case to mean what I mean by the optimal case.

¹⁴⁸ For S to see that p, it requires: 1. S has veridical perception; 2. S is competent in applying concept that is involved in p; 3. There is no environmental luck that prevents one from knowing that p. Or put it this way, S's recognition ability reaches a certain level that existing environmental-luck can be eliminated.

The Highest Common Factor Argument

(CF1) In a bad case, S's rational support cannot be of the factive sort.

(CF2) The only facts that S can reflectively know in the optimal case are facts that S's envatted counterpart can reflectively know in a bad case. [The highest common factor thesis]

(CF3) S's rational support in the optimal case is on a par with that of S's envatted counterpart in a bad case.

(CF4) In the optimal case, S's rational support cannot be of the factive sort.¹⁴⁹

If this argument is sound, then ED's core claim would be under threat. This is because ED submits that in the good case one's rational support is factive, but if S's rational support cannot be of the factive sort even in the optimal case, then her rational support in a good case will fall short of the factive sort as well. Fortunately, ED can block the argument by questioning (CF2), i.e., the highest common factor principle. In particular, ED maintains that S's rational support in a good case is seeing that p, while S's envatted counterpart in a bad case only has non-factive rational support. Then the question is how can S have factive rational support in a good case, such as seeing that p? After all, it seems problematic to have factive rational support. However, if ED's core claim can be well defended, then surely the epistemological disjunctivist can plausibly reject the highest common factor thesis and NED. In what follows, I will discuss why the idea that we can have factive rational support is plausible.

1.4 The Distinguishability Problem

Here is the distinguishability problem for ED: given that factive reason is available in the good case and not available in the bad case, it follows that one can introspectively distinguish the good case from the bad case when one is in the good case. After all, in order to do so, one simply needs to see whether factive rational support obtains.

¹⁴⁹ For similar formulations, see McDowell (1995) and Pritchard (2012, 43).

However, there is an undeniable intuition that the non-deceived case and its corresponding deceived case are introspectively indistinguishable. How can ED ease the apparent tension between ED's core claim and the intuition?

The central issue behind the distinguishability problem is: does one's perceptual discrimination exhausts one's internalist rational support? Or put it another way, given that one cannot discriminate veridical experience from its corresponding non-veridical experience, does it follow that one cannot distinguish the former from the latter?

1.4.1 Favouring Support/Discriminating Support

In this respect, Pritchard (2012, 77) reminds us of the distinction between favouring and discriminating epistemic support. Although he thinks that this distinction is not widely recognized, it plays an important role in developing ED's reply to radical scepticism.¹⁵⁰ I put the distinction as follows:

Discriminating support (evidence): For any p, q and S, S has discriminating support (evidence) for her belief that p if she can discriminate the object at issue in p from the object at issue in q, where p and q are incompatible propositions that S is aware of.¹⁵¹

Favouring support (evidence): For any p, q and S, S has favouring support (evidence) for her belief that p if p is more likely to be true than q does given S's rational support (evidence), where p and q are incompatible propositions that S is aware of.

¹⁵⁰ I also find this distinction crucial for the explanationist reply to radical scepticism. The general idea is that given the overall empirical evidence (our experiences and their characteristics), the real world hypothesis (we can take it as a collection of our everyday beliefs) provides a better explanation than the sceptical hypothesis does. Therefore, we are justified in believing the real world hypothesis. For proponents of this line, e.g., see Lycan (2002), Vogel (1990; 2008) and McCain (2011; 2016).

¹⁵¹ Note that discriminating evidence is understood contrastively. That is to say, only if one can discriminate p from a certain alternative q, one has discriminating evidence for p. In cases where one fails to do so, one simply lacks discriminating evidence for either of them. An immediate consequence is the idea that one can have discriminating evidence for p if the alternative is a mundane proposition, while one may lack the discriminating evidence for p if a far-fetched alternative is at issue.

Some clarifications: firstly, for S's rational support to favour p, it suffices that S's rational support makes p more likely to be true than q from *her own perspective*; secondly, I use rational support and evidence interchangeably in this formulation, because here I understand evidence along the epistemic internalist line.¹⁵² To illustrate this distinction, it might help to look at Feldman (2001)'s example. His example implicitly endorses a distinction between direct and indirect evidence:

I say that I know that I see Smith down the hall. You ask whether it could be Jones instead. I reply that Jones is taller with different color hair, so it's Smith not Jones...My visual evidence is direct evidence against the proposition that it is Jones that I see. In contrast, I have no direct evidence against the hypothesis that I am a brain in a vat being deceived...If that hypothesis were true, things would seem exactly as they do now. (Feldman 2001, 116)

Feldman's distinction is tantamount to our distinction between favouring and discriminating support. In particular, direct evidence is discriminating support (evidence), while indirect evidence is favouring support (evidence). As the example shows, one has direct evidence for an everyday proposition such as that Smith is down the hall because one can discriminate Smith from Jones because they look different. And since one recognizes that it is Smith rather than Jones that is down the hall, one is in a position to know that Smith is down the hall. In general, inspired by Fred Dretske (1970), we have the relevant alternatives account of perceptual knowledge:

The Relevant Alternatives Account of Perceptual Knowledge

In order for one to perceptually know that p, one must be able to rule out relevant not-p alternatives, where a relevant alternative is an alternative that obtains in a nearby possible world.¹⁵³

¹⁵² This is in contrast with the externalist conception of evidence, such as Williamson (2000).

¹⁵³ Note that this formulation is from Pritchard (2012, 67). A nearby possible world is similar to our actual world in the sense that there is little change between the actual world and the nearby world. Surely, a possible world would be remote if it is very different from our actual world. For Dretske, a relevant alternative is an alternative 'that a person must be in an evidential position to exclude (when he knows that p)'. See Dretske (2000, 57).

An alternative to p is incompatible with p , so it is a not- p possibility. This idea is very intuitive, because if one cannot discriminate p from not- p alternative, in so far as not- p can easily obtain in nearby possible worlds, then one's justification for believing that p would be very weak. In Feldman's case, if one fails to discriminate Smith from other neighbouring people, how can one know that Smith is down the hall? What indicates the difference between Smith and Jones is the discriminating evidence, such as different hair colours and heights. Thereby, we witness a close connection between one's possession of discriminating evidence and one's perceptual knowledge. And undoubtedly, it is a common way for us to acquire perceptual knowledge. However, are we therefore committed to the idea that perceptual knowledge has to rely on discriminating evidence? If this is true, then one cannot have perceptual knowledge unless one has discriminating evidence. This idea is problematic in that it poses too strong constraint on our perceptual knowledge. After all, in our everyday life, favouring support is widely appealed to. Let us consider the zebra case first introduced by Dretske (1970, 1016), and I call the protagonist 'Zoey':

At a zoo, Zoey takes her son to see several zebras. Her son asks her whether she knows they are zebras, she answers positively. Zoey knows that they are zebra because she knows what zebras look like, and they are in a pen marked 'Zebras' at a city zoo. However, does Zoey know that they are not cleverly-painted mules?

At first sight, Zoey cannot know that they are not cleverly-painted mules. For, if they were cleverly-painted mules, they would look strikingly similar to zebras so that Zoey cannot spot any difference. That is to say, given what animals in the pen look like, Zoey cannot discriminate zebras from cleverly-painted mules. Hence, given the relevant alternatives account of perceptual knowledge, it seems right to conclude that if Zoey is aware of this error-possibility and she lacks relevant discriminating support, then she cannot retain her knowledge that they are zebras. However, part of Zoey's evidence is glossed over in the above consideration. Importantly, her total evidence in this case consists of what the animals in the pen look like to her (visual perception),

her background information of what a zebra looks like (conceptual knowledge), the pen's being marked 'Zebras' (visual perception and conceptual knowledge), and her awareness that she is in the city zoo. Given her total evidence, we can say: Zoey knows that they are zebras, because she knows what a zebra looks like, her visual perception matches her understanding of zebras, and her judgement is also supported by the information (the 'Zebras' sign) from a reliable testifier.¹⁵⁴ Obviously, apart from her discriminating evidence, she also possesses some favouring evidence. These pieces of favouring evidence make the proposition that they are zebras, as opposed to the alternative that they are cleverly-painted mules, more likely to be true from Zoey's perspective. Hence, Zoey can know that they are zebras despite her lack of discriminating evidence.

What lesson can we draw from Zoey's example? It indicates that our understanding of evidence cannot be confined to discriminating evidence. Although in normal circumstances, the relevant alternative might be easily eliminated by discriminating evidence, such as one can distinguish a zebra from a panda, or an elephant. However, if a far-fetched alternative (such as cleverly-painted mules) is at issue, one might lack discriminating evidence because objects involved in the two propositions are hard to discriminate. Hence, one would naturally appeal to favouring support to compensate one's lack of discriminating evidence at times. Accordingly, when it comes to perceptual knowledge, one's evidence can consist of discriminating evidence and favouring evidence. Note that favouring support is not a theoretical assumption; rather it is embedded in our everyday life. First of all, in Zoey's case, she naturally appeals to her background information about zebras. This is quite common in our epistemic practices. For Zoey to perceptually know that there are zebras in the pen, she must have semantic knowledge of the concept <zebra>. At least, she needs to know the meaning of the concept. This would involve descriptions of what a zebra generally looks like. Otherwise, she cannot realize that zebras are present when some

¹⁵⁴ Here I take the city zoo to be a testifier, albeit a group testifier. The 'Zebras' sign is approved by the zoo, so Zoey can take this sign as a piece of testimonial evidence provided by an reliable testifier, even though nobody actually tells Zoey that animals in the pen are zebras.

zebras are present in her visual field. That is, she will fail to apply the concept <zebras> to zebras. In that case, we may call it *blind seeing* because she simply does not recognize what is present to her. In general, what enables one to recognize an object is one's understanding of a concept and one's ability to apply this concept. To apply a concept to an object, one is required to have semantic knowledge of the concept. In Zoey's case, she can know that they are zebras because she has already known what a zebra looks like. If this is true, then before we acquire perceptual knowledge, we generally have background information.

Secondly, Zoey's awareness of her being in the city zoo and the zoo's official sign 'Zebra' also indicates how she acquires favouring support. That is, she can generally know, in her context, what she is reasonable to believe. In general, I take one's context to be one's life experiences and social environment. These two factors affect how one acquires, retains and withholds favouring support. Specifically, Zoey knows that she is at a city zoo, where she can acquire reliable information about animals. With this consideration in mind, Zoey trusts her judgement that the animals in the pen are zebras in that the official information is in favour of her judgement. Or, she may consider that raising cleverly-painted mules in the 'Zebras' pen would incur a fine to the manager because it is a form of unlawful deception. In a law-governed society, intentional deception has consequences, and therefore a sensible manager would not risk doing so. Suppose Zoey visits the same zoo on April 1st and realizes that it is permissible to trick someone on that day, then she cannot easily dismiss the (cleverly-painted mules) alternative. The reason is, even if she sees the marked 'Zebras' pen, she knows that it is slightly more likely to be a prank on that day. Hence, unless she acquires more evidence, the alternative would remain outstanding. Once the context changes, one's favouring support might change accordingly. However, we can sense that most subjects acquire perceptual knowledge in a social setting and under the influence of their life experiences, so favouring support is deeply rooted in our everyday life.

Does one's perceptual discriminative ability exhaust one's internalist rational support? The answer is no. With the discriminating support/favouring support

distinction in play, ED can say that one's internalist rational support consists of discriminating support and favouring support. In case one's discriminating support is not sufficient in the sense that one cannot discriminate the object at issue in p from the object at issue in not-p alternative, one can very plausibly appeal to favouring support. One's favouring support indicates that p is more likely to be true than not-p alternative, so one's overall rational support favours p over not-p. Also, favouring support is rooted in our everyday life, so it is not a theoretical assumption that one may find dubious. On the contrary, our unawareness of this kind of rational support would lead to a misunderstanding of our default epistemic position.

Now, we can spell out ED's answer to the distinguishability problem. Following Pritchard (2012, 92), I put the distinguishability problem more formally as follows:

The Distinguishability Problem

(DP1) In the optimal case, one can perceptually know that p in virtue of possessing rational support (seeing that p) for her belief that p. [Premise]

(DP2) One can know by reflection alone that factive rational support (seeing that p) is only reflectively accessible to one in the optimal case. [Premise]

(DP3) In the optimal case, one can know via reflection and competent deduction that one is in the optimal case. [From (DP1) and (DP2)]

(DP4) In the optimal case, one can introspectively distinguish the optimal case from its corresponding bad case. [From (DP4)]

Obviously, (DP1) and (DP2) are what ED is committed to. Since (DP3) follows from (DP1) and (DP2), it is also unavoidable. However, (DP4) is ambiguous in that we can interpret it in two ways:

(DP4*) In the optimal case, one can introspectively distinguish the optimal case from its corresponding bad case on the basis of *discriminating evidence*.

(DP4**) In the optimal case, one can introspectively distinguish the optimal case from its corresponding bad case on the basis of *favouring support and competent deduction*.

When (DP4) is understood as (DP4*), the distinguishability problem arises. For, there

is a widely shared intuition that one cannot discriminate the optimal case from its corresponding bad case because two kinds of experiences are, *ex hypothesi*, indistinguishable. Also, one does not have a special discriminative power to tell the difference, so DP4* is implausible. On this score, ED keeps in line with the shared intuition by rejecting (DP4*).

However, what ED is contending is (DP4**). (DP4**) is different from (DP4*) in that it advocates a different conception of introspective distinguishability. What (DP4*) says is that, one can distinguish the optimal case from its corresponding case via citing one's factive favouring support and competent deduction, as opposed to possessing discriminating evidence. It is commonly assumed that introspective distinguishability is largely, if not essentially, based on discriminating evidence, so one is inclined to equate (DP4) with (DP4*). However, once the distinction between discriminating support and favouring support is drawn, one is in a good position to see how favouring support can be related to introspective distinguishability. Crucially, one can introspectively distinguish the optimal case from the bad case in virtue of having favouring support and making a competent deduction. And this process is well captured by the reasoning from (DP1) to (DP3).

Now, it is evident how ED can square its core claim with the shared intuition. In fact, there are two conceptions of reflective distinguishability in play here. On the one hand, ED shares the widespread intuition that the bad case is introspectively indistinguishable from the optimal case on the basis of discriminating evidence; on the other hand, ED submits that one can nonetheless distinguish the optimal case from the bad case on the basis of favouring support and competent deduction. In summary, ED reminds us that there is a way of knowing the difference between the optimal and bad cases which is not thereby a way of perceptually discriminating between them. Hence, the distinguishability problem is resolved.

1.5 The Basis Problem and the Entailment Thesis

Here is the basis problem for ED. Given that in paradigm cases one's rational support

for perceptual knowledge that *p* is seeing that *p*, how can seeing that *p* be the rational basis of knowing that *p*? Intuitively, seeing that *p* is just a *way* of knowing that *p*, rather than being its rational basis.¹⁵⁵ That is to say, when one sees that *p*, one already knows that *p*. And we can call this idea the entailment thesis (henceforth ET for short):¹⁵⁶

The Entailment Thesis

Seeing that *p* entails knowing that *p*.

There are some reasons for endorsing ET. First, ET is a natural explanation of our linguistic phenomenon. When asked how I know that it is raining, I could reasonably respond that I see that it is raining. In normal contexts, seeing that *p* provides a reason for one's coming to know that *p*, so a natural way to explain this phenomena is to accept that seeing that *p* entails knowing that *p*. Cassam (2007, 334) notes that, regarding how one knows that *p*, 'one's perceptual explanation has a kind of finality that other explanation lacks.' In this sense, if I cite my seeing that *p* as an explanation of how I know that *p*, it would be absurd to challenge my explanation since my explanation is final.

Relatedly, Williamson (2000, 39) also supports this idea and he claims that 'knowing is the most general stative propositional attitude such that, for all propositions *p*, necessarily if one has it to *p* then *p* is true'. He uses the notion of a factive mental state operator (FMSO) to elaborate this idea.¹⁵⁷ Put it simply, the consequence is that now that seeing that *p* is a particular FMSO, seeing that *p* entails the most general propositional attitude that knowing that *p*.

Secondly, to assume ET is theoretically important for establishing the possibility

¹⁵⁵ There are many ways to know that *P*. One can know from testimony and one can know via valid inference. Seeing that *p* is regarded as a way of knowing that *p* by some epistemologists.

¹⁵⁶ For proponents of the entailment thesis, for example, see Dretske (1968), Stroud (2009), Cassam (2009), French (2012; 2014), Ranalli (2014), Ghijzen (2015) and Williamson (2000).

¹⁵⁷ Williamson (2000, 34) defines FMSO as meeting three conditions: first, Φ typically takes as a subject a term for something animate and as object a term consisting of 'that' followed by a sentence; second, Φ is factive, so that the inference from ' Φ s that *A*' to '*A*' is deductively valid; third, ' Φ s that *A*' attributes a propositional attitude to *S*.

of our perceptual knowledge. As Stroud (2009, 564) notes, if we buy into the idea that ‘the most we could say about ourselves is that we believe that the world is the way our perceptions lead us to believe it is, but without our ever actually perceiving that the world is that way’, then the world is merely a hypothesis rather than something we can perceive. On this basis, a sceptic would say that if we never perceive such-and-such is so, we know nothing about the world.¹⁵⁸ In order to avoid this sceptical result, we must change our conception of perceptual knowledge so that we have propositional perception. In a propositional perception, we perceive both objects and a fact, and further our perceiving such-and-such is so best explains why we know such-and-such is so.

If ET is plausible, then seeing that p cannot be one’s rational basis for knowing that p. After all, to provide a rational basis for one’s knowledge, the rational ground cannot entail the knowledge in question. Otherwise, this process of citing a rational basis would be circular. Crucially, in such an explanation, the *explanandum* would be already contained in the *explanans* and therefore my rational support does not lend any genuine support to the proposition in question. Now, for ED, given the entailment thesis, how can epistemological disjunctivist defend the idea that seeing that p is the rational ground of knowing that p? To solve the basis problem, Turri (2010) and Pritchard (2011; 2012; 2015) remind us the theoretical lacuna between seeing that p and knowing that p.¹⁵⁹ In particular, they contend that there are cases where one sees that p but one does not know that p. And the key argument, as Ranalli (2014, 1243) puts it, is the belief argument against the entailment thesis:

*The Belief Argument against the Entailment Thesis*¹⁶⁰

(ET1) Knowledge entails belief.

(ET2) One can see that p without believing that p.

(ET3) Hence, one can see that p without knowing that p.

¹⁵⁸ The sceptic would demand that we show whether our belief is true and how we know it is true. We may have answers to these questions, but Stroud (2009, 564) believes that ‘we cannot understand ourselves as knowing how things are in a world we can never perceive any part of.’

¹⁵⁹ McDowell (2002, 277-8) also supports this view.

¹⁶⁰ See this characterisation in Ranalli (2014, 1243).

(ET1) concerns the close connection between knowledge and belief. If one knows that *p*, then one believes that *p* when one considers whether *p*. It doesn't make sense if one knows that *p* but one never believes that *p* whatsoever. For (ET2), in order to separate seeing that *p* from believing that *p*, let's look at Zula's visit to the zoo:

On 1st April, the city zoo hosts a 'Happy Fool's Day' event. Zula visits the city zoo with her sister Zoey. She stares at genuine zebras in the pen marked 'Zebras' and finds that how they look like exactly matches her background information about zebras. However, Zoey is informed by a member of staff Peter that there is an April Fool prank concerning zebras and the city zoo will paint mules so cleverly that they look like zebras. Zoey believes what Peter says, so Zula chooses not to believe that they are zebras. However, it turns out that the April Fool prank is Peter's words, rather than cleverly painted mules in the zebras pen.

In Zula's case, we would say that she sees that there are zebras in the pen. This is because her faculties work well, she has relevant information about zebras, and she is in an objectively good environment such that there are only genuine zebras in the pen. All these conditions put her in a good position to know if she forms a belief that *p* on this rational basis. However, she has a misleading defeater. Her awareness of Peter's testimony prevents her from believing that there are genuine zebras in the pen. This piece of evidence is misleading because it falsely indicates to Zula that what she propositionally sees is not true.¹⁶¹ Zula is epistemically responsible, so she does not believe what she sees given that she cannot defeat her misleading defeater without further inspection. In short, misleading evidence prevents Zula from believing what she propositionally sees. Therefore, she sees that *p* but she does not believe that *p* because of misleading evidence. Further, examples given by Pritchard (2012, 26) have the feature that if one were to discover subsequently that one's evidence was

¹⁶¹ Or at least, it undermines Zula's confidence in her perceptual evidence as of zebras. Here by 'propositionally see' I mean what one sees is a proposition rather than an object. The content of propositional seeing is also the content of one's belief, so one can believe what one propositionally sees.

misleading, one would naturally ascribe seeing that p (but not knowing that p) to one's past self. This feature is supposed to illustrate how seeing that p can come apart with knowing that p. Similar cases happen in our everyday life, and what motivates (ET2) is the idea that in case one possesses misleading defeater, one can see that p without believing that p. And further if belief is a necessary condition of knowledge, then one can see that p without knowing that p, hence the entailment thesis fails.

However, Ranalli (2014) challenges the belief argument against ET. In particular, he finds (ET1) to be ambiguous. It is ambiguous because belief has two types, occurrent belief and dispositional belief.¹⁶² I put them as follows:

Occurrent Beliefs: beliefs that S consciously endorse currently.

Dispositional Beliefs: beliefs that are not occurrent but can turn *manifest* (i.e., become occurrent beliefs) if they are *triggered* and *unmasked*.

Some clarifications are in order. As to the former kind, one has relatively few occurrent beliefs at a given time because occurrent beliefs require conscious endorsement but one's mental capacity is limited. For the latter kind, one can have many dispositional beliefs in one's mind. When dispositional beliefs are triggered and unmasked, they become manifest (turn into occurrent beliefs). Regarding dispositional beliefs, I will elaborate the *triggering condition*, the *manifestation condition* and the *unmasked condition*.

The triggering condition specifies in what circumstance a dispositional belief will turn into an occurrent belief. The manifestation condition is the result of the triggering condition, to wit, a dispositional belief becomes an occurrent belief. The unmasked condition specifies possible factors that may prevent the dispositional belief from being manifest when it is triggered. I will use an example to illustrate the three conditions. For instance, I have learnt that the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949 when I was in middle school, and obviously I cannot consciously

¹⁶² This distinction can trace back to Ryle (1949, 135) and Campbell (1967). For recent discussion, see Ranalli (2014), Rose & Schaffer (2013).

endorse it all the time. Thus, I have a dispositional belief that PRC was founded in 1949. Normally, if someone asks me when PRC was founded (the triggering condition), I can recall it and form the occurrent belief that PRC was founded in 1949 (manifestation condition). However, I once failed to form the occurrent belief in a test because I was very nervous. Is it right to say I don't have the dispositional belief then? Apparently, it is more natural to say that I still have the dispositional belief but I fail to manifest it. Analogously, salt has the disposition to dissolve in water.¹⁶³ But can we say that when salt is put in a glass of water (triggering condition), it will always dissolve in water (manifestation condition)? This understanding is simple-minded, because it does not consider cases where water is saturated. In such cases, salt will not dissolve even if the triggering condition obtains. We don't deny that salt has the disposition to dissolve in water even if it fails to manifest its disposition when the triggering condition obtains. What explains this failure is the unmasked condition. Therefore, we should bear in mind that for dispositional belief, the manifestation condition obtains when both the triggering condition and the unmasked condition are satisfied. In particular, I propose the distinction between epistemic masking and non-epistemic masking:

Epistemic Masking: an epistemic masking is an epistemic factor that prevents the manifestation condition (for a dispositional belief) from obtaining when the triggering condition obtains.

Non-epistemic Masking: a non-epistemic masking is a non-epistemic factor that prevents the manifestation condition (for a dispositional belief) from obtaining when the triggering condition obtains. Normally, it includes psychological factors, physical factors and social factors.

¹⁶³ A similar case can be found in Johnston (1992, 223). He discusses how extrinsic factors can mask the fragileness of glass. In short, a fragile glass can be struck but not shatter because it is carefully packed.

I will illustrate the distinction between epistemic masking and non-epistemic masking by providing a case. Suppose one acquires the dispositional belief that Edinburgh is in Scotland from Wikipedia, but on two occasions one fails to form the corresponding occurrent belief (manifestation conditions fails) when one's friend asks her where Edinburgh is (triggering conditions obtains). On one occasion, she fails because she is under huge pressure in a geography competition. The psychological factor masks her dispositional belief; on occasion two, she gains testimony from a British person who claims that Edinburgh is in England. She realizes that the testimony is in tension with the information provided by Wikipedia. To avoid the charge of epistemic irresponsibility, she refuses to form the occurrent belief that Edinburgh is in Scotland before she conducts further investigation. Both epistemic masking and non-epistemic masking prevent the manifestation condition from obtaining when the triggering condition is satisfied, but this distinction will be important to my following discussion.

With the occurrent belief/dispositional belief distinction in mind, the argument from belief in fact includes two arguments: the argument from occurrent belief and the argument from dispositional belief. In what follows, I will examine both arguments.

*The Argument from Occurrent Belief*¹⁶⁴

(OET1) Knowledge entails occurrent belief.

(OET2) One can see that p without having an occurrent belief that p.

(OET3) Hence, one can see that p without knowing that p.

The argument from occurrent belief is unsound because (OET1) is implausible. It poses a too strong requirement on knowledge. The simple reason is that, if knowledge entails occurrent belief, then we can know very little due to our inability to possess many occurrent beliefs at a given time. Intuitively, we know, at any given time, many propositions about our environment, such as where we live, what our parents' names are, and who the current president of our country is, etc. All the information we know cannot be occurrent beliefs at the same time, therefore (OET1) is highly contentious.

¹⁶⁴ This is from Ranalli (2014, 1243).

Hence, the argument from occurrent belief fails. On this score, I agree with Ranalli. How about the argument from dispositional belief then?

*The Argument from Dispositional Belief*¹⁶⁵

(DET1) Knowledge entails dispositional belief.

(DET2) One can see that p without having a dispositional belief that p.

(DET3) Hence, one can see that p without knowing that p.

This argument is valid, but is it sound? Ranalli contends that (DET2) is problematic because it is not clear how one can see that p without having a dispositional belief that p. After all, if one sees that p, one is said to be in an epistemically robust position. But how can the status be so weak that one does not even have a dispositional belief that p? In particular, I think what makes (DET2) unclear is in what case we don't have a dispositional belief.¹⁶⁶ Ranalli finds (DET2) not well supported, so he argues that the argument from dispositional belief fails. And if both arguments fail, then the argument from belief falls short of rebutting the entailment thesis, and thereby ED's basis problem remains unsolved.

However, I think his reconstruction of the argument from belief is inaccurate. At least, he misses a crucial detail in Zula's example, that is, she has a misleading and undefeated defeater. A defeater is, after all, an epistemic masking that prevents Zula from forming the occurrent belief that they are zebras. Because Zula is aware of the incompatibility between the proposition that they are zebras and the proposition that they are cleverly-painted mules, she refuses to believe what she propositionally sees. Therefore, even if she has a dispositional belief that p, when she considers whether p (triggering condition obtains), she will at least hesitate to believe that p (manifestation condition fails) because she has strong evidence suggesting otherwise (being masked). Unless her defeater is defeated by further evidence, this dispositional belief will cease to become an occurrent belief.

¹⁶⁵ This is from Ranalli (2014, 1243).

¹⁶⁶ Pritchard (2015, 128) has something to say in this regard. For him, the agent would be quite explicit, if called upon, in saying that she didn't believe that p. While one can have a dispositional belief that p while lacking the corresponding occurrent belief, it is hard to see how one could have a dispositional belief that p while explicitly disavowing the occurrent belief that p. My following discussion will further support this line of thought.

Does knowledge only entail dispositional belief? Although this premise is more plausible than the alternative premise that knowledge entails occurrent belief, I still find it too weak. Recall my distinction between epistemic masking and non-epistemic masking. Crucially, I contend that knowledge cannot tolerate epistemic masking. As I have discussed, when one knows that p one has a dispositional belief that p. Upon this basis, it might be permissible that one fails to endorse that p because non-epistemic factors are not in favour. After all, to endorse a belief is not only a matter of epistemic deliberation. It depends on many non-epistemic factors.¹⁶⁷ I will keep neutral on this issue. However, once we set aside all non-epistemic masking temporarily, would it be tolerable if one fails to endorse that p because one is in possession of an undefeated defeater q? I don't think so. When it comes to knowledge, at least it requires that one does not possess a known defeater q to p. For, if I possess a known defeater q, then I have a reason not to believe the proposition that p. And if my total evidence does not favour p, then I am not justified in believing that p. In order to know that p, I must at least defeat the defeater q. That is to say, I cannot know that p unless my total evidence favours p. Also, one will be accused of epistemic irresponsibility if one insists on believing that p when one is unable to defeat a known defeater q. Therefore, a more plausible account of the relation between knowledge that p and one's dispositional belief that p should be: if one knows that p, then one has a dispositional belief that p and one does not have any known undefeated defeater q to p. With this new account in play, I reformulate the argument from belief as follows:

The Argument from Dispositional Belief without Epistemic Masking

(UET1) If one knows that p, then one has a dispositional belief that p and one does not have any known undefeated defeater q to p.

(UET2) One can (i) see that p; (ii) have a dispositional belief that p; (iii) possess a known undefeated defeater q.

¹⁶⁷ Here I have in mind cases where one's belief is affected by pragmatic reasons. For instance, although one lacks epistemic reason for believing that one will recover from an incurable disease, one might nonetheless believe that one will recover because this belief is pragmatically justified. By adopting this belief, one is more likely to gain practical benefits.

(UET3) Hence, one can see that p without knowing that p.

Let's take a closer look at (UET2). Recall (DET2), Ranalli finds it unclear how one can see that p without having a dispositional belief that p. I agree with him. One may lack a dispositional belief that p if one lacks any perceptual contact with p. However, if one does see that p, at least one has the disposition to believe that p, no matter whether one's belief that p can become occurrent. Further, I don't think that (DET2) fully captures ED's counterexample to ET. In Zula's case and other examples provided by ED, it is not that one sees that p but one lacks a dispositional belief that p. Rather, I propose a better characterisation (UET2). (UET2) consists of three components: (i) one sees that p; (ii) one has a dispositional belief that p; (iii) one also possesses a defeater q. For sure, (iii) is an important aspect in ED's example because it explains why one does not believe what one propositionally sees. And (ii) dismisses Ranalli's worry in that ED does not rely on (DET2). And since (UET1) and (UET2) are both well motivated, it follows that one can see that p without knowing that p. Hence, the argument from dispositional belief without epistemic masking is sound.

To sum up, one can see that p without knowing that p. This is because one can disbelieve that p due to one's possession of a misleading defeater. Therefore, the entailment thesis fails and the basis problem for ED is resolved.

Now that ET fails, does it follow that the motivations for ET will automatically burden ED? Does it follow that seeing that p is not a way of knowing that p? Does it follow that we cannot have knowledge of the external world? I think these worries are too quick. After all, ED says that there can be cases where one sees that p but one does not know that p. These cases feature one's possession of a misleading defeater, and it is for this reason that one does not believe what one propositionally sees. However, in the optimal case where one does not possess a misleading defeater, one's default stance is to believe what one propositionally sees, and then there is nothing standing in the way to one's perceptual knowledge. That is to say, when one sees that p in the optimal case, one would naturally believe that p on this rational basis, and

thereby one qualifies as knowing that p.¹⁶⁸ This default position is very intuitive so that one inclines to regard seeing that p as a way of knowing that p even in the suboptimal case.¹⁶⁹ An alternative explanation is rather that, in the optimal case, seeing that p automatically leads to believing that p. Since the belief condition on knowledge is automatically satisfied, seeing that p cannot be separated from knowing that p in the optimal case. However, in the suboptimal case, the belief condition does not automatically obtain because one will consciously change one's default stance. Thus seeing that p can be independent from knowing that p in the suboptimal case. ET fails because it provides an incomplete account of the relationship between seeing that p and knowing that p, but this failure does not amount to a denial of perceptual knowledge or of our default epistemic practices. Rather, ED provides a better account of the relationship between seeing that p and knowing that p. On the one hand, it explains why seeing that p and knowing that p are so closely related in the optimal case; on the other hand, it shows how one can be epistemically responsible in the sense that one does not unconditionally believe what one propositionally sees. With ED's account in play, it is clear that both propositional seeing and one's attitude towards propositional seeing are important for perceptual knowledge. Now that the basis problem is resolved, I will review the access problem for ED.

1.6 The Access Problem

In this section, I will quickly review Pritchard's response to the access problem for ED. Consider the following argument:

(AC1) S can know by reflection alone that her rational support r for believing that p is that she sees that p.

(AC2) S can know by reflection alone that seeing that p entails p.

(AC3) S can know by reflection alone that p.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ For instance, see Stroud (2002)'s reading of McDowell's view along this line. According to this reading, if one is in possession of a factive rational support for believing a proposition that p, then it entails that one believes that p. And on McDowell's view, these two conditions suffice for knowing that p.

¹⁶⁹ I mean cases where one sees that p but one has a defeater to p.

¹⁷⁰ See this formulation in Pritchard (2012, 46).

(AC1) is ED's core claim, namely, that one's rational support r in paradigm cases is both factive and reflectively accessible. That is to say, regarding an empirical proposition p , S 's factive rational support that seeing that p can be reflectively known by S . (AC2) shows the feature of a factive rational support, that is, a factive rational support entails the truth of the proposition. After all, if p is false, we simply cannot see that p . But given (AC1) and (AC2), (AC3) seems to follow. (AC3) appears to be an absurd conclusion. It says that one can reflectively know an empirical proposition. If ED were committed to (AC3), then hardly anyone would find ED plausible. So, this line of argument poses the access problem for ED.

However, Pritchard (2012, 47) argues that this line of argument is unsound. In particular, seeing that p is an *empirical reason* for believing that p . This claim needs to be clarified.¹⁷¹ A reason can be empirical if we acquire it in an empirical way.¹⁷² For example, testimony from my friend (S says that it is raining) is an empirical reason for believing that it is raining. And I normally acquire this reason from having a conversation with my friend. This is an empirical way of acquiring this reason. Now we are in a better position to understand why one can have reflective access to an empirical reason (one sees that p). Importantly, one acquires this reason via seeing that p , so this reason is acquired in an empirical fashion; and once it is acquired, it is thereafter available to the subject without further empirical investigation, and hence is in this sense reflectively accessible. That is to say, in (AC1), one's reason for believing that p is empirical. Although (AC2) is purely reflective, S 's acquisition of knowledge that p is nonetheless not entirely reflective. Crucially, as long as one continues to base her belief that p on this empirical reason, one's acquisition of

¹⁷¹ See a different interpretation from Greco (2014, 117). He remarks that 'S can know by reflection alone' can mean two things: 1. S can know on exclusively reflective ground; 2. S can know *without further investigation* beyond one sees that p . He thinks that what Pritchard means is the latter. Further, he argues that this understanding does not show any essential difference between externalism and ED. For, externalism is also compatible with this sense of reflective knowledge.

¹⁷² Kraft (2015b, 319) also notes that a reason can be empirical if its content is about our perceptions. In his view, my seeing that it is raining is also an empirical reason for believing that it is raining. It is so because the content of this reason has the form that 'I ϕ that P ' where ϕ is a perceptual verb. Reasons of this form indicate that I perceive something in the environment.

knowledge that p will at least partly be empirical. Thus, one's knowledge does not come exclusively from reflection, and (AC3) does not follow.

However, one can reformulate the previous argument to avoid this line of response. Since Pritchard's response relies on the idea that one's belief that p is essentially *based on* one's empirical reason, is it possible that one simply does not form a belief that p? If so, then a reformulated argument for the access problem will be as follows:

(AC1') S can know by reflection alone that her rational support r for believing that p is that she sees that p, although she does not form a belief on this basis or on any other empirical basis.

(AC2') S can know by reflection alone that seeing that p entails p.

(AC3') S can know by reflection alone that p.¹⁷³

Can this argument go through? Pritchard finds (AC1') problematic. He contends that in cases where one sees that p but one does not believe that p on this basis (i.e., in suboptimal cases), ED can refuse to say that one's rational support is reflectively accessible in those cases. It is obvious that one's factive rational support is reflectively accessible in the paradigm case. However, suboptimal cases are not paradigm cases, so it is at least possible for ED to explain why one's rational support fails to be reflectively accessible in suboptimal cases. What distinguishes suboptimal cases from optimal cases is one's possession of misleading defeaters.¹⁷⁴ When one possesses a misleading defeater, one inclines not to believe that p even if one sees that p. That is to say, although one sees that p, when one considers whether one sees that p, one would regard herself as not seeing that p because her misleading evidence suggests that what she sees is not the case. Therefore, even if one acquires factive rational support in suboptimal cases, one cannot reflectively recall and endorse it.

My discussion of epistemic masking can explain this idea. First of all, I propose that when one considers (reflectively) whether one sees that p, it is a matter of

¹⁷³ See this formulation in Pritchard (2012, 49).

¹⁷⁴ Suboptimal cases can be suboptimal in other senses (e.g., one is not in an epistemically good environment, or one does not have necessary conceptual repertoire), but here I will confine suboptimal cases to cases where one sees that p but one possesses misleading defeaters.

whether one believes that one sees that p. If one sees that p and one believes that one sees that p, then one's factive rational support is, undoubtedly, reflectively accessible. However, if one sees that p but one does not believe that one sees that p, then one's factive rational support would not be reflectively accessible. When one believes that one sees that p, one has a conclusive reason for believing that p because seeing that p entails p. Now compare two kinds of cases: in paradigm cases, one's belief that one sees that p is not masked by any epistemic defeater, so one would naturally believe that p on this basis and thereby one knows that p; while in the suboptimal cases (recall Zula's case), one possesses a misleading defeater q. This defeater prevents one from believing that p on the one hand because q indicates that p is false, and on the other hand it stops one from believing that one sees that p. For, if one believes that one sees that p, then q must already be defeated and therefore one is not in the suboptimal cases. So long as q remains undefeated and one is epistemically responsible, one won't believe that one sees that p. In a word, q epistemically masks both one's dispositional belief that p and one's dispositional belief that one sees that p. And since both beliefs fail to become occurrent in suboptimal cases, one's factive rational support is in fact reflectively inaccessible. Thereby, (AC1') is wrong. It is wrong because it mistakenly equates suboptimal cases with paradigm cases. And since both arguments are unsound, the access problem for ED does not arise.

Now that the three *prima facie* objections to ED have been resolved, the idea that in paradigm cases one's factive rational support is reflectively accessible should at least be plausible. And in what follows, I will explore how ED incorporates its core claim into an anti-sceptical proposal.

2. Responding to the Underdetermination_{RK}-Based Sceptical Argument

In this section, I will illustrate how ED can respond to the underdetermination_{RK}-based sceptical argument. Recall how we formulate the argument in chapter 1:

The Underdetermination_{RK}-Based Sceptical Argument

(UP1) If S's rational support for believing that p does not favour p over an incompatible sceptical hypothesis q and S knows the incompatibility, then S does not have rationally grounded knowledge that p.

(UP2) S's rational support for believing p does not favour p over q and S knows that p is incompatible with q.

(UP3) Thus S does not have rationally grounded knowledge that p.

As I have noted in chapter one, given that (UP1) is intuitively plausible, a more satisfying way to reject the argument is to question (UP2). What (UP2) says is that our rational support for believing an everyday proposition (such as that there is an apple on the table) does not favour it over its sceptical counterpart (such as that I am hallucinating that there is an apple on the table). Pritchard (2015, 55) neatly calls the idea behind (UP2) the *insularity of reasons thesis*, i.e., our rational support for perceptual beliefs, even in the best case, are insular to the extent that our having rational support is compatible with widespread falsity in our perceptual beliefs. Thereby, if ED can counter (UP2), we then have a direct response to the underdetermination_{RK}-based sceptical argument. In particular, epistemological disjunctivists, such as Pritchard, aim to establish that in a good case, one's rational support does favour one's everyday perceptual belief over its sceptical counterpart. Note that the epistemological disjunctivist contention is conditional, and it is conditional because (UP2) is ambiguous. We can read (UP2) in the following three ways (where p is an everyday proposition and q is its sceptical counterpart):¹⁷⁵

(UP2*) In a good case, S's rational support for believing p does not favour p over q;

(UP2**) In a bad case, S's rational support for believing p does not favour p over q;

¹⁷⁵ Because what is at issue now is one's rational support, for convenience I will ignore the requirement that S know the incompatibility.

(UP2***) In either case, S's rational support for believing p does not favour p over q;

Because (UP2) is formulated without a restriction, it says the same thing as (UP2***) does. What shall the epistemological disjunctivists say? Firstly, ED does not deny (UP2**). In a bad case, one's rational support cannot be of the factive sort that one has in a good case. Therefore, if we are willing to grant that one can have rational support in a bad case, namely that it appears to one that p, then the rational support does not favour p over q. One more thing is, what (UP2**) says is trivial, because every party would agree that in the bad case one surely cannot know. Secondly, if (UP2*) can be rejected, then (UP2***) is rejected as well. After all, if in a good case one's everyday belief is better supported by one's rational support, then it's false that in either case p and q are equally supported by one's rational support. Consequently, ED's primary focus would be on (UP2*).

In order to see why (UP2*) is problematic, we need to answer two crucial questions. Firstly, what is one's rational support for an everyday belief in a good case? Secondly, in what sense does one's rational support favour one's everyday belief over its sceptical counterpart?

As to the first question, the answer is made obvious in section 1.1. According to ED, one's rational support in a good case is one sees that p, which is both factive and reflectively accessible. But why does my rational support favour my everyday belief p over the sceptical hypothesis q? At first sight, this question is closely related to the distinguishability problem. The reason is, when it comes to perceptual knowledge, if one's rational support consists only of discriminating evidence, then p and q would be equally supported by one's rational support (i.e., one lacks discriminating evidence) because one is unable to discriminate p from q. However, our rational support consists of discriminating support and favouring support. Hence, even if one lacks discriminating evidence for believing p, one's overall rational support might favour p over q because p has better favouring support. With this point in mind, we can see why (UP2*) is problematic. I will rewrite it as follows:

(UP2*) In a good case, S's (discriminating support and favouring support) for believing p does not favour p over q;

And we have the following reasoning against (UP2*):

(A1) In a good case, S lacks discriminating support for believing either p or q.

(A2) In a good case, S's favouring support for believing p does favour p over q.

(A3) Therefore, in a good case, S's (discriminating support and favouring support) for believing p does favour p over q.

Evidently, this reasoning is valid. As to its soundness, (A1) is granted by all parties because it is stipulated that veridical experiences and non-veridical experiences are subjectively indistinguishable. (A2) needs some clarifications. For ED, one has factive support for one's everyday belief that p. Factive rational support does favour p over q, because p is entailed by the rational support while q is not. And in this sense, factive support is the strongest support for p because it is conclusive.¹⁷⁶ From (A1) and (A2), we arrive at (A3), which says that in a good case S's (overall) rational support for believing p does favour p over q. Thereby, ED can reject (UP2*). And further, (UP2***) is found problematic in that our rational support in a good case is different from what we have in a bad case. Can we then conclude that the underdetermination_{RK}-based sceptical argument is thus unsound? I think it might be hasty to conclude so, and here is a possible worry.

The distinction between discriminating support and favouring support works well in the zebra case, but does it work in the scepticism case? After all, in the zebra case, Zoey's favouring support, including the background information about zebras and life experiences, is also granted by her interlocutor so that she can legitimately adduce it

¹⁷⁶ In McDowell (2008, 378), he remarks that our worry regarding the possibility of perceptual knowledge is that perceptual experience provides at best inconclusive rational support for claims about the external environment.

in favour of her belief. However, things are different when we deal with the sceptic. On pain of question-begging, we cannot use favouring support that has presumed any knowledge of the external world. Specifically, any background information about the external object and any past life experiences would be dialectically ineffective against radical scepticism. For, if we already possess some knowledge of the external world, the sceptical challenge would be automatically dismissed.

At this juncture, I think we can further distinguish two ways of using favouring support. One way of using favouring support is independent of discriminating support. They can be independent because they are not provided by the same piece of reason. In the zebra case, Zoey's favouring support does not depend on her discriminating support in the sense that she can acquire favouring support without acquiring discriminating support, and *vice versa*. That is to say, Zoey can have the experience as of a zebra but at the same time lack background information about how likely the cleverly-painted-mules alternative is. She can also possess background information about zebras, and have noticed the 'Zebras' sign at the city zoo without possessing any perceptual experience as of a zebra. In that case, for Zoey, the cleverly-painted-mules alternative would be less likely than the proposition that there are zebras in the pen. Given the independence of favouring support on discriminating support, it is an open question whether favouring support has any anti-sceptical import. On the one hand, if one's favouring support is a piece of empirical knowledge of the external world, then any use of it would be dialectically ineffective; on the other hand, one's favouring support can be non-empirical. A case in point is the explanationist reply to the scepticism. Explanationist claims that our common sense hypothesis has explanatory virtues that the sceptical hypothesis lacks. These explanatory virtues include simplicity, coherence, conservatism, fecundity, etc.¹⁷⁷ According to the explanationist, a hypothesis with some of these explanatory

¹⁷⁷ Some preliminaries: 1. Simplicity: other things being equal, a hypothesis that postulates the existence of fewer kinds of entities is simpler; 2. Coherence: other things being equal, a hypothesis that fits better with other widely accepted background knowledge is more coherent; 3. Conservatism: other things being equal, a hypothesis that causes a smaller change in one's belief system is more conservative; 4. Fecundity: other things being equal, a hypothesis that yields more predictions and explanations is more fecund. For a summary of explanatory virtues, see Beebe (2009, 609-11).

virtues is supposed to provide the best explanation of our empirical evidence, and whatever provides the best explanation is the one most likely to be true. Therefore, if our common sense hypothesis, rather than the sceptical hypothesis, is shown to be a better explanation, then we are justified in believing the former, despite the fact that both hypotheses are equally supported by our empirical evidence. Although it remains unclear how these explanatory virtues are related to the truth of a hypothesis, they do provide favouring support rather than discriminating support to our everyday beliefs. Also, this way of invoking favouring support is not question-begging. For, the explanationist does not appeal to any substantive empirical knowledge to justify our everyday beliefs. What is involved in her proposal is the central idea that explanatory virtues are truth-conducive.¹⁷⁸ Thus, as long as she does not defend this idea on empirical ground, favouring support of this sort can have anti-sceptical import.¹⁷⁹

Another way of using favouring support is dependent on the discriminating support, and this is how ED makes use of factive rational support. Importantly, when one acquires rational support that one sees that *p* in the good case, one possesses just *a* reason for believing that *p*. When the alternative *q* is an everyday proposition, one's rational support (one sees that *p*) provides both discriminating and favouring support for *p*. However, when the alternative *q* becomes far-fetched so that one is unable to discriminate *p* from *q*, the same rational support seeing that *p* can only provide favouring support for *p*. Let's use Zoey's case to illustrate this point. When Zoey sees that there are zebras in the pen, she can have discriminating evidence if she is only required to discriminate zebras from elephants. And this discriminating evidence also makes the proposition that animals in the pen are zebras more likely than the alternative that animals in the pen are elephants. That is, discriminating evidence provides favouring support in this particular situation. Therefore, both discriminating support and favouring support are provided by the factive reason that Zoey sees that

¹⁷⁸ Or alternatively, explanationist can say that they care about virtuous inquiries that are resulted from explanatory virtues. If virtuous belief is more fundamental than true belief, then the question whether explanatory virtue is truth-conducive is not primarily important.

¹⁷⁹ As an anti-sceptical proposal, the explanationist reply must therefore defend the central idea on *a priori* ground. One may wonder how this can be done, but clearly this is another issue.

there are zebras in the pen. Nonetheless, when the alternative at issue is that animals in the pen are cleverly-painted mules, the same factive reason only provides Zoey with favouring support. After all, she is no longer able to distinguish a zebra from a cleverly-painted mule by possessing this rational support alone.¹⁸⁰ Is the second way of using favouring support effective against the sceptic? I think so. The main reason is that, unlike independent favouring support such as background information, favouring support provided by factive seeing does not presume any knowledge of the external world. As I have argued, when one acquires a factive reason (i.e., one sees that p), one can know, non-empirically, that one's rational support decisively favours p over its sceptical counterpart q. For, it is stipulated that unless p is true, one cannot see that p. And given that p is incompatible with q, q must be false. Hence, to cite the favouring support, one does not rely on any empirical knowledge. Now that ED's appeal to favouring support is dialectically effective, we can conclude that the underdetermination_{RK}-based sceptical argument fails because (UP2) is wrong.

Does ED provide an obstacle-dissolving response to radical scepticism? There are good reasons for thinking so. Recall how an anti-sceptical proposal can be obstacle-dissolving. From my understanding, an obstacle-dissolving proposal will treat the sceptical challenge as a spurious paradox. That is to say, the sceptical problem does not arise out of our fundamental epistemological concepts and principles; rather it comes from faulty assumptions disguising as innocent platitudes. Crucially, an obstacle-dissolving proposal would submit that there is no *bona fide* paradox which awaits a solution. Therefore, we only need to diagnose what the problematic assumption is and how we can dislodge it without revising our pre-theoretic commitments. For ED, radical scepticism misrepresents our rational support for everyday beliefs. In particular, scepticism tempts us to buy into the idea that our rational support in the good case falls short of the factive sort, so it is at best on a par with our rational support in the bad case. This idea is further supported by our inability to discriminate veridical perception from hallucination. Given this setting,

¹⁸⁰ A possible lesson to be drawn here is that, discriminating evidence is always favouring evidence, but favouring evidence does not have to be discriminating evidence.

we feel uneasy citing our factive rational support because we are tempted to think that discriminating evidence solely constitutes our rational support. However, once we are made aware that our rational support for perceptual knowledge includes discriminating support and favouring support, that equal discriminating support does not amount to equal rational support, and that we can have factive rational support in the good case, faulty assumptions are exposed step by step and we eventually manage to remove the whole problematic setting. As a result, our innocent default position is restored. ED is in line with our folk epistemological concepts. Specifically, it is quite natural in our everyday life that one cites factive rational support, such as seeing that *p*, to explain how one acquires perceptual knowledge. Suppose I am invited to visit my friend. Before I enter her house, I look through the window and find a bunch of tulips on the dining table, so I call her on the phone:

Me: There is a bunch of tulips on your table, how lovely!

Lynn: How do you know that?

Me: I can see that.

Lynn: Oh, you must have arrived.

This natural exchange illustrates how one can cite factive rational support in favour of one's perceptual knowledge. This phenomenon is also supported by linguistic data. As Gisborne (2010) and French (2012) show, there are generally three senses of 'see'. The first sense is visual, what we can call *objectual seeing*. Its typical form is 'S sees *x*'. When we see an object, we perceive visually an object. The second sense is epistemic, what we can call *propositional seeing*. Its typical form is 'S sees that *p*'. When 'see' is used in this sense, we represent ourselves as knowledgeable with respect to a proposition.¹⁸¹ However, we can see that *p* without the visual presence of

¹⁸¹ As opposed to French, I don't think this linguistic fact means that entailment thesis holds. From my view, an alternative explanation is that in the good case, the attribution 'seeing that *p*' represents one as knowledgeable to that *p* because the belief condition of knowledge is automatically satisfied. After all, nothing stops one from believing what one propositionally sees. However, it does not follow that one will always believe what one propositionally sees in other cases.

the target object at issue in p ; i.e., propositional seeing can be independent from objectual seeing. For example, I can see that Lynn is at home without perceiving Lynn, but by noticing her car parking in the (home) garage. For those cases where propositional seeing is on the basis of objectual seeing, we find a distinct type of ‘see’ that is used in a visuo-epistemic way. Call this *visuo-epistemic seeing*. Specifically, when we use sentences of the form ‘S sees that p ’, we represent S as knowledgeable as to p by means of visual perception. In my previous case, when I say ‘I can see that’, I represent myself as knowing that there is a bunch of tulips on the table, and my evidence is based on my looking at the bunch of tulips. Seeing that p is visual in that it specifies that one’s evidence for a proposition is visual perception, and it is epistemic in that it represents one as knowledgeable with respect to a proposition. This visuo-epistemic way of using ‘see’ explains why we do naturally cite factive rational support in favour of our perceptual knowledge.

Now it is clear that ED is invoking our everyday use of rational support, and its core claim does not include any theoretical revision. Hence, ED is providing an obstacle-dissolving reply to underdetermination_{RK}-based radical scepticism.

3. Epistemological Disjunctivism and Closure_{RK}-Based Radical Scepticism

Now that ED can deal with underdetermination_{RK}-based radical scepticism, is ED able to tackle closure_{RK}-based radical scepticism? Recall the sceptical argument:

The Closure_{RK}-Based Sceptical Argument

(SA1) S cannot have rationally grounded knowledge that q (i.e., the denial of the sceptical hypothesis).

(SA2) If S has rationally grounded knowledge that p , and S competently deduces from p that q , thereby forming a belief that q on this basis while retaining her rationally grounded knowledge that p , then S has rationally grounded knowledge that q . [the closure_{RK} principle]

(SA3) S can have rationally grounded everyday knowledge that p .¹⁸²

¹⁸² This formulation is from Pritchard (2015, 161).

At first sight, the closure_{RRK}-based radical scepticism does not pose a threat to ED. In particular, ED can oppose (SA1) directly. According to ED, in paradigm cases, S can have factive and reflectively accessible rational support and therefore her rational support favours her everyday belief over the sceptical hypothesis. That is to say, in spite of the fact that she cannot determine whether the sceptical hypothesis does obtain on the basis of her discriminating support, she is nonetheless in a good position to know the denial of the sceptical hypothesis in paradigm cases due to her possession of favouring support. Further, her favouring support is *decisively* against the sceptical hypothesis because she cannot get factive rational support in the sceptical hypothesis. Therefore, compared with other favouring support that is against the sceptical hypothesis,¹⁸³ factive rational support provides one the strongest rational grounds for regarding the sceptical hypothesis as false.

The same result can be brought about by combining ED's core claim, the underdetermination_{RRK} principle and (SA2) together. And here is the reasoning against (SA1):

- (A) In paradigm cases, S's rational support favours p (an everyday belief) over q (the sceptical counterpart of an everyday belief). [ED's core claim]
- (B) If S's rational support for believing p favour p over an incompatible hypothesis q and S knows the incompatibility, then S can have rationally grounded knowledge that p. [the underdetermination_{RRK} principle]
- (C) Thereby, S can have rationally grounded knowledge that p. [from (A) and (B)]
- (D) If S has rationally grounded knowledge that p, and S competently deduces from p that she is not a BIV, thereby forming a belief that she is not a BIV on this basis while retaining her rationally grounded knowledge that p, then S

¹⁸³ Here I have in mind the background information and explanatory virtues as favouring support. In my view, they are both compatible with the sceptical hypothesis' being true. What they do is just render this hypothesis very unlikely, or nearly improbable. However, only factive rational support is incompatible with the sceptical hypothesis, and thereby it is decisively against the sceptical hypothesis.

has rationally grounded knowledge that she is not a BIV.[the closure_{RK} principle]

(E) Hence, S can have rationally grounded knowledge that she is not a BIV.[from (C) and (D)]

Again, (SA1) seems to be the core claim that ED should reject. And if not, then ED is committed to the denial of the closure_{RK} principle. However, the quick refutation of the closure_{RK}-based sceptical argument might render ED immodest. (SA1) seems to be intuitively true and compelling, and few anti-sceptical proposals would oppose this claim. As Pritchard (2015, 163) remarks, if ED were to conclude that we have rational basis for taking the sceptical hypothesis to be false, then ED's anti-sceptical conclusion would seem far too robust. However, I think whether ED can argue against (SA1) is one thing, whether ED should argue against (SA1) is another thing. For the first question, the rejection of (SA1) is just a direct consequence of ED. After all, if one's rational support in paradigm cases favours one's everyday belief over its sceptical counterpart, then one can have rationally grounded everyday knowledge. And by appealing to the closure_{RK} principle, one can even acquire a rational ground for regarding the sceptical hypothesis as false. As to the second question, it is a strategical issue whether ED should take this step. Ideally, if ED can find a more modest way to contra the closure_{RK}-based sceptical argument, then ED's reply would be more palatable.

4. Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I examined how ED can respond to the underdetermination_{RK}-based sceptical argument. I firstly elaborate ED's core claim, and then I review several challenges to ED. It turns out that ED can plausibly respond to some objections that are levelled against it, and thus we should take ED seriously as a philosophical thesis. From ED's perspective, underdetermination_{RK}-based radical scepticism is wrong because one can have better rational support for one's everyday belief in the paradigm

case. Crucially, one's overall rational support is not exhausted by one's discriminating evidence. That is to say, from the fact that experiences in the good case and experiences in the bad case are subjectively indistinguishable, one cannot conclude that one's epistemic standing is epistemically on a par with that of one's envatted counterpart. What makes the difference is one's favouring support. By having a factive reason, our rational support in the good case favours our everyday belief over its counterpart belief. Therefore, our everyday belief is justified, while the sceptical hypothesis is not.

Although the underdetermination_{RR}-based sceptical argument is shown to be unsound, ED has a problem with the closure_{RR}-based sceptical argument. This problem is only a strategic one. According to ED, as long as one possesses factive rational support, one has a conclusive reason against the sceptical hypothesis. That is, one can know that one is not a BIV. However, this reply is so robust that some epistemological disjunctivists hesitate to embrace it. Therefore, an indirect way of answering closure_{RR}-based radical scepticism, if possible, would be preferable.

Moreover, as I have mentioned in the first chapter, a combined treatment of radical scepticism is what we may hope for. For if an anti-sceptical proposal can respond to a line of sceptical argument but not the other, then at least some part of the sceptical issue is not well addressed. To fully answer the sceptical challenge, we should be able to dismiss two forms of sceptical argument within one anti-sceptical proposal. For this purpose, I will explore whether and how we can combine our responses to radical scepticism in the next chapter.

Chapter Five

A Combined Solution of the Sceptical Problem

0. Introduction

In the previous chapters, I investigate into radical scepticism in a comprehensive way. My investigation includes: 1. the source of radical scepticism; 2. the anti-sceptical import of transcendental arguments; 3. a Davidsonian proposal against closure_{RRK}-based radical scepticism; 4. an epistemological disjunctivist proposal against underdetermination_{RRK}-based radical scepticism. Each chapter ends up with some findings, and it would be helpful to have a summary here.

In chapter one, I examine two arguments for radical scepticism. They are the closure_{RRK}-based radical scepticism and the underdetermination_{RRK}-based radical scepticism. Recall the formulations:

*The Closure_{RRK}-Based Sceptical Argument*¹⁸⁴

- (CR1) S cannot have rationally grounded knowledge that q (e.g., I am not a BIV).
(CR2) If S has rationally grounded knowledge that p (e.g. I am reading a paper), and S competently deduces from p that q, thereby forming a belief that q on this basis while retaining her rationally grounded knowledge that p, then S has rationally grounded knowledge that q. [The closure_{RRK} principle]
(CR3) So, S does not have rationally grounded knowledge that p.

*The Underdetermination_{RRK}-Based Sceptical Argument*¹⁸⁵

- (UP1) If S's rational support for believing that p does not favour p over an incompatible hypothesis q and S knows the incompatibility, then S does not have rationally grounded knowledge that p. [The underdetermination_{RRK} principle]
(UP2) S's rational support for believing that p does not favour p over q and S knows that p is incompatible with q.
(UP3) Thus S does not have rationally grounded knowledge that p.

Both arguments aim to show that our knowledge of the external world is impossible.

¹⁸⁴ This formulation is adapted from Pritchard (2015, 41).

¹⁸⁵ This formulation is adapted from Pritchard (2015, 30).

And they are two logically independent arguments, so any satisfying response to radical scepticism must take both of them into consideration. Moreover, at first sight, the sceptical challenge is a paradox because it appears to rest on nothing but our deeply rooted platitudes. So either we admit that this is a *genuine* paradox because these intuitive claims are problematic and thereby theoretical revision is necessary; or we point out that the putative challenge is a *spurious* paradox, for the simple reason that these claims are not innocent platitudes. Rather, the spurious paradox consists of dubious theoretical assumptions disguising as our default epistemic status. Once the dubious assumptions are dislodged, the sceptical challenge would thereby be dismissed. I call the former approach the obstacle-overriding approach, while the latter approach the obstacle-dissolving approach. I argue for the obstacle-dissolving approach in that it can provide intellectual reassurance and that it does not make any unnecessary concession to the sceptic. In summary, an intellectual satisfying anti-sceptical proposal should address the sceptical challenge by i) responding to the two sceptical arguments in a combined way and ii) in an obstacle-dissolving manner.

In chapter two, I explore the anti-sceptical import of transcendental arguments. Specifically, I argue that modest transcendental arguments can be used as a stepping stone for a diagnostic anti-sceptical proposal. The core idea is that the sceptical paradox consists of three claims that are *prima facie* plausible, and it seems that we are lead into the paradox easily. At the level where the sceptical paradox arises, we are incapable of finding a palatable solution. However, in order to see whether the paradox is ultimately inescapable, we need to step back from it and examine some more basic assumptions that are granted by the paradox. If we arrive at a more basic point where the sceptical problem does not arise, then we will be well positioned to find out some faulty assumptions that drive us into the paradox. A modest transcendental argument starts from an undisputed psychological fact and ends with a necessary theoretical commitment we must make. Note that it won't suffice if we rest content with the revelation of our commitment. We must in addition reveal the faulty assumptions that give rise to the paradox and diagnose why they misrepresent our epistemic standings.

In chapter three, I develop a Davidsonian response to closure_{RK}-based radical scepticism. It provides a satisfying answer to the closure_{RK}-based sceptical argument but struggles dealing with underdetermination_{RK}-based radical scepticism. Closure_{RK}-based scepticism motivates the following idea:

(RE) Rationally grounded knowledge can be extended via competent deduction without restriction.¹⁸⁶

The Davidsonian response to closure_{RK}-based radical scepticism involves two crucial claims:

- A. Contentful belief is in its nature local.
- B. Our evaluation of the sceptical hypothesis is not a contentful and knowledge-apt belief, and therefore we cannot acquire rationally grounded knowledge that the sceptical hypothesis does not obtain.

I will explain what the first claim means in the next section. For now, it would suffice to bear in mind that, from the Davidsonian perspective, there is a limit to the acquisition of rationally grounded knowledge. Knowledge as such cannot go beyond the realm of contentful beliefs.

In chapter four, I argue that epistemological disjunctivism (ED for short) can deal with underdetermination_{RK}-based radical scepticism, but ED's response to closure_{RK}-based radical scepticism is far too ambitious to be palatable. Underdetermination_{RK}-based radical scepticism rests on the idea:

(RS) Rational support for our beliefs is at best inconclusive.¹⁸⁷

Opposing to the idea (RS), Epistemological disjunctivism contends that:

¹⁸⁶ Similar idea is called *the universality of rational evaluation thesis* by Pritchard (2015, 55).

¹⁸⁷ Similar idea is called the *insularity of reasons thesis* by Pritchard (2015, 55).

C. In terms of perceptual knowledge, one's rational support in the optimal case is both factive and reflectively accessible.

That is, regarding our rational support for everyday beliefs, ED submits that our rational support can be conclusive in that it entails the truth of the proposition. Now, in order to resolve the sceptical problem in one go, can we combine these anti-sceptical diagnoses together? It appears that these two proposals can compensate for each other's weakness so that there would be a combined treatment of the sceptical problem. In particular, I will highlight the following two features of rational support:

(I) Rational support can only be provided in a local evaluative system.

(II) Rational support can be factive.

Claim (II) is just a consequence of ED's core claim. As I have discussed ED in great detail in chapter four, I will not defend (II) here. However, regarding the first claim, I have more to say in the next section. In chapter three, I only conclude that doubt must be local,¹⁸⁸ but this claim looks different from what is at issue here. Hence, some elaboration is needed.

1. The Local Nature of Rational Support

In this section, I will take a look at the claim that rational support must be provided locally. *Contra* (RE), this claim suggests that there are constraints on our search for rational support. To spell out what the constraints are, I will recap Davidson's and Wittgenstein's view on this score. Interestingly, they seem to endorse the same idea, although for different reasons.

¹⁸⁸ See section 4 in chapter three.

For Wittgenstein, it is only possible to have a doubt when some propositions are undoubted. We can see this from considering the degree of certainty of different propositions. Obviously, propositions vary in their certainties. Propositions with a high certainty tend to be sure, undoubted and retained; while propositions with a low certainty are likely to be checked, doubted or disbelieved. In our rational evaluations, we search for rational support for a proposition so that the proposition becomes rationally grounded. To do this, reasons for the proposition must be more certain than the proposition itself, for otherwise we would wonder how something more suspicious can confer justification to this proposition. That is to say, propositions with a higher certainty can provide rational support for propositions that are less certain. By doing this, propositions are well-supported in that their rational support makes them epistemically justified. However, on this picture, propositions of the highest certainty are *groundless*.¹⁸⁹ The reason is that no proposition will be more certain than them, so there cannot be rational support for/against them. It is the top-down order of rational support that determines that propositions with the highest certainty must be groundless. Given the groundless nature of those propositions, it follows that there cannot be rational evaluation regarding those propositions as well. After all, any rational support for accepting or rejecting them is less-certain than those propositions, so there cannot be rational support for such evaluation. In a nutshell, any rational evaluation must take place with those propositions in place, and therefore rational support must be local in its nature. In Wittgenstein's view, those propositions are hinges on which rational evaluations turn. We can only provide rational support for a proposition in an evaluative system, and any evaluative system must presuppose hinge propositions. Accordingly, the idea of a wholesale evaluation would be fundamentally incorrect.

Now I return to Davidson. From a Davidsonian perspective, rational support must be local. And I summary the Davidsonian argument for local rational support as follows:

¹⁸⁹ See Pritchard (2015, 64).

(LR1) Unless a belief has determinate content, it cannot be subject to epistemic evaluations.

(LR2) A contentful belief must presuppose other content-determining beliefs.

(LR3) Some content-determining beliefs must be in place in order for epistemic evaluations to take place, thus we cannot have a wholesale epistemic evaluation.

(LR4) Rational support can only be provided in an epistemic evaluation.

(LR5) Hence, rational support must be local.

Claim (LR1) emphasizes that semantic evaluation is prior to epistemic evaluation. For, if we have no idea what a belief is about, then how can we conduct an epistemic evaluation about it? After all, we need to know what counts as evidence in favour of or against the belief in question. And this general epistemic capability requires semantic understanding. Claim (LR2) is Davidson's view on the content of belief, namely, that a belief essentially involves other content-determining beliefs. Then it follows that an epistemic evaluation must presuppose some beliefs that determine the content of the subject matter being evaluated. And only in such an evaluation, rational support can be provided. That is to say, in order to provide any rational support, we must, at least, presuppose some content-determining beliefs.

To sum up: for Wittgenstein, rational support must be provided locally in that any epistemic evaluation must presuppose hinge propositions; and for Davidson, only contentful beliefs are subject to epistemic evaluation, and contentful beliefs presuppose other content-determining beliefs. So any epistemic evaluation must presuppose other content-determining beliefs. For both, a wholesale/global epistemic evaluation is unintelligible, and therefore rational support must be provided in a local manner.

2. A Combined Treatment of Radical Scepticism

Given that (I) rational support can only be provided locally and that (II) rational

support can be factive, can factive rational support be locally provided? I think there are good reasons for thinking so.

2.1 Whether Compatible?

There is no apparent incompatibility between (I) and (II). After all, what (I) says is that any epistemic evaluation must be conducted in a local manner. Within a certain epistemic evaluation, it is an open question whether rational support is factive or non-factive. That is, it is undecided whether rational support entails the truth of the proposition in question. And (II) says that in paradigm cases of perceptual knowledge, one's rational support is factive in that it entails the truth of the proposition at issue. However, (II) does not specify in what conditions factive rational support is provided. In particular, it leaves open whether the evaluative system in which a factive rational support operates is local or universal. It is the compatibility between (I) and (II) that provides us a good chance to combine them together in order to combat the sceptical problem in a combined fashion.

However, there is a possible worry in this regard. On the one hand, regarding the rational support for a belief, Davidson endorses the following thesis:

(BS) Rational support for a belief comes only from beliefs.¹⁹⁰

However, on the other hand, epistemic disjunctivists such as McDowell hold that rational support can come from our experiences as well (at least in the good case). Then it appears that factive rational support is not available to a Davidsonian proposal, for he simply denies that our experience can provide rational support. Therefore, to advocate the combined proposal, one needs to revise the Davidsonian view on this issue.

Regarding this worry, I contend that the McDowellian conception of rational

¹⁹⁰ For example, Davidson (1983, 141) says that 'nothing counts as a reason for holding a belief except another belief'.

support, which can be seen as an extended version of the Davidsonian conception of rational support, should be advocated. To begin with, let's consider why Davidson allows only rational support from beliefs. What concerns him is that if our experience, as an *intermediary* between the world and our beliefs, is ever appealed to justify our beliefs, scepticism is unavoidable. And here is his main reason:

The relation between a sensation and a belief cannot be logical, since sensations are not beliefs or other propositional attitudes. What then is the relation? The answer is, I think, obvious: the relation is causal...For if the intermediaries are merely causes, they don't justify the beliefs they cause, while if they deliver information, they may be lying. The moral is obvious. Since we can't swear intermediaries to truthfulness, we should allow no intermediaries between our beliefs and their objects in the world. Of course there are causal intermediaries. What we must guard against are epistemic intermediaries. (Davidson 2001, 144-45)

Davidson's worry is two-fold. On the one hand, the fact that senses can lie concerns him. When our senses (experiences) provide false information, any justification based on senses has no truth-connection (i.e., the connection between senses and truth is not something we can swear to). And if our beliefs are epistemically, rather than causally based on senses, we would always have the worry that our beliefs can be generally false. Davidson probably, I assume, endorses the idea that veridical experience and non-veridical experience are of the same kind. The reason is that, he aims to argue that our beliefs are generally true, but experience sometimes can lead to massive error, so it would be unwise to base the justificatory ground on experience.

On the other hand, he maintains that justification is a logical connection between the content of a belief and the content of the justifier. However, he holds that sensation has no propositional content, so there cannot be logical or justificatory connection between experience and belief. With this two-fold worry in mind, one might contend that if perceptual experience is shown to be contentful and have a strong connection with truth, then on what ground will a Davidsonian disapprove of its being a justifier? And this contention is in fact an extended version of Davidson's original stance, and we can put it as:

(EBS) What provides rational support for a belief is another belief or perceptual experience in the optimal case.

The difference between (BS) and (EBS) is not as striking as it appears. Davidson (1999, 107) claims that he differs with McDowell on this issue: what is caused by veridical experience, a belief or a non-judgemental propositional attitude that can transform into a belief? For Davidson, the way the world is causes us to have a basic belief, i.e., *perceptual belief*. And this fact also explains why a basic belief owes its content to its cause. When basic beliefs gain subjective probability, other (non-basic) beliefs can be rationally supported by them.¹⁹¹ However, for an epistemological disjunctivist such as McDowell, one can see that p without believing that p. When one sees that p, one is entitled to believe that p.¹⁹²

Return to Davidson's worry. He thinks that sensation does not have propositional content, but he does not defend this point in detail. Contrary to what Davidson holds, it is widely agreed that although sensation (whatever it is) might lack propositional content, perceptual experience does have propositional content.¹⁹³ The general idea is that perceptual experience represents the world as being a certain way. When we have veridical perceptual experience, the world has to be a certain way in order to be represented. As Glüer (2014, 199) puts it, perceptual experiences have 'conditions of correctness, satisfaction, or truth, and that simply means that they have representational, or propositional content.' Hence, at least veridical perceptual experience (in the optimal case) is capable of providing rational support for our beliefs. Moreover, since now we focus on perceptual experience in the good case

¹⁹¹ The term 'subjective probability' is from Davidson (1999, 107). By this term he means that rational support for a belief must be something the agent endorses. Very plausibly, one would only believe a proposition that seems to be probable to the subject. It then follows that a proposition that has no subjective probability cannot serve as rational support for one's belief. One simply would not cite that proposition to justify one's belief.

¹⁹² The term entitlement is used by McDowell (2002, 98). Pritchard (2012, 34) expresses the same idea as, seeing that p guarantees that one is in an objective epistemically good scenario, and therefore one is in a good position to know that p.

¹⁹³ For example, such arguments are provided by Siegel (2005), Byrne (2009), Pautz (2009) and Schellenberg (2011).

where a fact is manifest in one's experience, an immediate consequence is that there is a conclusive connection between one's experience and the way the world is. Specifically, when one's experience takes in an environmental fact that p , then p must be the case. Therefore, at least in the good case, we can swear to the connection between our experience and the world. Note that for ED, experience in the good case and experience in the bad case are different in kind, so Davidson's worry that experience can be lying applies only to the bad case. After all, experiences in the good case never lie. My goal is only to establish that experience in the good case can provide rational support for one's belief, and since Davidson's two worries are dismissed, I don't see any principled objection from him. As a result, we can now plausibly endorse (EBS). With (EBS) in play, the idea that rational support can be both factive and local is therefore plausible.

2.2 Other Reasons for A Combined Proposal

There are more reasons for endorsing a combined proposal. In the first place, the two aspects of rational support are mutually-supportive. It has been made clear that, when we only have the local nature of rational support in mind, we are not in a good position to answer the question whether our rational support favours our everyday belief over its sceptical counterpart. This is both true for Wittgenstein and Davidson. For Wittgenstein, that all rational evaluations must be local is compatible with our rational support being inconclusive, *i.e.* that rationally supported beliefs can be massively false. And for Davidson, although he explicitly argues against the idea that our beliefs can be massively false, his answer also falls short. The reason is, in a good case, the causal fact of my belief does favour my everyday belief over its sceptical counterpart, but this fact does not constitute my *rational support*. Crucially, I cannot acquire this fact from my veridical experience because Davidson maintains that experience does not provide justification for belief. Thus, it remains unanswered whether our rational support favours our everyday belief over its sceptical counterpart. However, when we incorporate the idea that rational support can be factive, then the

Wittgenstein-Davidson approach can easily evade the underdetermination_{RK}-based sceptical challenge. This approach can maintain that, among local rational support, we have factive rational support that favours our everyday belief over the sceptical alternative in paradigm cases.

We also notice that ED cannot provide a modest response to closure_{RK}-based radical scepticism. When we acquire factive rational support, our rational support does favour our everyday belief over its sceptical counterpart. On this basis, ED would implicitly motivate the idea that we can have rationally grounded knowledge that the sceptical hypothesis does not obtain.¹⁹⁴ For modesty, we would like to incorporate a key Wittgensteinian-Davidsonian element into ED's response, namely, the local nature of rational support. When this element is added, ED can submit that although we can acquire factive rational support in paradigm cases, our rational support does not issue any rationally grounded knowledge that the sceptical hypothesis does not obtain. After all, any evaluation of the sceptical hypothesis is not in the realm of rationally grounded knowledge. So, ED can embrace a restricted way of using factive rational support. According to the restricted version, factive rational support shall only be used within the limit of rationally grounded knowledge. Hence, ED's response to closure_{RK}-based scepticism is more modest and more satisfying.

Secondly, there is a unified diagnostic nature of the three proposals.¹⁹⁵ The diagnostic nature is in line with the obstacle-dissolving approach I discussed in chapter one. The obstacle-dissolving approach centres on the idea that there is no *genuine* special paradox. The apparent paradox is only *spurious*, and it results from problematic assumptions. If we manage to dislodge these assumptions, the sceptical worry will then be dismissed. In the course of diagnosis, modest transcendental arguments play a vital part.¹⁹⁶ Modest transcendental arguments aim to reveal some necessary commitments that we must make before we engage the sceptical paradox. These commitments are indispensable to some basic facts that the sceptic shares with

¹⁹⁴ See section 3 in Chapter Four.

¹⁹⁵ I mean Wittgenstein, Davidson and ED.

¹⁹⁶ Davidson and McDowell are more explicit in this regard, while Wittgenstein is rather implicit.

us. When these commitments are revealed, we are in a good position to find out why the sceptical paradox is tempting but spurious. In this sense, a modest transcendental argument is a stepping stone for our diagnostic anti-sceptical proposal. What is the diagnosis then? For Wittgenstein and Davidson, it is necessary that any rational evaluation be conducted in a local manner. However, closure_{RK}-based radical scepticism appeals to an unrestricted way of conducting rational evaluation. And we also confuse two things: that competent deduction is a typical way of acquiring rationally grounded knowledge and that the limit of competent deduction is the limit of rationally grounded knowledge.¹⁹⁷ Once we are made aware of that the realm of rationally grounded knowledge is determined by how rational support must be provided, we will reject the unrestricted way of conducting rational evaluation.

For ED, we must be committed to the idea that there are cases where we see that p (i.e. an environmental fact is manifest to us via perception) if we find intelligible that perceptual experience purports to be of objective environment. That is to say, our rational support can be factive. However, underdetermination_{RK}-based scepticism regards our rational support to be, at best, inconclusive. And the sceptical contention looks even plausible because we find factive rational support problematic. We face the distinguishability problem, the basis problem and the access problem. The problematic assumptions include the new evil demon thesis, the entailment thesis and the ignored distinction between favouring support and discriminating support. After we conclude that these problems don't sustain, we can endorse factive rational support wholeheartedly.

Now, it is evident that radical scepticism, including both the closure_{RK}-based and the underdetermination_{RK}-based variants, is a misrepresentation of our genuine epistemic standing. This misrepresentation is due to some problematic assumptions. To fully disarm the sceptical threat, we rely on a diagnosis which starts with a modest transcendental argument and ends with the dislodgement of dubious assumptions.

¹⁹⁷ Crucially, logical deduction is a matter of truth-preservation inference. However, rationally grounded knowledge requires truth and rational support. So, when we have rationally grounded knowledge that p, what we arrive at (via competent deduction from p) is not always rationally grounded knowledge.

3 Concluding Remarks

With the combined proposal in play, we can have rational support that is both local and factive. Rational support as such can evade the challenge posed by either the $\text{closure}_{\text{RK}}$ -based or the $\text{underdetermination}_{\text{RK}}$ -based sceptical arguments. Put the answer simply, on the one hand, the fact the rational support must be local reminds us that our evaluation of the sceptical hypothesis is not knowledge-apt, so there is simply no rationally grounded knowledge regarding the denial of the sceptical hypothesis. Hence, before we acquire rationally grounded everyday knowledge, we are not required to dismiss the sceptical hypothesis on a rational basis; also, we are not licenced to conclude the falsity of the sceptical hypothesis when rationally grounded everyday knowledge is in place. On the other hand, the fact that rational support can be factive highlights the essential difference between rational support for everyday beliefs and rational support in the sceptical scenario. While possessing factive rational support, we can conclude that our everyday beliefs are favoured than their sceptical counterparts. In summary, with the combined proposal in play, we manage to provide a combined treatment to the two-faceted radical scepticism. This treatment proceeds along the obstacle-dissolving approach by providing a diagnosis of the sceptical problem and then dislodging dubious assumptions. In the end, we are provided with a satisfying response to radical scepticism.

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