WITTGENSTEINIAN EPISTEMOLOGY AND

CARTESIAN SKEPTICISM

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To my mother, and to the loving memory of my father

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

This work starts from three complementary and interdependent questions:

1) How should we interpret Wittgenstein's anti-skeptical strategy as presented in *On Certainty*, and especially the elusive and yet central concept of 'hinges'?

2) Can Wittgenstein's strategy, when properly understood and developed, provide a satisfactory response to Cartesian skepticism?

3) Does a Wittgensteinian epistemology license epistemic relativism, and if so to what extent?

In Chapter 1, I present Cartesian-style skepticism and its epistemological implications along with the Dretske-Nozick's 'relevant alternatives' theory, based on the rejection of the Closure principle for Knowledge which underlies the skeptical challenge. After a brief discussion of the main concerns raised against this proposal, I argue that this line is untenable and that a successful anti-skeptical proposal has to retain Closure.

Having shown the shortcomings of the Dretske-Nozick proposal, I then focus my attention on G. E. Moore's famous anti-skeptical works, namely "A Defence of Common Sense" (1925, henceforth DCS) and "Proof of an External World", (1939, henceforth PEW). In these seminal papers, Moore famously argued that it is possible to know several 'obvious truisms of commonsense' such as 'There are external objects', I have a body' and so on and that this knowledge can offer a direct response to skeptical worries; the aim of this strategy is then to retain both Closure and our confidence in our everyday knowledge claims.

After a detailed presentation of DCS and PEW I will discuss the problems of Moore's direct response against the skeptic, drawing on the works of distinguished commentators such as Malcolm, Clarke, Stroud and Wright. Roughly, I argue that Moore's strategy is both unnecessary and unconvincing: unconvincing because Moore's knowledge-claims cannot refute Cartesian skeptical arguments; unnecessary

for they can 'work' only within our everyday 'non-philosophical' context, thus when no skeptical hypothesis can be sensibly raised.

Even if Moore's anti-skeptical attempts have unanimously been considered unsatisfying, for several reasons his works have nonetheless been extremely influential, to the extent that quite a few contemporary anti-skeptical proposals can be fairly described as 'Moorean'. In Chapter 2, I present and discuss the dominant 'Moore-Inspired' positions, namely Pryor's Dogmatist Reading of PEW, Neta's interpretation of the Proof, Greco's reliabilist account, Fara's 'Second Proof', DeRose's 'Moorean contextualism' and Sosa 'Neo-Mooreanism'. I criticise these accounts in turn, in order to show that all these strategies inherit the main problems of Moore's treatment of skepticism and also have unpalatable consequences with regard to the so-called 'value problem for knowledge'.

After having extensively criticised both Moore's and 'Neo-Moorean' epistemologies, in Chapter 3 I focus my attention on Wittgenstein's *On Certainty*; given the obscurity and ambiguity of this work, in this chapter I present some of the less contentious aspects of Wittgenstein's treatment of skepticism and I emphasise the role played by 'hinges ' in his anti-skeptical strategy.

This will give me the background to assess the different 'Wittgenstein-inspired' anti-skeptical strategies I consider in Chapter 4, namely Conant's 'therapeutic' reading, Wright's 'rational entitlement' account, Williams' 'Wittgensteinian contextualism', McGinn's 'framework' reading and Pritchard's 'hinge commitment' strategy. I argue that these proposals are wanting, both as plausible interpretations of Wittgenstein's thought and more importantly as viable anti-skeptical strategies. Moreover, I show that McGinn and Williams' proposals can lead to a form of epistemic relativism, according to which our epistemic practices are the result of pre-rational, social commitments not subject to rational evaluation of any sort; a conclusion which is not more palatable than skepticism itself.

Chapter 5 is devoted to presenting Moyal-Sharrock's 'non-epistemic' reading of OC, for which 'hinges' such as 'There are external objects' or 'I have a body' are the expression of a pre-theoretical, animal certainty which she sees as constitutively different from knowledge. While I defend Moyal-Sharrock's exegesis and her analogy between 'hinges' and 'rules of grammar' as the most plausible interpretation of Wittgenstein's thought, in this chapter I also criticise her 'non-epistemic' account; roughly, I argue that following this strategy we will be forced either to reject the

Closure principle, thus inheriting the problems of the Dretske-Nozick's line, or else to endorse skepticism. Moreover, I also consider some of the relativistic implications of Moyal-Sharrock's account, which make her proposal vulnerable to the same objections I have raised against McGinn's framework reading and Williams' Wittgensteinian contextualism.

In Chapter 6, I develop my own anti-skeptical proposal, which is informed by the analogy between 'hinges' and 'rules of grammar' and their peculiar status. Drawing on Wittgenstein's reflections on grammatical rules, developed in the so-called second phase of his thought, and especially in his *Philosophical Investigations*, I argue that 'hinges' cannot be object of knowledge but are subject to an altogether different epistemic standing, namely *understanding* or *'mastery of techniques'*. A promising anti-skeptical implication of this account is that it will help us to dismiss Cartesian-style skepticism as the result of a *logical error*, based on a misleading way of representing the structure of our epistemic practices, which are not based on propositional beliefs but rather on non-propositional, normative *rules*.

In the rest of Chapter 6, I consider a final problem that a Wittgensteinian epistemology so construed has to face in order to be considered a fully viable anti-skeptical position; that is, whether Wittgenstein's account of 'hinges' would lead to epistemic relativism of a kind that is generated by the proposals put forward by Williams, McGinn and Moyal-Sharrock.

Chapter 7 is devoted to addressing this question in detail. Drawing on Wittgenstein's views on mathematics, metrology and religious beliefs, I aim to show that his remarks on 'hinges' will help us to dissolve epistemic relativism rather than licensing it. This is so because following Wittgenstein's remarks on the structure of reason the disagreement between epistemic communities committed to different 'hinges' (for instance a community which believes in oracles rather than in science) is either solvable, as different epistemic practices can be compared and assessed if they have similar aims, or is a pseudo-disagreement which stems from a misguided comparison between different practices.

CHAPTER 1

CARTESIAN SKEPTICISM, RELEVANT ALTERNATIVES AND THE
COMMONSENSE VIEW OF THE WORLD

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the first section of this chapter, I introduce Cartesian-style skepticism and its
epistemological implications.

Section 2 is devoted to presenting the Dretske-Nozick 'relevant alternative"
theory, based on the rejection of the Closure principle of Knowledge which underlies
the skeptical challenge; the main concerns that have been raised against this proposal
are sketched in Section 3.

Finally, in the rest of the chapter I present G.E. Moore's influential anti-
skeptical strategies, along with a survey of the dominant interpretations of his work.

1.1 THE CARTESIAN SKEPTICAL PARADOX.

The feature of Cartesian style arguments is that we cannot know some empirical
propositions (such as 'I have a body', or 'There are external objects') as we may
be dreaming, hallucinating, deceived by a demon[1] or be "brains in the vat" (BIV), that
is, disembodied brains floating in a vat, connected to supercomputers that stimulate us
in just the same way that normal brains are stimulated when they perceive things in a

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1   As in Rene Descartes' "systematic doubt", which is the first example of this kind of radical
    skepticism (hence Cartesian skepticism). In his *Meditation on First Philosophy,* along with various
    skeptical hypotheses that lead him to distrust his senses (the fact that they have deceived him in the
    past, that while sleeping he dreamt all sorts of things gaining many false beliefs that looked
    apparently true, and so on and so forth), he also hypothesises the existence of an evil genius, who is
    "as clever and deceitful as he is powerful, who has directed his entire effort to misleading me". This
    evil deceiver presents to Descartes a complete illusion of an external world, including other people,
    where in fact there is no world. Moreover, he also constantly presents to him an illusion of his own
    body, including all bodily sensations, while in fact Descartes has no body.

normal way. [2] Therefore, as we are unable to refute these skeptical hypotheses, we are also unable to know propositions that we would otherwise accept as being true if we could rule out these scenarios.

As in the work of Keith DeRose (1995), Ernest Sosa (1995), Jonathan Vogel (1999), and others, we can understand the Cartesian skeptical problem as consisting in a number of claims that are, at the same time, both inconsistent and, at least *prima facie*, perfectly in order. First, let's take a skeptical hypothesis SH, such as one of the ones we have mentioned above, and M a "mundane" (Vogel, 1999, 157) proposition that we would typically take ourselves to know and the knowledge of which entails the falsity of the skeptical hypothesis. For example, a proposition like "I know that I have two hands" would entail the falsity of a skeptical hypothesis such as the BIV scenario.

The three inconsistent claims can now be stated as follows:

1) I know M

2) I do not know not-SH

Therefore

3) If I do not know not-SH, then I do not know M

These three propositions cannot clearly be all true; still, they all are highly plausible. Take (1) first. We normally claim to know mundane propositions; that is, in ordinary situations we would confidently claim to know that we have two hands or a body (and that we are not, therefore, brains manipulated by supercomputers), or that our perceptions are generally reliable and are not the result of, say, systematic delusions.

However, following (2), we cannot say that we know skeptical hypotheses to be false, as they concern scenarios that are phenomenologically indistinguishable from everyday life. For instance, if we were BIVs all our experiences would be qualitatively indistinguishable from those of an ordinary perceiver. If on the basis of these computer-determined experiences we believe that we have two hands, when in fact we don't (BIVs don't have hands), our belief would be obviously false, and will not amount to knowledge.

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2   See Putnam (1981, Chapter 1), in which he hypothesises that we might be brains fed by supercomputers that constantly stimulate us with false impressions, even about the existence of the external world or of our own body.

Cartesian arguments are extremely powerful as they rest on the *Closure principle for knowledge.* According to this principle, knowledge is "closed" under known entailment; roughly speaking, this principle states that if an agent knows a proposition (for example, the fact that she has two hands) and knows that this proposition entails a second proposition (for example, that she is not a BIV, something which lacks hands), then she also knows the second proposition (that she is not a BIV). In a more formal way, this principle goes as follows:

> *The "Closure" Principle*
> For all S, p, q, if S knows that p, and S knows that p entails q than S knows that q.

This principle is highly intuitive: for instance, a proposition like *I had an egg for breakfast* entails that, say, *I had something for breakfast.* If I know that p, I had an egg for breakfast, I also know that q, I had something for breakfast, at least provided I know the relevant entailment (as intuitively I do). That is, according to the principle that knowledge is closed under known entailment if I know the former claim, and I know the entailment, I know the latter. Now, even in this sketchy form, this principle seems apparently uncontentious.

The intuitiveness of the Closure principle rests also on the fact that we reason in conformity with Closure any time in which we gain knowledge of previously unknown propositions via knowledge of other propositions and the relevant entailment. But in the hand of the skeptic, Closure can be easily used as follows:

> 1) I do not know that I am not a bodiless BIV
> 2) I know that (I have a body entails that I am not a bodiless BIV)

Hence, via Closure, we can now infer:

> 3) I do not know that I have a body.

For if I did know that I have a body then, given Closure and (2), I would thereby know that I am not a bodiless BIV. Since it has already been granted, in (1), that I do

not know this, it follows that I do not—indeed, *cannot*—know that I have a body, as (3) says.

More generally, the skeptic can use Closure to argue for skepticism in this schematic fashion, where (S2) is motivated by appeal to the Closure principle (and where it is also reasonably assumed that I do know that M entails not-SH):

(S1) I do not know not-SH

(S2) If I do not know not-SH, then I do not know M

Therefore

(SC) I do not know M

The radical skeptical consequence that we can draw from this and similar arguments is that, as we have mentioned above, our everyday knowledge would be impossible. For given that we can repeat such arguments for any epistemic agent as well as for any mundane proposition M (we would just need to vary the skeptical hypothesis in question to suit), it follows that we are unable to know anything at all.

1.2. ORDINARY KNOWLEDGE-CLAIMS AND RELEVANT ALTERNATIVES

A first anti-skeptical solution that I am going to consider is the *relevant alternatives* line, which has received a first explicit formulation in the works of Fred Dretske (1970, 1971, 2005a, 2005b). Roughly, according to this proposal, it would be possible to know a mundane proposition M such as 'I have two hands' even when it is impossible to rule out a skeptical scenario such as the BIV one; accordingly, following this proposal we should reject the premise S2) of the skeptical argument, thus affirming that the impossibility of knowing non-SH does not entail the impossibility of knowing any mundane proposition M.

Dretske's main idea is that all knowledge only transmits across known entailments, where the entailments in question are "relevant". Consider the following example (1970):

p) The animals in the pen are zebras

q) The animals in the pen are not mules cleverly disguised to look like zebras.

In normal circumstances, Dretske argues, we can know that p even without knowing whether an irrelevant error possibility such as q is false; all we need to do is simply to eliminate *relevant* error possibilities (for instance, checking that we are not looking into the ape enclosure instead of the zebra enclosure). Accordingly, to eliminate the irrelevant error possibility at issue in q in order to know that p would not be a sensible epistemic inquiry; on the contrary, it would just set too high, and somewhat irrational, epistemic requirements to our knowledge-claims.

This would be so, Dretske argues, because anytime we are involved in a given epistemic practice we automatically assume the falsity of some far-fetched error possibilities; and we have to do so if widespread knowledge is to be possible. Consider one's knowledge of a proposition r such as 'There is a cookie in the jar', formed *via* visual perception. Even if visual perception is a reliable process in order to know that r, it does not *per se* represent a way of knowing a number of propositions concerning far-fetched error-possibilities whose truth is presupposed by r, such as that one is not looking at a cookie hologram. More generally, all our epistemic practices would rest on "heavyweight implications" (Dretske 2005a, 20); in the case of visual perception, for instance, we take for granted the existence of the external world, or the fact that our perceptions are not the result of constant deception. Nonetheless, *via* visual perception we cannot know these propositions to be true; while according to Closure, in order to say that we know that r) 'There is a cookie in the jar', we should be able to know that p) There is an external world (a known entailment from r).

Accordingly, Dretske argues, we should reject the Closure principle as misleading; if we allow Closure to stand, then it will follow from the agent's knowledge that r), and her knowledge of the entailment from r) to the target heavyweight implication of r), that she thereby knows this heavyweight implication, despite the fact that the agent is not in a position to have such knowledge. But if we reject Closure there is no need to know the heavyweight implication of r in order to know that r; accordingly, we can know our mundane propositions M while failing to know the denials of skeptical hypotheses.

It is worth noticing that Dretske's rejection of Closure is not an *ad ho*c solution to Cartesian skepticism; on the contrary, he tries to show how the Cartesian argument rests on an unsatisfactory model of knowledge. Thus, in order to explain how we can know mundane propositions while failing to know the denials of

skeptical hypotheses, Dretske (1971) adduces the following modal condition on knowledge, which has been developed further by Robert Nozick (1981). As in Pritchard (2002a, 221) we might call this principle 'Dretskean Sensitivity':

Dretskean Sensitivity

A necessary condition of an agent's knowledge of a contingent proposition, p, is that she has a true belief in p in the actual world and that, in the nearest possible world or worlds in which p is false, she does not believe p.

The idea behind this strategy is that a belief, in order to count as knowledge, has to 'track' the truth in the sense that not only it is true but also, had what is believed been false, the agent would not have believed it.

Consider the following (true) beliefs, held by a subject S:

p) I am sitting in my office
q) I am not a BIV

On Dretske's account, if S is a normal agent in normal circumstances then his belief that p counts as knowledge because in the nearest possible worlds in which she is not in her office (for instance, a world in which she is outside the office or in the corridor) she would no longer believe that p). S's belief that p is thus, in Dretske's jargon, *sensitive;* if it were false, S would not have believed that p.

S's belief that q, in contrast, cannot be sensitive; for in the nearest possible world in which q is false (i.e., the BIV world) S would, by hypothesis, continue to form the belief that q, as in this world she is victim of a sophisticated deception. So q does not meet the necessary condition for knowledge set out in Dretskean sensitivity and hence cannot be considered as an instance of knowledge.

It follows that on this view we should reject Closure, in that an agent can know one proposition (say, p), know that it entails a second proposition (q, in this case), and yet fail to know the entailed proposition. The diagnosis of why Closure fails on Dretske's view is that knowledge needs to be understood in terms of what the agent believes with regard to the target proposition across a certain range of possible

worlds, where that range is variable depending on the proposition at issue. For instance, in the case of p, the nearby possible worlds relevant to know that p are the worlds in which for instance I am in the corridor or I am at home, but not the far-off possible worlds in which I am a BIV.

The result is that an agent can know a proposition relative to a set of possible worlds, know also the entailment to a second proposition but nonetheless fail to know the second proposition relative to a different set of possible worlds. That is, we can have and also know that our knowledge entails the denial of a skeptical hypothesis; but still, we cannot know the denials of skeptical hypotheses because, in these scenarios, knowledge is relative to 'far off' possible worlds that are very different from the actual one.

1.3 PROBLEMS WITH THE REJECTION OF CLOSURE

The Dretske-Nozick line has been highly influential, but as we have mentioned above results in an explicit denial of the Closure principle. This principle is highly plausible: the idea that we must know the known consequences of what we know is extremely intuitive, and to simply reject it appears to many commentators as an unsustainable position.

For instance, as DeRose points out (1995, 9), to deny Closure will allow what he calls 'abominable conjunctions' such as that an agent can claim that he doesn't know that he is not a bodiless (and so handless) BIV, while at the same time claiming to know that he has two hands[3].

To face this criticism Dretske, following Grice (1967), draws a difference between "logical" and "conversational" abominations (2005a). Logical abominations are statements, such as 'It is raining and it is not raining', that cannot be true and are self-contradictory; on the other hand, conversational abominations are perfectly consistent and possibly true statements that violate conventional expectations.

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[3] It is worth noting that Wittgenstein's anti-skeptical remarks in OC are informed by similar concerns on the use of the expression 'to know', as he argues that it would be wrong to claim that we know statements such as ' I have a body' or 'This is a hand' for they cannot be grounded in evidence or reasons. I will come back to this point in Chapter 3.

For example, a statement like "the refrigerator is empty but has lots of things in it" is a conversational, not a logical abomination (2005a, 17). We can say that there is no food in the fridge, so it is empty; nonetheless it is full of, for instance, molecules, devices and so on. Therefore, the statement "the refrigerator is empty but has lots of things in it" is not self-contradictory. A similar point can be made for two statements such as 'I know that I have two hands' and 'I do not know that I am not a bodiless (so handless) BIV'; these statements are consistent, despite the fact that they violate conventional expectations.

However, the rejection of Closure seems to many critics to be highly problematic; this is so because, as has been argued among others such as Williamson (2000) and Hawthorne (2005a, 2005b), the Dretske-Nozick line implies the rejection of a number of highly intuitive 'Closure-related' principles. Consider the following version of the Closure principle:

Competent Deduction
If one knows that p and one competently deduces q from p, thereby coming to believe that q on this basis, while retaining one's knowledge that p, then one comes to know that q (Hawthorne 2005a, 29; cf. Williamson 2000a, 117).

This version of Closure is highly compelling; it would be extremely odd to concede that an agent knows that p, that he knows that some q follow from p and so she believes that q on that basis, but still to deny that she knows that q.

Moreover, consider the following principle, from Hawthorne :

The Equivalence Principle
If one knows a priori (with certainty) that p is equivalent to q and one knows that p, and one competently deduces q from p (forming one's belief that q on this basis, while retaining one's knowledge that p), then one knows that q (2005a, 29).

There is a strong logical relationship between this principle and Closure; equivalence states that anytime an agent knows a *priori* that a p, for instance 'I have two hands', is equivalent to a q, 'I am not a handless BIV', and competently deduces q from its knowledge that p, then one knows that q. We can therefore consider equivalence as a

particular case of the more general Closure. Now, argues Hawthorne, Dretske's argument against Closure has no strength against equivalence. On Dretske's account, in order to believe that p an agent should have a conclusive reason r such that, were p not the case, r would not be the case. Now if we believe p on the basis of r, and p entails q, r may be sensitive to p and still not to q. But if p and q are equivalent, we have no reason to claim that r can underwrite knowledge that p but not knowledge that q. Therefore, Dretske should accept the equivalence principle.

To support his point further, Hawthorne also presents this other principle:

Distribution
If one knows the conjunction of p and q, then as long as one is able to deduce p, one is in a position to know that p (and as long as one is able to deduce q, one is in a position to know that q) (ibid).

As before, there is a strong logical relationship between this principle and Closure. If I know the conjunction of p, 'I have two hands', and q, 'I am not a handless BIV', then I am in a position to know that p. And knowing the conjunction, as I am able to deduce q then I am in a position to know that q.

Similar to the equivalence principle, Distribution is a - somewhat improved - version of Closure, as it states that if we know that p&q, then we are also able to know, *via* deduction, that p and similarly that q. Moreover, Distribution seems also highly reasonable; it would be extremely odd to claim that an agent knows that p and q, but is unable to know that p by deduction.

Nevertheless, argues Hawthorne, Dretske is committed to denying this principle. If we suppose that we know that a glass g is full of wine on the basis of perception, the proposition that g is full of wine is *a priori* equivalent to the proposition

g is full of wine and non-g is full of non-wine that is colored like wine.

So, following the equivalence, an agent knows this conjunction. Now, supposing Distribution, one is in a position to know that

Non-g is full of non-wine that is colored like wine.

But, following Dretske, we would be forced to deny that we can know the latter, thus abandoning the Distribution Principle. And this is just a sample of the significant costs implied by the rejection of Closure.

1.4 MOORE AND EXTERNAL WORLD SKEPTICISM[4]

As we have seen, despite the appeal of the Dretske-Nozick line the rejection of the Closure principle presents too many issues and has been therefore widely fallen into disfavour.

Another way of dealing with Cartesian style skepticism is to deny the premise S1) of the skeptical argument ("I don't know if I am the victim of a skeptical scenario"), thus affirming *contra* the skeptic that we can know the falsity of the relevant skeptical hypothesis.

The origin of this anti-skeptical line can be traced in G.E. Moore's *DCS and PEW*; in these papers, Moore famously argued that we can know statements such as 'I have a body', 'There are external objects' or 'The earth existed long before my birth' and that this knowledge would offer a direct response to skeptical worries.

Even if both DCS and PEW have been read mostly as anti-skeptical works, Moore's primary concern in these two papers was a refutation of the tenets of British idealism and especially the work of Bradley.

In his *Appearance and Reality* (1930), Bradley argued that our everyday conceptions of the world contain hidden contradictions which appear when we try to think out their consequences. In particular, he rejected the view that reality can be understood as consisting of many objects existing independently of each other (pluralism) and of our experience of them (realism). Thus, Bradley's view combined *substance monism* — the claim that reality is one and that there are no real separate things — with metaphysical idealism — the claim that reality consists solely of ideas or experience. As in Berkeley's famous expression, for Bradley *esse est percipi*; that

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[4] In this section, I am drawing on Soames, 2003, Vol. 1.

is, material objects exist only as they are perceived, and so there would be no mind-independent objects.

To reconstruct in detail Bradley's complex metaphysic is not a task I shall set myself here and would fall beyond the scope of the present work. Nevertheless, it should be clear that a similar position is at odds with our common sense view for it would lead to more than a perplexity about the real existence of the world or of the past, which, following Bradley, would only be a - so to speak - 'mind-dependent' product of our perceptions.

It is worth highlighting at this stage a difference between external world skepticism and the idealist position. Both a Cartesian skeptic and an idealist would grant the existence of the external world; but while for the latter external objects exist only when perceived, the former argues that as long as we are unable to rule out skeptical scenarios we are unable to *know* that the external world exists. Thus, given Closure, we are unable to know anything at all.

With this distinction in mind, we can now focus our attention on Moore's DCS, which starts by enunciating a whole list of propositions that he knows for certain to be true:

> There exists at present a living human body, which is my body. This body was born at a certain time in the past, and has existed continuously ever since, though not without undergoing changes; it was, for instance, much smaller when it was born, and for sometime afterwards, than it is now. Ever since it was born, it has been either in contact with or not far from the surface of the earth; and, at every moment since it was born, there have also existed many other things having shape and size in three dimensions (in the same familiar way in which it has), from which it has been at various distances (in the familiar sense in which it is now at a distance both from that mantelpiece and from that bookcase, and at a greater distance from the bookcase than it is from the mantelpiece): also there have (very often, at all events) existed some other things of this kind with which it was in contact (in the familiar sense in which it is now in contact with the pen I am holding in my right hand and with some of the clothes I am wearing). Among the things which have, in this sense, formed parts of its environment […] there have, at every moment since its birth, been large numbers of other living human bodies, each of which has,

like it, a) at some time been born b) continued to exist at some time after birth c) been, at every moment of its life after birth, either in contact with or not far from the surface of earth; and many of these bodies have already died and ceased to exist before I was born. But the earth has existed long also for many years long before my body was born: and for many of these years, also, large numbers of human bodies had died and ceased to exist before it was born. Finally [….] I am a human being and I have, at different times since my body was born, had many different experiences, of each of many different kinds [….] And, just as my body has been the body of a human being, namely myself, who has, during his lifetime, had many experiences of each of these (and other) different kinds; so, in the case of very many of the others human bodies which have lived upon the earth, each has been the body of a different human being who has, during the lifetime of that body, had many different experiences of each of these (and others) different kinds (1925, 33-34).

All these statements are known to be true, Moore argues, by many other human beings; also, they are perfectly understandable by any competent English speaker and constitute what Moore calls the *common-sense view of the world*.

As we have seen supra, an idealist denies all these 'obvious truisms', an idealist cannot hold any of the propositions listed in DCS; nevertheless, argues Moore, when denying them the idealist is simply maintaining something *false*. This is so because an idealist philosopher can uphold his position just because he is, first and foremost, a human being; as such, he cannot deny having a body, or having thoughts or memories, whose 'mind-independent' existence is put in discussion by philosophical idealism. Moreover, when an idealist assumes that other non-idealist philosophers are wrong, he is implicitly assuming that he knows that there are other human beings; and so, that there are material objects, that there is space and time and so on (1925, 40).

As I have mentioned before, differently from a radical skeptic an idealist does not deny our knowledge of the existence of material objects or of other human beings, but the fact that they exist independently from their being perceived. In light of Moore's analysis, this thesis can be stated only given the *falsity* of its premises (that is, that the material world and other human beings exist only as they are perceived), and is therefore false.

Furthermore, Moore argues that even if denying the 'truisms of the commonsense' is not self-contradictory, these are all true propositions which cannot entail a contradiction; thus, as 'commonsense truisms' are true, their negation is false.

After having extensively discussed and criticised the idealistic position, Moore then sets himself to refute Cartesian skepticism. Against skeptical worries, he holds that the skeptic is maintaining a false position; the skeptic invites us to consider our ordinary knowledge-claims as mere beliefs which cannot count, strictly speaking, as knowledge. But, argues Moore, while affirming that, for instance, 'no human being has ever had knowledge of the existence of other human beings' the skeptic is implicitly recognising what she claims to doubt, namely the existence of other human beings. In other words, for Moore we can translate the skeptical challenge into the following self-contradictory proposition: "There have been many human beings, myself included, and no one of them (myself included) has ever had knowledge of other human beings" (1925, 40).

It is worth noting that Moore does not seem fully convinced of the anti-skeptical strength of his strategy; with regard to the propositions listed in DCS, Moore asks himself whether he really knows all his truisms or if he just considers them highly probable. His answer is that he knows them with certainty even if, as he admits

> in the case of most of them, I do not know them directly: that is to say, I only know them because, in the past, I have known to be true other propositions that were evidence for them (1925, 40).

Let us set this aside for a moment, and turn our attention to PEW. Moore starts his Proof, probably one of his most known and more discussed works, with a quotation from the second edition of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*:

> It still remains a scandal to philosophy.... that the existence of things outside of us...must be accepted merely on faith, and that, if anyone thinks good to doubt their existence, we are unable to counter his doubts by any satisfactory proof (1998, 36).

As per Moore, in order to address this 'scandal to philosophy' we need first to clarify what exactly the expression 'things outside of us' means; a term which is extremely

ambiguous, as it can define entities such as *things to be met in space, things presented in space* and *things external to our minds*. Despite their apparent similarities, all these possess radically different features that can be stated as follows.

First, things *presented in space* are all *private*; for instance, two persons can have similar pains, or perceive similar afterimages and double images. Still, it is logically impossible to say that they are having the same pain or having the same sense experience; thus, pains, double images and after images are all *private*, in the sense that they are peculiar to an individual point of view and they cannot be experienced by more than one person.

Also, all things *presented in space* cannot exist unperceived; pains, afterimages and double images exist only when someone is perceiving and/ or experiencing them. To understand this point, consider the case of pain: when we hurt ourselves, our pain exists only as long as we are feeling it and we have no reason to think that our pain will exist somewhere when we cease to experience it.

To sum up, things *presented in space* are private and exist only as long as they are perceived; two features that, argues Moore, are not accidental but belong to their logical nature and their meaning. On the contrary, *things to be met in space,* such as chairs, rocks and so forth, are not private; differently from pains, double images and after images, the same object can be perceived by more than a person at the same time. Also, material objects can exist unperceived; while the existence of, for instance, pain is logically related to a subject's feeling of pain, this is not so for the existence of a material object such as a chair or a rock.

Given these preliminary distinctions, Moore invites the reader to consider the expressions *things external to our minds*. As per Moore, all things *presented in space* are internal to our minds, for they are all private and cannot exist while no one is perceiving or experiencing them. On the contrary, an object is external to our minds when it can exist unperceived; accordingly, all things *to be met in space* are also external to our minds.

After having extensively argued this point, Moore finally presents his Proof, which goes as follows:

1) Here (holding up one hand) is one hand
2) Here (holding up his other hand) is another hand
Therefore

3) There are at present two human hands.

This conclusion entails that there are at least two things which can be met in space, independently from their being perceived. Therefore, 3) entails that

4) Since there are two hands, there are at least two things to be met in space.

And so he has proved that

5) There are at least two things external to our minds, and so, there are external objects.

Despite its simplicity, this argument fulfills all the requirements that a proof has to. In fact:

i) Its premises are different from its conclusion
ii) The conclusion follows from its premises;
iii) Its premises are known to be true (1939, 82).

Now, i) and ii) are uncontentious. Things are quite different with regard to iii); for a skeptic would still argue that, since Moore is unable to rule out skeptical scenarios, then he is also unable to know the premises of his Proof.

To defend his strategy, Moore asks the reader to imagine someone wishing to show that there are three misprints on a page. A similar proof would go as follows: "Here is a misprint, here is another misprint, and there is a third, therefore there are at least three misprints on the page".

This is, Moore argues, a completely legitimate and effective proof and everyone would accept it in everyday life; also, using this proof we can know both its premises (that such and such is a misprint) and its conclusion (There are three at least three misprints on this page). Similarly, using PEW one can know that certain things are hands; and if we can know that certain things are hands then we can know that there are external objects, thus proving the existence of the external world.

1.5 SKEPTICISM AND ORDINARY LANGUAGE

As with DCS, Moore himself was not fully convinced by the anti-skeptical strength of PEW. With regard to the latter, in fact, Moore wrote (1942) that his Proof was not meant to refute external world skepticism or to claim, against skeptical worries, that we can *know* that there is an external world. On the contrary, the aim of PEW was to prove *the existence of external objects,* independent from our minds[5].

To understand this difference, just consider the following two propositions:

i) There are no material things;
ii) Nobody knows for certain that there are material things.

PEW, Moore argues, can show that there are two hands and thus there are material objects; therefore, the Proof can successfully deny i). Things are different when it comes to ii); with regard to this point, Moore in fact admits that to prove the existence of external objects does not *ipso facto* show that we know that there are external objects, and that thus would be unable to address the skeptical challenge.

However, the anti-skeptical implications of DCS and PEW have created a huge debate; among many interpreters, one of the first and more authoritative is Norman Malcolm, friend and pupil of both Wittgenstein and Moore.

Malcolm wrote two papers on Moore's work; to understand his first article on the subject (1942), it would be worth considering his interpretation of the skeptical challenge. As per Malcolm, Cartesian skeptical conclusions such as 'We cannot know empirical statements to be true' or 'We cannot know that the external world exists' are not empirical judgments but *grammatical statements* (Malcolm, 1942, 376). That is to say, a proponent of Radical skepticism does not argue that sometimes our knowledge claims can turn out to be false; on the contrary, a skeptic argues that anytime we make a statement about an empirical claim and we prefix it with the verb 'to know', what we said is *always* false. This would be so because any empirical proposition is liable to an infinite number of verifications that cannot be logically exhausted; thus, our empirical knowledge cannot be considered certain but, at most, probable (ibid., 376-377).

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[5] On this point, see Sosa (2009).

Following Malcolm, then, the skeptic's aim is to propose a revision of our ordinary language; namely, to forbid any expression of the form 'I know with certainty that p' when p is an empirical proposition, and replace it with 'It is highly probable that p'.

It should be clear that Malcolm's rendering of the skeptical challenge is highly disputable. This is so because a proponent of Cartesian skepticism does not deny the common usage of expressions such as 'I know with certainty that p', nor does she aim to highlight the probabilistic nature of our empirical knowledge. Rather, Cartesian skepticism is meant to show that we are unable to rule out skeptical hypotheses and that then, given Closure, our knowledge is impossible.

However, with Malcolm's rendering of the skeptical challenge in mind, we can now go back to his interpretation of PEW, which goes as follows. Moore takes a paradigmatic case of sure-fire knowledge such as 'I know that this is a hand', stated in good lighting conditions and while cognitively lucid. In this situation, it would be plain nonsense to say 'It is highly probable that this is a hand' instead of 'I know that this is a hand'. For instance, take a child who is learning to speak; if she were to say 'It is highly probable that this is a hand' while looking at her hand, we would correct her by saying "it is certain that there is a hand here, it is not merely probable".

Accordingly, Moore's Proof would suffice to defeat the skeptical challenge. Recall that for Malcolm skeptical conclusions are grammatical statements, meant to revise our use of the expression 'I know with certainty that p' when p is an empirical proposition such as 'This is a hand'. This expression has already a well-accepted use within our ordinary language and the skeptic cannot maintain that it is a self-contradictory expression; for otherwise it could not be used to describe any kind of situation and thus it could not have the ordinary use that in fact it has. PEW would then remind the skeptic of the ordinary use of the locution 'to know with certainty' and would then be able to rule out Cartesian skeptical worries; in other words, PEW would show that Cartesian skepticism goes against *ordinary language* and is therefore fatally flawed.

As I have argued *supra,* Malcolm fails to address the real nature of the skeptical challenge; that is, the skeptic is not concerned with the 'probabilistic' nature of our empirical knowledge, nor does she aim to revise our use of the expression 'to know'; on the contrary, what is really at issue in Cartesian-style arguments is the very

possibility of knowledge, which is under threat as long as we cannot rule out skeptical scenarios.

Moreover, the fact that in ordinary language we use the expression 'to know' and fully understand its meaning cannot count as a plausible anti-skeptical strategy. This is so because a skeptic can well agree on the ordinary meaning of the expression 'to know'; still, as long as we cannot know whether we are victims of a skeptical scenario or not, a proponent of Cartesian-style skepticism can show that in our ordinary language we are using the expression 'to know' in a misleading way.

In the second paper he wrote on the subject (1949), Malcolm himself radically changed his mind about the value of Moore's Proof. As we have seen above, in his first article Malcolm argues that PEW would defeat the skeptic on the grounds of our ordinary language; on the contrary, according to his second paper, Moore's strategy would fail for it is at odds with the way in which the expressions 'to know' or 'to doubt' are naturally used and understood.

Malcolm invites the reader to imagine circumstances in which it would be reasonable to ponder whether our senses are deceiving us, for example, we wake up suddenly and we find a fire burning brightly in the gate but we do not remember having started a fire, hence we ask ourselves whether we are dreaming; similarly, we fix our attention on an object in plain view at close range and we ask ourselves whether we are really seeing a chair or rather we are hallucinating and there is a dog in front of us.

That is to say, a doubt like 'I might be dreaming or hallucinating' makes sense only in particular extraordinary circumstances. On the contrary, when Moore claims 'I know that this is a hand' in front of his audience, no one is doubting whether Moore has a hand or not and there is no reason to think that he is, for instance, hallucinating or dreaming.

Moreover, he argues, knowledge claims should be supported with *reasons*. To clarify this matter, Malcolm asks us to imagine the following situation: we are on the top of a hill and we are curious to know whether something we see in front of us is a tree or a shrub. In this case, if we say 'I know that what we are seeing is a tree' we should be able to motivate this knowledge-claim with proof, reasons or evidence. That is, according to ordinary language, when we make a knowledge-claim we should be in a position to answer to the question 'How do you know?'; and as Moore is unable to address this question while stating both his 'obvious truisms' and the

premises of his Proof, he is therefore breaking with the ordinary use of the expression 'to know'.

Malcolm's third and last criticism against Moore's anti-skeptical strategy goes as follows. There are cases in which a knowledge-claim such as 'I know that this is a hand' makes perfect sense; for instance, when we are doubting whether what we are seeing in front of us is indeed a hand or something which looks like a hand, or when we do not know what the term 'hand' means in English and so on. In these and similar other cases, doubts are legitimate and there is also the possibility of carrying out an investigation in order to solve them.

Unlike the abovementioned examples, argues Malcolm, Cartesian–style skepticism is unsolvable by definition; following skeptical arguments, every empirical knowledge claim can in fact turn out to be false, thus no empirical evidence such as the premises of Moore's Proof can be usefully used against the skeptic.

As per Malcolm, this shows that Cartesian skeptical doubts *are not real doubts at all*. Accordingly, when there is no real doubt to solve, then there is no knowledge claim to make; therefore, Moore's anti-skeptical attempts in DCS and PEW are plain nonsense and at odd with the very 'commonsense view of the world' he attempted to defend. As Malcolm writes at one point:

I hold, therefore, that Moore was not defending "common sense" at all when he declared "I know with certainty" that "There exists at present a living human body which is my body," that "The earth had existed many years before this body was born," that "For many of these years large numbers of human bodies had, at every moment, been alive upon it," that "I am a human being." *His assertions were made in circumstances where there was no question, and it wouldn't have made sense to raise a question,* as to whether Moore had a body and was a human being, or as to whether the earth had existed before he was born, or as to whether there were other human beings living on it. Moore's assertions do not belong to "common sense," i.e., to ordinary language, at all. They involve a use of "know" which is a radical departure from ordinary usage. Moore wished to attack all those philosophers who hold views from which it follows that no human being knows that he is a human being and that no human being knows any proposition like "Here's a hand". [Moore] did not see that [statements such as 'I know I am a human

being' and 'I know that this is a hand'] *too are a misuse of language* (1949, 219-220, my italics).

In a famous letter to Malcolm (1977, 173-174; reprinted in Moore, 1993, 213-216) Moore replied to these criticisms arguing that his use of the expression 'to know' was maybe peculiar, but not senseless; even if the circumstances under which he made his knowledge claims were unusual, he still used the expression 'to know' in the same sense in which it is used in ordinary language.

Moreover, as we have seen, for Malcolm a proper doubt should arise from precise circumstances and should be, at least potentially, dissolvable. Thus, as the Skeptical doubt is no doubt at all DCS and PEW are plain nonsense; given the features of Cartesian skepticism, there is no response that we can or we should offer against a Radical skeptic.

On the contrary, Moore argues that Cartesian skepticism is the expression of a theoretical but still meaningful and proper doubt, which arises in front of a problem that can and must be solved; hence his attempts in DCS and in PEW, even if maybe unsatisfactory, are nonetheless legitimate[6].

1.6 CLARKE AND STROUD: PHILOSOPHICAL VS ORDINARY LANGUAGE

To sum up, Malcolm considers both skeptical 'doubts' and Moore's anti-skeptical attempts as nonsensical; on the other side, Moore treats Cartesian Skepticism as the expression of a sensible philosophical doubt and considers his use of the expressions 'to know' and 'to doubt' as legitimate.

This debate is the starting point of Thompson Clarke's (1972) influential reading of PEW, which goes as follows. As per Clarke, to solve the Malcolm-Moore debate we should distinguish between *plain* and *philosophical* talk; while a discourse in plain talk, in order to be meaningful, must be subject to practical limits and concerns (such as relevance and social expectations), in philosophical talk words have to respect the following three conditions:

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[6] As we will see to a further extent in Chapter 3, Wittgenstein's reflection on 'hinges' is informed by similar concerns about the nonsensicality of Moore's knowledge claims in DCS and PEW. I will consider the anti-skeptical implications of this point in Chapter 6.

1) Every concept employed must make sense and retain its independent unity within a conceptual scheme that in its entirety is the self-sufficient unit. That is, each concept or the conceptual scheme itself must be fully divorceable from the "plain talk" without losing its meaning, or be parasitic on the meaning that it has in plain talk;

2) It must be possible to imagine a domain of items, separate from their corresponding concepts, which are the referents of the concepts employed;

3) It must be possible to imagine ourselves as pure observers, detached from concepts and items and capable of verifying that the latter satisfies the conditions determined by the former (1972, 761).

According to Clarke, both Cartesian Skepticism and Moore's knowledge-claims in DCS and PEW fulfill these conditions; thus they make sense, even if only in philosophical talk. While plain talk is embedded in the practical constraints and the usual expectations of everyday life, philosophical talk is free from any practical limitations; nonetheless, doubts made within philosophical talk are legitimate as they aim to satisfy an intellectual need that cannot be fulfilled by their counterparts in plain talk. Hence, as per Clarke, Malcolm's interpretation of Moore's strategy would confuse the peculiarity of his use of the expression 'to know' with its alleged lack of sense. If we consider Moore's knowledge-claims in DCS and PEW within plain talk they reveal a *philosophical lobotomy*, as philosophical doubts cannot be solved using our ordinary epistemic practices. But if on the contrary we consider Moore's anti-skeptical strategies as philosophical talk, they reveal a form of *dogmatism*, since Moore is unable to explain to the skeptic how he can know his 'obvious truisms' or the premises of his Proof.

Clarke's analysis is the starting point of Barry Stroud's reflections on Moore's Proof (1984). Stroud draws on the differences between 'plain' and 'philosophical' talk introduced by Clarke; but while for the latter Moore's mistake consists in having answered to a philosophical question using our ordinary language, according to Stroud, Moore was clearly talking in 'plain talk' and so his Proof is perfectly fine.

Still, PEW is completely useless to address the skeptical challenge, which is obviously raised in philosophical terms. But here lies the importance of Moore's

Proof: even if it is a philosophical failure, it can help us to cast light on the relationship between *ordinary* and *philosophical* discourse.

As per Stroud, Moore's Proof is philosophically interesting as it contradicts skepticism while at the same time being compatible with it. It contradicts skepticism as Moore claims to know both the premises and the conclusion of his Proof; and is compatible with it as Moore was talking in 'plain language', hence in a language totally different from the philosophical one.

Similarly, Cartesian skepticism at the same time contradicts and is compatible with our ordinary knowledge claims. When doing philosophy the skeptic can rightly say that, as long as we are unable to rule out skeptical scenarios, we cannot know anything at all; however, our ordinary knowledge-claims are preserved from the skeptical challenge as they are made within plain talk, thus in a language in which there is no place for theoretical concerns such as skeptical hypotheses.

According to Stroud, then, the moral we can draw from PEW is that there is a *logical discontinuity* between philosophical and ordinary language*;* thus, Cartesian skepticism is, at the same time, unavoidable but insulated from our ordinary knowledge claims. A conclusion that, given the purely theoretical nature of the skeptical challenge, is far from intellectually satisfactory [7].

1.7 WRIGHT'S DIAGNOSIS OF THE PROOF

Before concluding this chapter, it would be worth considering an influential diagnosis of PEW proposed by Crispin Wright (1985). As per Wright, we can reconstruct PEW as follows:

I) It perceptually appears to me that there are two hands;

II) There are two hands;

III) Therefore, there are physical objects (so there is an external world).

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[7] Here (Williams, 1991, 8) Clarke and Stroud are indebted to Hume's 'biperspectivalism', according to which skeptical doubts are at the same time at odds with our ordinary life and inescapable once reflecting 'philosophically' on our everyday epistemic practices. As we will see in Chapter 6 Wittgenstein explicitly argues against this point, for he takes skeptical doubts as nonsensical rather than unlivable or 'philosophically unsolvable'. For a contemporary reflection on Humean skepticism, see Fogelin (1985).

In other words, to state I) amounts to saying that there is a proposition that correctly describes the relevant aspects of Moore's experience in the circumstances in which the Proof was given; in the case of the Proof, for instance, I) will sound like 'I am perceiving (what I take to be) my hand'. Then, from I) follows II) and from II) III) since 'a hand' is a physical object; and given that the premises are known, so is the conclusion.

But, argues Wright, the passage from I) to II) is highly problematic: if Moore was victim of a skeptical scenario such as the 'Dream hypothesis' one and thus was just dreaming his hand, II) would no longer follow from I). More generally, I) can ground II) only if we already take for granted that our experience is caused by our interaction with external objects; thus, sensory experience can warrant a belief about empirical objects only if we already assume that there is an external world.

Hence, we need to already have a warrant for III) in order to justifiably go from I) to II); and this is why Moore's Proof would be *question begging* or *epistemically circular*: in order to consider the premises of Moore's Proof true, we are implicitly assuming the truth of its conclusion.

Thus Moore's Proof would lead to another, more subtle form of skepticism that Wright calls *Humean*[8]; while Cartesian-style skepticism goes from uncongenial skeptical scenarios to show that we cannot know any of our empirical beliefs, Humean skepticism argues that anytime we make an empirical knowledge claim we are already assuming that, so to say, things outside of us are already the way we take them to be and more generally that there is an external world.

Again, in order to go from I) to II) to III), we need to have an independent warrant to believe that III) is true; and as we do not have this independent warrant, then the argument fails to provide warrant for his conclusions. This is a phenomenon which Wright calls "failure of transmission of warrant" (or *transmission failure* for short).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

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[8] This is not to say that Wright would endorse this sort of skepticism; these considerations are just preliminary for his 'Wittgenstein-inspired' anti-skeptical strategy, which I will present and discuss in Chapter 4.

In this chapter I have presented the Cartesian Skeptical problem and its epistemological consequences. I then discussed two influential ways of dealing with the skeptical paradox, namely the 'relevant alternative' strategy and G.E. Moore's 'direct responses' to the skeptical challenge.

Both these lines of argument have to face a number of serious concerns. If the Dretske-Nozick line implies the rejection of Closure, which appears to many commentators as an unsustainable position, Moore's anti-skeptical attempts have been generally considered as unviable anti-skeptical solutions for several reasons.

In particular, PEW has generally been considered both unnecessary and unconvincing. Unconvincing because, following the skeptical argument, Moore cannot know the premises of his Proof; unnecessary because PEW can, so to say, 'work' only in the context of our ordinary epistemic practices, thus so when no skeptical scenarios can sensibly be hypothesised.

However, Moore's basic insight, for which it would be possible to directly refute skeptical hypotheses, has led to a number of influential proposals; in the next chapter, I will, then, present a survey of 'Moore-inspired' anti-skeptical positions.

CHAPTER 2

MOOREAN ANTI-SKEPTICAL STRATEGIES

2.0 INTRODUCTION

As we have seen in the previous chapter, Moore's anti-skeptical strategy presents too many weak points and uncertainties to be considered a fully viable solution to Cartesian skepticism. Nonetheless, the idea that we should read Moore's Proof in order to cast light on the nature of skepticism and of our empirical knowledge claims has been very influential and informs much of the current literature on the subject. In this chapter, I will present a survey of the most recent works inspired by Moore's epistemology; this will allow me to further understand and assess his strategy. Moreover, this will offer a different outlook on the current debate on Cartesian skepticism, for each interpretation of Moore's strategy and its efficacy goes along with a different understanding of the Cartesian problem itself.

In Section 1, I present the so-called Dogmatist reading of Moore's Proof; I then consider Neta's interpretation of PEW, for which Moore's strategy would display, rather than prove, the existence of the external world. I then discuss Greco's reliabilist rendering of the Proof, for which we should read PEW in light of the philosophy of the commonsense 18th Century philosopher Thomas Reid, and Fara's interpretation of PEW, based on Moore's last work on skepticism. Finally in the last two sections I present and discuss two highly influential anti-skeptical proposals, namely DeRose's 'Moorean contextualism' and the safety-based 'Neo-Moorean' strategy.

2.1 THE DOGMATIST READING OF THE PROOF

An influential 'Moore-inspired' anti-skeptical proposal is the dogmatist reading of the Proof, proposed by Jim Pryor (2000, 2004) and Martin Davies (2003, 2004)[9]. The starting point of this strategy is a rejection of Wright's diagnosis of PEW that we encountered in the previous chapter.

Recall that for Wright PEW would be *epistemically circular*: Moore's warrant for premise I), 'Here is a hand', already depends on his having a warrant for its conclusion III)'There are external objects', since it is only in the context of such anterior assumption that he can take his sense experience as a warrant for I)'Here is a hand'. Accordingly, Moore's Proof would fail to be rationally persuasive, for it cannot produce a first warrant to believe its conclusion.

On the contrary, Pryor argues, Moore's PEW can transmit knowledge, doxastically justified belief, from its premises to its conclusions; to defend this point (2004, 358-362), he distinguishes between five types of epistemic dependence between the premises and the conclusion of an argument. Among them, the most relevant for the present discussion are the following two:

> Type 4: Another type of dependence between premise and conclusion is that the conclusion be such that that evidence *against it* would (to at least some degree) undermine the kind of justification you purport to have for the premises. Moore's argument clearly *does* exhibit this type of dependence. So long as we maintain the assumption that hands are external objects, any evidence that *there is an external world* will (to some degree) undermine Moore's perceptual justification for believing he has hands. But is this type of dependence, in itself, a bad thing?
>
> That's a difficult question, because many arguments that exhibit it will also exhibit a further type of epistemic dependence.
>
> Type 5: We have this type of dependence when having justification to believe the conclusion, as condition for having that justification for the premise. Type 5 dependence does clearly seem to be an epistemic vice (2004, 359).

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[9] As noted by Neta (2007, 37) Davies does not explicitly commit himself to Pryor's dogmatist view of perceptual justification in (2004), even if it strongly suggests an endorsement of this position. Nonetheless, he explicitly sides with Pryor's dogmatist account of perceptual justification in Davies, 2003.

Thus, Pryor argues, Type 4 dependence is compatible with knowledge transmission while Type 5 dependence does not; and crucially, PEW exhibits a Type 4 dependence and not a Type 5 one (2000, 534-536). This is so because Moore's Proof is based on a *perceptual experience*, namely on Moore's looking at his hands and believing that p, 'There are two hands'; and to perceive that p, 'There are two hands', would give us a *prima facie* justification in believing that p as long as we have no ordinary evidence able to defeat or undermine our belief that p.

So, according to Pryor, it would be perfectly legitimate to be *dogmatist* about our basic perception and Moore's Proof transmits knowledge, propositional justification to believe that 'There are physical objects'; at least, crucially, since we do *not doubt its conclusion*.

As we have seen, according to the 'dogmatist reading' we have a *prima facie* justification to believe in our perceptually basic beliefs; thus Moore's Proof is not epistemically circular, as in Wright's reading, but rather, can transmit knowledge from its premises to its conclusion. Still, when skeptical arguments are in play we are led to doubt the conclusion of PEW, namely that there are external objects; and so we lose our doxastically-justified belief in its premises ('Here is a hand' and 'Here is another hand', known *via* perception). Therefore, the Proof is *dialectically ineffective* (2004, 369)[10] against Cartesian-style skepticism, for a skeptic takes both its premises and its conclusion as likely to be false.

Nonetheless, Pryor argues, skepticism is nothing but a disease we should cure ourselves of (2004, 368); this is so because as rational epistemic agents we have to accept a Proof based on a perceptually basic belief such as 'Here is a hand'; accordingly, only a stubborn and ultimately irrational skeptic would not accept PEW as a proof of the existence of external objects. As Pryor succinctly puts the matter "the skeptic has doubts he ought not to have (2004, 369)".

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[10] In his (2008) work, Davies takes a more sympathetic stance toward Wright's proposal; still maintaining that PEW would not exhibit a transmission failure when no skeptical hypothesis is invoked, he holds that the Proof's inability to address the skeptical challenge displays a *secondary transmission failure*. Roughly, the thought is that there are two purposes of arguing; 'teasing out', that is drawing out the consequence/consequences of a belief/ set of beliefs, and 'convincing the doubter' (2008, 6-7, 15, 17, 25). These are two independent tasks; Moore's Proof would transmit warrant from its premises to its conclusion in the former, but not in the latter case. To discuss in detail whether this distinction is tenable would take us too far afield, and would fall beyond the scope of the present discussion.

A first worry against this line of argument is that in Cartesian-style skepticism no doubt is employed. Just recall the feature of Cartesian-style arguments:

(S1) I do not know not-SH

(S2) If I do not know not-SH, then I do not know M

(SC) I do not know M

where M is an empirical proposition and SH a skeptical scenario such as the Evil Deceiver one. In this argument, no doubt is employed, either rational or 'irrational'; indeed, whether an agent is seriously doubting if she has a body or not is completely irrelevant for the skeptical conclusion (SC) I do not know M.

Also, Cartesian skeptical arguments are, at least *prima facie*, highly intuitive as they rest on a compelling principle such as Closure; and to simply dismiss them as a sort of 'irrational disease' we should cure ourselves of, without any further clarification on the real nature of the Cartesian skeptical challenge, may sound too simplistic a response to the skeptic.

At most, the dogmatist reading can tell us that in our everyday life we have no reason to doubt the general reliability of our perceptual experience; but this is something we already 'know' within our epistemic practices, and as a philosophical response will amount to nothing but a pragmatic dismissal of skeptical worries as they are irrelevant for our ordinary life.

The dogmatist reading of the proof can be, paradoxically enough, considered as a viable solution to the skeptical problem only if we minimise, if not completely abandon as irrational, the Cartesian skeptical challenge itself.

2.2 DISPLAYING OUR KNOWLEDGE OF THE EXTERNAL WORLD: NETA'S INTERPRETATION OF MOORE'S PROOF

As we have seen, for Wright PEW would display what he names transmission failure, as it is unable to transmit warrant from its premises to its conclusion. On the other hand, Pryor and Davies maintain that this would not be the case, for the Proof would transmit knowledge, doxastically justified belief, to believe that 'There is an external world' on the basis of its premises, at least since skeptical scenarios are not in play.

Despite their differences, both Wright and the Dogmatists thus share two fundamental views: namely, the idea that Moore's Proof is unable to overcome skeptical doubts about its conclusions and that Moore's aim in PEW was to provide knowledge of the existence of the external world. According to Ram Neta (2007), these points both misrepresent Moore's real project and the efficacy of his Proof.

Neta (2007, 27) starts his interpretation from the following passage of PEW that I have already mentioned in Chapter 1:

> My proof, then, of the existence of things outside of us did satisfy three of the conditions necessary for a rigorous proof […] I do want to emphasize that, so far as I can see, we all of us do constantly take proof of this sort as absolutely conclusive proofs of certain conclusions- *as finally settling questions, as to which we were previously in doubt*. Suppose, for instance, it were a question whether there were as many as three misprints on a certain page on a certain book. A says there are, B is inclined to doubt it. How could A prove that he is right? Surely he *could* prove it by taking the book, turning to the page, and pointing to three separate places on it, saying 'There's one misprint here, and another here'; surely that is a method by which it *might* be proved! (1939, 82, my italics).

As per Neta, this passage suggests two things: first, that Moore thought that his Proof would have been able to rationally overcome skeptical doubts; second, and more importantly, that nonetheless his aim was not to provide us with knowledge of the truth of the conclusion. As Neta writes at one point:

> On Moore's view, knowing that there are external things- or at least having learned that there are external things- is a necessary condition of knowing that there are two hands, so whatever epistemic properties the Proof might transmit, it cannot transmit knowledge (2007, 30).

Thus, for Neta PEW cannot enhance our epistemic status concerning the existence of external things, for it cannot prove against a Cartesian skeptic that there is an external

world. Still, Moore's performance would be able to *display our knowledge of the existence of the external world* (2007, 28)[11].

To understand this point, just consider the following example offered by Neta. To ride a bicycle displays the fact that we know how to ride a bicycle, and can then rationally overcome doubts about our ability to ride bicycles; similarly, PEW displays our knowledge of the external world and would then be able to overcome doubts about the existence of external objects. Still, the Proof cannot address the Cartesian challenge and overcome of skeptical doubts; but crucially, Neta argues, to merely doubt that p does not imply that we do no know that p. As he writes at one point:

> […] I can know that p even while I doubt that p, so long as my doubt is unreasonable. For instance, if a philosopher talks me into doubting whether or not the universe has existed for more than five minutes, it doesn't follow that I no longer know that the universe has existed for more than five minutes […] If I know that I ate breakfast 3 hours ago, then I can also know that the universe has existed for more than 5 minutes. My doubt is unreasonable, of course. But […] it could be a doubt that I don't recognize to be unreasonable. But still it does not destroy my belief, or my knowledge that I ate breakfast 3 hours ago. I can know that I ate breakfast, even when I also (unreasonably) doubt that the universe is more than 5 minutes old (2007, 29-30).

A consequence of this thought is that Moore's Proof cannot rule out skeptical doubts; but this does not necessarily undermine our knowledge of the existence of external objects displayed, not proven, by PEW.

A first worry against Neta's proposal is his account of the unreasonableness of skeptical hypotheses. Even if Neta dissociates himself from Pryor and does not consider skeptical doubts as necessarily pathological, it is not clear why we should dismiss them; while Pryor stresses the, so to say, intrinsic rationality of being dogmatist with regard to our basic perceptual beliefs, Neta does not provide any reason why we should consider unreasonable Cartesian skeptical worries.

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[11] Here Neta's point resembles Moyal-Sharrock's 'non-epistemic' reading of OC, for which our 'knowledge' can only be shown in practice, for instance by an agent's ability to interact with external objects. I will present and discuss Moyal-Sharrock's anti-skeptical strategy in Chapter 5.

Also, he tells us that these 'unreasonable' doubts (which, as I have extensively argued above, are not so unreasonable for they are based on a very compelling logical principle such as Closure) are compatible with our knowledge claims, in the same sense in which, for instance, my knowledge that p) I ate breakfast 5 minutes ago cannot be undermined by skeptical doubts.

Even if we grant that certain kinds of doubts are compatible with knowledge, a point which is far from uncontentious, there are still a number of objections we can raise at this juncture. Firstly, as we have seen while presenting the Dogmatist approach, in Cartesian skeptical arguments no doubt is employed, whether rational, irrational or unreasonable; on the contrary, we do not even need to assume that an agent is seriously doubting whether or not she is victim of a skeptical scenario such as the BIV one. Nonetheless, the issue is that we cannot know whether we are BIV or not and thus, given Closure, our knowledge is still impossible.

Secondly, we can surely grant that in our ordinary life skeptical doubts have minimal or no strength against our knowledge; however, what can be considered reasonable in our everyday life can still be under question in a philosophical context. That is to say, in our everyday life no skeptical hypothesis such as the BIV one can sensibly undermine our knowledge that, for instance, p) I ate breakfast 5 minutes ago; but once skeptical hypotheses are in play, we have to admit our inability to know that p, for our memories can also be the result of constant deception.

Moreover, recall that following Neta's reconstruction, Moore's Proof would display a knowledge we already possess, as riding a bicycle displays the fact that we know how to ride a bicycle. But this kind of 'knowledge' cannot 'rationally overcome' skeptical worries at all; for following Cartesian arguments Moore's performance, and more generally the knowledge we already posses of the existence of external objects, can still be the result of a dream, of the action of an Evil Deceiver and so on. Accordingly, the anti-skeptical implications of Neta's reading of PEW are somewhat moot.

2.3 GRECO'S 'REIDING' OF MOORE'S PROOF

As we have seen, despite their differences, all the accounts I have presented so far agree on a basic point: namely, on the idea that Moore's Proof would not be

persuasive, or fully persuasive, against a Cartesian skeptic. On the contrary, for Greco (2002), PEW would be able to face the skeptical challenge once we read it in light of the philosophy of Thomas Reid and his defence of commonsense (1710-1796), which has been praised by Moore on various occasions and can be considered one of his main philosophical influences.

There are three features of Reid's epistemology that, on Greco's reading, Moore was following while giving his Proof. A first tenet of Reid's epistemological views is that

E1: Not everything we know is known by proof.

In order to explain this point, Greco quotes the following general definition of reasoning proposed by Reid[12]:

Reasoning is the process by which we pass from one judgment to another, which is the consequence of it...In all reasoning, therefore, there must be a proposition inferred, and one or more from which is inferred. And this power of inferring, or drawing a conclusion, is only another name for reasoning; the propositions inferred being called the conclusion, and the proposition or propositions from which it is inferred the *premises*. (IP VII I, p. 475a).

There are many varieties of reasoning; among others, Reid argues, the most important are demonstrative and probable reasoning. Proofs must be based on demonstrative reasoning; but our knowledge does not rest on deductive reasoning alone. Reasoning and demonstrations need premises; so, even if reasoning can extend our knowledge, we must admit other sources of knowledge as well. This leads to the second tenet of Reid's epistemology:

E2: External objects are known by perception, not by proof;

That is, our knowledge of the external world is based on perception; and perceptual knowledge, differently from reasoning, does not need any proof. This is so, Reid

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12 All references to read are to *An inquiry into the human mind on the Principles of Common Sense* (henceforth Inq) and *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of man* (henceforth IP), both in Reid, 1983, *Philosophical Works*.

argues, because perception does not involve any kind of reasoning at all: while reasoning is grounded on prior beliefs acting as premises, perception is grounded in sensory experience, which produces a belief in the external objects either by nature or by acquired habit. This leads to Reid's third tenet:

E3: The evidence of senses is no less reasonable than that of demonstration.

This is so, Reid argues, because reasoning is not more reliable than perception. In fact, both our senses and our reasoning faculties such as memory or judging can be defective; we still do not consider reasoning as generally fallacious. And as we do not consider reasoning as generally fallacious just because it can sometimes lead us to errors, similarly, we should not underestimate the reliability of our senses only because sometimes they can deceive us.

As per Greco, while giving his Proof Moore had in mind Reid's epistemological principles. First of all, as we have seen, Moore admits that he is unable to know how he knows the premises of PEW to be true. Nonetheless he claims that he knows them for certain to be true; and on Greco's account he was doing so following E3. That is, his beliefs 'Here is a hand' and 'Here is another hand', based on perceptual evidence, are well grounded for *perceptual evidence is good evidence*, as good as mathematical demonstration.

On Greco's account, then, both Reid and Moore were refuting the implicit assumptions of Cartesian skeptical arguments; following his reading, Cartesian skepticism is based on the misleading idea that all our evidence must have some necessary relation (either logical or probabilistic) to the beliefs that it makes evident (2002, 562). Accordingly, this background assumption would make plausible the fact that our knowledge of external things must proceed by some sort of inference or must ultimately depend on reasoning. But this rationalist account of our knowledge is not the only one, nor the most plausible; a viable alternative is *reliabilism.*

If, following Reid and Moore, we admit that even our perceptions are capable of giving us good evidence for our knowledge-claims, we will then agree on the fact that our knowledge does not indicate the truth of our beliefs by virtue of some necessary relation, but rather by virtue of some contingent relation. As we have seen *supra*, according to Reid's epistemology our knowledge may result from both reasoning and from our perceptual faculties; this means that both are valid

knowledge-sources, and that what really can turn our beliefs into knowledge is that they have been formed in a reliable way.

Following this account, PEW would then succeed in rejecting Cartesian skepticism; its premises are known, even if not by reasoning, thus we can know the conclusion 'There is an external world'. More generally, following Greco's reliabilist account of the Proof we should be able to know the denials of skeptical scenarios; given that our perception is generally reliable, we can come to know that we are not, for instance, BIV simply by perceiving our hands.

Greco's proposal is informed by his reliabilist account of knowledge for which, roughly, a belief that p amounts to knowledge iff it is the product of a reliable belief-forming process. A detailed discussion of the merits of Greco's reliabilist theory would fall beyond the scope of the present discussion, and is not a task I shall set myself here; for the purpose of the present discussion, I will just discuss some of the worries that his reading of PEW has to face.

As we have seen, according to Greco PEW is a viable anti-skeptical strategy; as our perceptions are generally reliable, we can know that 'There are two hands' and that therefore there is an external world simply using our perceptual faculties. Nonetheless, Cartesian skeptical arguments are not meant to deny the general reliability of our senses. That is to say, a proponent of Cartesian skepticism can well agree that in ordinary circumstances our perceptual faculties are reliable belief-forming processes and that thus they can give us good evidence; but crucially, following Cartesian skeptical arguments our perceptual beliefs can all be the result of a hallucination or of constant deception and so forth. Thus, at most, and similar to the Pryor/Davies line we encountered in the previous section, Greco's account is able to tell us that in normal circumstances, that is when no skeptical hypothesis is invoked, our perception can give us evidence of the existence of external objects; but this cannot count as a viable anti-skeptical strategy at all.

2.4. MICHAEL FARA AND THE PLEA FOR PROOF

If, according to Greco, we should read PEW having in mind the philosophy of Reid, Fara's reading of the Proof is informed by one of Moore's last papers on skepticism, *Certainty* (1959a, henceforth CE).

Moore's CE was originally written for the Howison Lecture he delivered at the University of Berkeley in 1941. Similar to DCS, he begins his lecture stating a number of assertions:

> I am at present, as you can all see, in a room and not in the open air; I am standing up, and not either sitting or lying down; I have clothes on, and am not absolutely naked; I am speaking in a fairly loud voice, and am not either singing or whispering or keeping quite silent; I have in my hand some sheets of paper with writing on them; there are a good many other people in the same room in which I am; and there are windows in that wall and a door in this one (1959 a, 171).

Moore makes these statements quite positively, implying not only that he believes them to be true but rather that he *knows them for certain to be true*; that when he asserted them to be the case, they were in fact the case. Despite their differences, he argues, his assertions share common features.

First of all, they are all *contingent*, in the sense that their negation is not self-contradictory. Yet, from their being contingent alone it does not follow that they were not known to be true by both Moore and his audience when the lecture was given. This is not to say that Moore, at least at this point of the argument, is claiming that he *knows for* certain to be true the statements he made at the beginning of his lecture; so far, he just wants to stress that from the fact that his assertions are contingent it does not follow that they are unknowable.

Similarly, he argues, from the fact that all his assertions were contingent it does not follow that it was *possible* for any of his assertion to be false. Just take the first proposition, 'I am standing up': from the fact that this proposition was contingent it does not follow that, if Moore had said 'It is possible that it is not the case that I am not standing up', he should have said something true. To understand this point, just take the following propositions:

p) The proposition 'I am standing up' is contingent;

r) I do not know that I am standing up;

q) It is possible that I am not standing up.

Now, p) does not entail q) while q) does entail r); usually, when we say that something is possible, we mean that we do not know whether something is really the case or not. But from the very fact that something is contingent it does not necessarily follow that we do not know that something is the case.

 Moore's point is that from a proposition such as 'It is logically possible that p is true' it does not follow that p is not known to be false; even if it would have been possible for him to sit down while giving his lecture, at that very moment he knew that he was standing up.

Another similarity between all his assertions is that they all imply the existence of an external world. Thus, if he did know any of his assertions to be true at the time he was giving his lecture, the existence of an external world was absolutely certain; on the other hand, if the existence of an external world cannot ever be considered as certain, then he couldn't have known any of his assertions to be true.

Finally, all his assertions had in common the following characteristic: if he did not know them to be true at the time he was giving his lecture, then any philosopher who denied our knowledge of the external world would be right. But if he didn't know his assertions while he was giving his lecture, then our knowledge of external objects would be impossible. Thus, he argues, his assertions are good test-cases to decide between these two alternatives, that I will call the Skeptical (SK) and the Moorean (MO):

SK: None of us ever knows for certain to be true of the existence of anything outside our minds;
M: We all have known for certain to be true the existence of anything outside our mind;

These two alternatives can be translated into the following arguments. Consider 'A', a Moorean assertion such as 'I know that I am standing up', and 'SH', a skeptical scenario such as that one is being tricked by the Evil Deceiver:

SK1) If you don't know that not-SH, then you don't know that A;
SK2) You do not know that not-SH;
SKC) You do not know that A.

Moore surely agrees with SK1): if we cannot exclude a skeptical scenario such as the 'Dream hypothesis' one, we are then unable to properly claim that we know any of his assertions (and more generally, any belief about the external world). Still, Moore argues, this first part of the argument implies that if he does know that he, for instance, was standing up, then he is in a position to know that not-SH. His argument can be then sketched as follows:

M1) If I don't know that not-SH, then I don't know that A;
M2) I know that A;
MC) I know that not–SH.

As Moore says, (1959, 193-194) both SK) and M) are equally valid arguments, unless his opponent can give better reasons for asserting that he didn't know that not-SH, for instance that he was not dreaming, while he was asserting that A); and while no reasons can be given to support the 'logical possibility' that SH, we have reasons to support the assertion made in CE, which at least are based on the evidence of his senses. Even if this evidence cannot be considered conclusive in order to properly exclude the possibility that SH, it is nonetheless *more certain* than the mere logical possibility that SH.

Thus, Moore's anti-skeptical strategy in CE can be summed up as follows: as we have more evidence in support of our everyday knowledge claims than in support of skeptical scenarios, then skeptical hypotheses must be false. With Moore's strategy in mind, we can now go back to Fara's proposal. Michael Fara starts his reading of PEW considering the three criteria that, according to Moore, a rigorous proof has to satisfy in order to be considered valid:

i) Its conclusion must be different from its premises
ii) Its conclusion must follow from its premises and
iii) Each of its premises must be known.

As we have already seen, a Cartesian skeptic will not concede iii). This leads Fara to reconstruct the skeptical challenge against Moore as follows:

S1*) The premises of PEW cannot be proved;
S2*) Proof is required for knowledge;

SC*) Therefore the premises of PEW are not known (and so its conclusion).

So, the skeptic assumes against Moore that he needs to prove the premises of PEW in order to say that he knows its conclusion. And this is a point of disagreement between Moore and the skeptic; Moore admits that, even if he knows his premises, he cannot say how he knows them and also that he cannot prove that his premises are true.

This is so because it would be impossible to prove against a Cartesian skeptic that he was not dreaming while giving his proof; at most, he can have conclusive evidence that he was awake, but this is completely different from being able to prove it. Any evidence adduced in support of p) I am now not dreaming will then be compatible with skeptical hypotheses.

Nonetheless, according to Fara this does not necessarily represent a failure for Moore's PEW, but will rather lead to what he calls *Moore secondary Proof (MsP)*, which goes as follows:

 MsP 1) The premises of PEW cannot be proved

MsP 2) The premises of PEW are known. Therefore

MsP C) Proof is not required for knowledge (2008, 3)

So, we are in front of what Fara calls a philosophical 'standoff': Moore does not consider it necessary to prove its premises in order to say that he knows them, while on the contrary the skeptic argues that in order to say that we know the premises we must prove them first.

Still, following the skeptical line of reasoning we should also be able to prove the premises S1*) and S2*) of the skeptical argument *contra* Moore; but crucially, the skeptic cannot prove the premises of her argument. Therefore, she is not in a position to say that proof is required for knowledge, and so her argument cannot prove her skeptical conclusion.

So, following Fara's account the skeptical challenge is in some sense self-refuting, for its premises cannot be proved; on the contrary Moore's argument, stating that we do not need to prove the premises of his Proof, can prove the existence of the external world.

Even setting aside questions about the plausibility of this proposal as an interpretation of Moore's Proof, it should be clear that the kind of skepticism Fara has in mind has little in common with radical skepticism. Just recall the feature of Cartesian-style arguments:

(S1) I do not know not-SH

(S2) If I do not know not-SH, then I do not know M

(SC) I do not know M

where M is an empirical proposition and SH a skeptical scenario such as the BIV one; now compare this argument with the one employed by Moore's skeptical opponent:

S1*) Premise MP*) of Moore's main argument cannot be proved

S2*) Proof is required for knowledge

SC*) Therefore premise MP1*) is not known.

In the first argument what is at issue is not whether Moore or more generally an epistemic agent should be able to prove that M) in order to know that M). Rather, the point of the skeptical challenge is that each and every of our knowledge claims, and every piece of evidence we can adduce to support them, can be the result of a constant deception; accordingly, as we are unable to refute skeptical hypotheses we are unable to know anything at all. Thus, a Cartesian skeptic is not concerned with Moore's inability to prove the premises of his proof or with our inability to prove our mundane propositions M), but with our inability to rule out skeptical hypotheses which, given Closure, entails that we are unable to know anything at all.

As we have seen, PEW and the 'PEW inspired' strategies we have encountered so far present too many weaknesses to be considered satisfactory anti-skeptical devices. Nonetheless Moore's basic thought, according to which our knowledge of ordinary propositions should suffice to rule out skeptical worries, has informed a number of influential proposals; in this section, I will consider DeRose's 'Moorean contextualism'[14].

Central to DeRose's contextualism is a notion inspired by the Dretske-Nozick line we have already encountered in Chapter 1, namely the *Subjunctive Conditionals Account* (SCA). According to SCA, our beliefs in the denials of skeptical hypotheses are problematic for we would hold them even if they were false. That is to say, following Cartesian skeptical arguments we would always believe that not-SH even if we were actually victim of a skeptical scenario.

DeRose names the kinds of beliefs that we would hold even if they were false *insensitive*. The insensitivity of our belief that not-SH would capture the high plausibility of Cartesian skepticism; following DeRose's SCA, we tend to judge that an agent S does not know that P when P is insensitive.

This generalisation, DeRose argues, does not reflect our ordinary standards for knowledge; still, when mentioning skeptical scenarios a proponent of Cartesian Skepticism puts them into place as the standard for our knowledge claim. That is to say, the skeptic *creates a context* in which our beliefs must be sensitive if they are to count as knowledge; when this standard is in place we fail to know that, for instance, we are not BIV, as we would hold the same belief even if it was false. In order to explain how the skeptic raises the standards for knowledge, DeRose presents his *Rule of Sensitivity*:

Sensitivity

When it is asserted that some subject S knows (or does not know) some proposition P, the standards for knowledge (the standards for how good an

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[13] DeRose himself defines his proposal as 'Moorean' in a broad sense for he grants, as the reader will see, that we can know the denials of skeptical hypotheses even if only in ordinary context. See DeRose, 2004, 38.

[14] Other contextualist anti-skeptical accounts which run along similar lines have been proposed by Cohen (1988, 1999, 2000) and Lewis (1996). In Chapter 5, I will consider a somewhat different kind of contextualist proposal, namely the '*Wittgensteinian contextualism*' put forward by Williams (1991, 2001), directly inspired by Wittgenstein's remarks in *On Certainty*.

epistemic position one must be in to count as knowledge) tend to be raised, if need be, to such a level as to require S's belief in that particular P to be sensitive for it to count as knowledge (1995, 36).

As per DeRose, then, when the skeptic asserts that we don't know that we are not BIV he is invoking the Rules of Sensitivity, thus raising the standards for knowledge in such a way that a belief must be sensitive in order to count as knowledge. And since our belief that we are not BIV is not sensitive, in skeptical context we cannot know that we are not BIV. Therefore, given the Closure principle, in a skeptical context we do not know that we are not BIV.

However, this does not mean that we *never* know our mundane propositions M; in ordinary contexts skeptical standards are not in place, thus our beliefs do not have to be sensitive in order to count as knowledge.

Therefore, in ordinary contexts we can truthfully assert that we do know some mundane proposition M such as 'I have two hands'; and since Closure is true in every context, it follows that in ordinary context our knowledge of mundane propositions such as 'This is a hand' can rule out a skeptical scenario such as the BIV one.

Thus, according to DeRose Cartesian skepticism is so compelling as the standards for knowledge are quite high in skeptical contexts but comparatively low in ordinary ones. But when no SH is mentioned the Rule of Sensitivity is not invoked; thus in ordinary, non-philosophical conversational contexts our belief that non-SH, even if insensitive, does count as knowledge. Therefore, our everyday knowledge is preserved by the skeptical challenge.

DeRose's primary aim is to defend a contextualist view for which we should consider the expression 'to know' as an indexical, whose truth condition differs sensibly from one context to another. To discuss in detail the plausibility of this account would take us too far afield; for my present purposes, it will suffice to present two main concerns that have been raised against the anti-skeptical strength of DeRose's 'Moorean contextualism'.

A first issue (Pritchard, 2001) is the *problem of epistemic descent*, which goes as follows. Let us assume that ordinary agents and the skeptic are working, so to say, at different levels and that what counts as knowledge in everyday contexts does not amount to knowledge in the more demanding skeptical one. However, nothing prevents us from thinking that the high requirements of the skeptic are the *right*

standards that a knowledge claim has to fulfill, not only in the philosophical domain but also in the ordinary one. Accordingly, in ordinary contexts we would be using the expression to 'know' in a loosely if not completely wrong way; a conclusion that is not so different from the skeptical one.

Another line of criticism toward DeRose's proposal has been moved against his Rules of Sensitivity. Recall that on DeRose's account, a belief amounts to knowledge if it is *sensitive*: an agent S's belief that p is sensitive if, were it not so that p, S would not have believed that p. With regard to this point, Sosa (1999) has persuasively argued that sensitivity is not necessary for knowledge at all; just consider two propositions:

> a) p
> b) I do not falsely believe that p (1999, 145).

As per Sosa it is undeniable that no one can know both a) and b) while failing to know the former but not the latter, or *vice versa*. So, even when one's belief a) is sensitive, the belief that b) could never be sensitive. Even if b) were false, one would still believe it; however, it is implausible that the assertion that I know that the assertion b) could never be true, not even when the assertion that a) would be true. Another counterexample against the Rule of Sensitivity goes as follows:

> On my way to the elevator I release a trash bag down the chute from my high-rise condo. Presumably I know my bag will soon be in the basement. But what if, having been released, it still (incredibly) were not to arrive there? That presumably would be because it had been snagged somehow in the chute on the way down […] But none such could affect my predictive belief as I release it, so I would still predict that the bag would soon arrive in the basement. My belief seems not to be sensitive, therefore, but constitutes knowledge anyhow, and can correctly be said to do so (1999, 145-146).

That is, sensitivity cannot account for all our knowledge claims that we would hold even if they were false, and that nevertheless counts as knowledge. Moreover, Sosa argues, the *Rule of Sensitivity* excludes from knowledge our belief in necessary truths. For instance, we know that P) 'All squares have four sides'; P is necessarily true and

cannot be either true or false, for it would be difficult even to make sense of not-P when P is a statement such as 'All squares have four sides'. Still, a necessary truth such as P is insensitive; for P cannot be false and we would always hold this belief. However, according to the sensitivity principle we cannot know that 'All squares have four sides' and more generally we would have no knowledge of necessary truths[15].

2.6 NEO-MOOREANISM AND SAFETY

To sum up, there are at least two main criticisms that have been moved against DeRose's 'Moorean contextualism'. A first is that to simply confine the skeptical challenge to the philosophical context does not count as satisfactory anti-skeptical strategy; a second is that the Rule of Sensitivity, which underlies DeRose's proposal, is not a necessary condition for knowledge and is also unable to account for our knowledge of necessary truths.

All these objections have led authors such as Sosa (1999, 2000) and more recently Pritchard (2002a, 2007) to propose an alternative Moorean anti-skeptical account, namely 'Neo-Mooreanism'. A basic feature of the 'Neo-Moorean' proposal is the rejection of sensitivity in favor of the *safety principle*, first proposed by Sosa (1999, 142), which we can roughly sketch as follows:

> *Safety Principle*
> If S knows that p, then S's true belief that p is such that S's belief could not have easily been false (Pritchard 2011, 34)

In order to understand the anti-skeptical implications of this principle, recall the structure of the skeptical argument:

> (S1) I do not know not-SH

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[15] It is worth noting that for Wittgenstein it would be altogether wrong to say that we 'know' necessary truths such as 'A square has four sides'. This is so, he argues, because differently from propositional beliefs these statements cannot be supported by evidence or reasons but are rather *ways to make sense of reality*, whose correctness is antecedent to questions of truth or falsity; as such, they cannot be 'known' but are rather the expression of an altogether epistemic standing, which he names understanding or mastery of techniques. I will come back to this in Chapter 6.

(S2) If I do not know not-SH, then I do not know M

Therefore

(SC) I do not know M

According to DeRose the belief that not-SH is insensitive, as we would hold it even if it were false. But according to 'Neo-Mooreans' the belief that non-SH is *safe*, insofar as one would believe that non-SH (that is, that one is not a victim of an evil deceiver, or a BIV, and so on) *only if it was true*. In the actual world as well as in the nearest possible worlds, our belief in the denials of skeptical hypotheses matches the fact as to whether or not we are victims of these scenarios (Sosa, 2000, 15). That is to say, when we reflect on it we can *hic et nunc* confidently say that we know various things and that we know that we are not BIV, or constantly deceived by an Evil Deceiver and so on (*ibid.* 17, n.10).

To understand this point, suppose that an agent has a safe belief in a mundane proposition M such as 'I have two hands'. This belief is true not only in the actual world but also across the range of nearby possible worlds in which the agent continues to believe this proposition. Given that the belief is really safe, there is then no skeptical possible world in the realm of nearby possible worlds; for if the skeptical possible worlds were among nearby possible worlds, then there would be a nearby possible world where the agent believes that she has two hands but believes falsely— *viz.*, the world in which, say, she is a BIV. But as there are no nearby possible worlds in which skeptical hypotheses obtain, it follows that one's belief in the denial of a skeptical hypothesis is safe, as there can be no nearby possible world where one believes this proposition and yet believes it falsely. Insofar as an agent can know that she has two hands, then she is also in a position to know that she is not a BIV.

Also (Pritchard, 2002b, 13), as long as we do have safe beliefs in mundane propositions then skeptical hypotheses will only obtain in far-off possible worlds; accordingly, skeptical scenarios are too modally far-fetched to count as relevant to either our knowledge of mundane propositions *or* to our knowledge of the denials of skeptical scenarios.

Differently from DeRose's 'Moorean contextualism', then, 'Neo-Mooreanism' can help us to retain our knowledge of everyday propositions and refute skeptical hypotheses independent from the conversational context we are in. While contextualism concedes to the skeptic that in the philosophical context we cannot

know anything at all, following a safety- based approach (Pritchard, 2002a, 237-240) if an agent knows a mundane proposition M such as 'I have two hands', then *via* Closure she is also able to know the denials of skeptical hypotheses entailed by M.

'Neo-Mooreanism' can then deny the premise S1) of the skeptical challenge, thus showing *contra* the skeptic that we can know the denials of skeptical hypotheses.

Nonetheless, even if this view will be able to positively address the skeptical challenge, it still has unpalatable consequences; in order to clarify this matter, I will set aside the skeptical challenge for a moment, and sketch the so-called value problem for knowledge.

2.7 VALUE PROBLEM AND SKEPTICISM

The value problem for knowledge has been the focus of several important epistemological works to the extent that, as has been suggested by Wayne Riggs (2006) amongst others, we might speak of a 'value-turn' in epistemology.

The origin of this problem can be traced back to Plato's *Meno*, in which Socrates raises the question why knowledge is more valuable than mere true belief. If it is widely held that knowledge should be more valuable than, for instance, true belief, there is no wider agreement on why this should be the case. According to the virtue-theoretic account of the value of knowledge, persuasively proposed by John Greco in a number of influential works (2002, 2007) knowledge would be finally, that is intrinsically, valuable for it is a form of *achievement*. Similarly, knowledge would be finally valuable for it is the result of a relevant cognitive ability creditable to an epistemic agent and not, for instance, to a lucky guess or to fortuitous circumstances.

With this sketchy account of the 'final value thesis' in mind, it should be clear that the kind of anti-skeptical knowledge 'Neo-Mooreanism' can grant us is far from valuable. Recall that following 'Neo-Moorean' accounts our beliefs in mundane propositions M such as 'I have two hands' are safe for they are true not only in the actual world, but also across the range of nearby possible worlds in which the agent continues to believe this proposition. Accordingly, as the agent's beliefs in mundane propositions M are safe then she is also in a position to rule out skeptical scenarios such as the BIV one. Still, following this line of reasoning, the agent's belief in the denials of skeptical hypotheses is not the result of her cognitive success; rather, is

more creditable to the fact that the agent at issue is in an epistemically friendly environment, namely in the worlds in which she is not a BIV (Pritchard, 2008, 34).

Given the strong connections between the belief that not-SH and our knowledge of mundane propositions M, the valuelessness of our belief in the denial of skeptical hypotheses can have negative consequences for our ordinary knowledge claims as well. Consider the following version of the Closure principle (*ibid*. 37), reformulated in terms of a type of knowledge which involves a type of cognitive achievement that we might call 'knowledge +':

> *The Closure Principle for Knowledge+*
> If S knows+ that p, and S competently deduces q from p, (thereby coming to believe q while retaining her knowledge+ that p) then S knows+ that q.

Following this principle, if the truth of one's belief in a (known) proposition is because of an agent's cognitive ability, and so constitutes a cognitive achievement, then any further knowledge competently deduced from that knowledge should involve a belief, the truth of which is related to the agent's cognitive ability as well. But as our knowledge in the denials of skeptical hypotheses is not the result of a cognitive ability, given the Closure principle for knowledge +, we will have to face a second skeptical challenge which goes as follows (*ibid*, 33):

> S1+) S does not know+ not-SH
> S2+) If S does not know +not-SH, then S does not know+ M
> SC+) S does not know +E

Accordingly, even if following a safety-based anti-skeptical approach we would be able to rule out skeptical hypotheses, this would still have a significant cost. Under skeptical scrutiny we are forced to admit that, as there is nothing valuable in the denials of skeptical scenarios, our ordinary knowledge is not valuable either.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this chapter I have presented a number of anti-skeptical proposals inspired by G.E. Moore's epistemology; I have argued that these accounts, with the exception of the safety-based 'Neo-Moorean' approach, are unable to face the skeptical challenge. Also, following Pritchard's treatment of the matter, I have shown that even if 'Neo-Mooreanism' can rule out skeptical worries, it nonetheless has significant negative consequences with regard to the value of our ordinary knowledge claims.

CHAPTER 3

WITTGENSTEIN ON SKEPTICISM

3.0 INTRODUCTION

Despite their differences all the Neo-Moorean strategies we have encountered so far
agree on a basic point, namely, that it is possible to know the denials of skeptical
hypotheses and thus retain our everyday knowledge. A direct refutation that, as we
will see in this chapter, seems to Wittgenstein no less misguided than Cartesian
skepticism itself.

 In Section 1, I present Wittgenstein's reflections on Moore's misuse of the expression
'to know'. Section 2 is devoted to Wittgenstein's remarks on the differences between
epistemic doubt and the kind of 'doubt' employed by the Cartesian skeptic. Finally, in
Section 3 I sketch Wittgenstein's treatment of the peculiar status of Moore's 'obvious
truisms of the commonsense', the 'hinges'.

3.1 WITTGENSTEIN AND MOORE(ANS) ON THE USE OF 'I KNOW'

Wittgenstein wrote the 676 remarks published posthumously as *On Certainty* (1969,
henceforth OC) under the influence of DCS and PEW, and in particular in the context
of conversations he had about these papers with his friend and pupil Norman
Malcolm[16].

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[16] While writing OC Wittgenstein was also heavily influenced by Henry Newman's lectures on
religious beliefs (see Newman, 1844, 1870-1985). In these works, Newman defends Christian
beliefs against skeptical attacks, maintaining that a local skepticism about religious beliefs is
unfounded, as one could run an analogous skeptical argument regarding *all* beliefs. In other words,
religious skepticism usually stems from the fact that fundamental religious beliefs, such as that God
exists, are groundless; but, Newman argues, even our more praised and authoritative epistemic
practices, such as scientific procedures, also involve a commitment to fundamental, yet
ungrounded, presuppositions. Thus, we should reject any attempt to refute religious beliefs *qua*
groundless, as all our rational enquiries rest on 'ungrounded grounds' as well. As we will see in this
work, Wittgenstein's anti-skeptical remarks are informed by similar views about the 'structure of
reason' and the 'ungroundedness' of our most basic beliefs; for a more detailed analysis of the
relationship between Newman's and Wittgenstein's anti-skeptical strategies, see Pritchard (2000).

As we have seen in the previous chapters, despite their differences both Moore and the 'Moorean' antiskeptical strategies put forward by Greco, Fara and Sosa agree on a basic point, namely, that it is possible to provide a direct refutation of Cartesian-style skepticism, thus claiming *contra* the skeptic that we can know the denials of skeptical hypotheses.

But, Wittgenstein argues, to say that we simply 'know' Moore's 'obvious truisms' is somewhat misleading. This is for a number of reasons.

First because in DCS as well as in PEW Moore considers the expression 'I know' to be analogous to concepts such as 'I believe', 'I doubt' and 'I am certain'; that is, Moore considers knowledge as a *mental state* of which we are always aware whenever we are experiencing it. Following this line of thought, the expression 'to know' would be equivalent to the expression 'I am in pain' (OC 178): we can't fail to know that we are in pain and our sincere avowal suffices to guarantee that we are in pain. Now, Wittgenstein argues, if to be in the mental state 'I know that p' is a necessary and sufficient condition for knowledge, there will be no difference between our sincere avowal 'I believe that P' and our knowledge claim 'I know that p':

> To whom does anyone say that he knows something? To himself, or to someone else. If he says it to himself, how is it distinguished from the assertion that he is sure that things are like that? There is no subjective sureness that I know something. The certainty is subjective, but not the knowledge. So if I say "I know that I have two hands", and that is not supposed to express just my subjective certainty, I must be able to satisfy myself that I am right. But I can't do that, for my having two hands is not less certain before I have looked at them than afterwards. But I could say: "That I have two hands is an irreversible belief." That would express the fact that I am not ready to let anything count as a disproof of this proposition (OC 245).

As Michael Williams points out (2004, 92-93) here Wittgenstein is stressing an important difference between 'belief-claims' and 'knowledge-claims'. When we state that we believe something in normal circumstances, we can at most be insincere, not mistaken; usually, from my saying that I believe so-and so you can infer that I believe so-and-so. This is not true of knowledge-claims; their truth or falsity does not depend on our being sincere or not while asserting them. But while giving his Proof and

asserting his 'knowledge' of the 'Commonsense view of the world', Moore seems to hold that his sincere avowal is enough to justify his beliefs; and this is one of the reasons for the collapse of his anti-skeptical strategy. Quoting Wittgenstein:

> Moore's view really comes to this: the concept "know" is analogous to the concepts "believe, "surmise", "doubt", "be convinced" in that the statement "I know" can't be a mistake. And if that is so, then there can be an inference from such an utterance to the truth of an assertion. And here the form "I thought I knew" is being overlooked... (OC 21).

As per Wittgenstein, this picture of knowledge is misleading (OC 42) for while it is possible to say 'He believes that p, but it isn't so', we cannot say something like 'He knows that p, but it isn't so'. And this is not because 'to know' and 'to believe' are two different mental states; rather, to be in the mental state that p is not sufficient to claim that we know that p. Wittgenstein explains this point further in OC 90:

> "I know" has a primitive meaning similar to and related to "I see" ("wissen", "videre"). And "I knew he was in the room, but he wasn't in the room" is like "I saw him in the room, but he wasn't there". "I know" is supposed to express a relation, not between me and the sense of a proposition (like "I believe") but between me and a fact. So that the fact is taken into my consciousness. (Here is the reason why one wants to say that nothing that goes on in the outer world is really known, but only what happens in the domain of what are called sense-data.) This would give us a picture of knowing as the perception of an outer event through visual rays which project it as it is into the eye and the consciousness. Only then the question at once arises whether one can be certain of this projection. And this picture does indeed show how our imagination presents knowledge, but not what lies at the bottom of this presentation.

Thus, for Wittgenstein, while 'I believe' expresses a relation between us and the sense of a proposition, 'I know' expresses a relation between us and a *fact*. Moreover, unlike belief- claims knowledge-claims do not depend only on our mental states but also on our *epistemic status*; for instance, on our ability to produce evidence in support of our claims. Wittgenstein offers the following examples of the proper use of

'I know':

> I know that that's a tree-this may mean all sorts of things. I look at a plant that I take for a young beech and that someone else thinks is a black-currant. He says "that is a shrub"; I say it is a tree. -We see something in the mist which one of us takes for a man, and the other says "I know that that's a tree (…) (OC 349).

> (...) Someone with bad sight asks me: "do you believe that the thing we can see there is a tree?" I reply "I know it is; I can see it clearly and I am familiar with it. -A: "Is NN at home? -I believe he is" A "was he at home yesterday? Yesterday he was; I spoke to him-do you know or only believe that this part of the house was built on rather than the rest? I know it is" (OC 483).

These examples show that in order to say 'I know' one should be able, at least in principle, to produce evidence or to offer compelling grounds for his beliefs. This does not exclude that our knowledge-claims could turn out to be false; nevertheless, the 'language game' of knowledge involves and presupposes the ability to give reasons, justifications and evidence.

But Moore's cannot ground his knowledge-claims with evidence or reasons because (OC 245) *his grounds aren't stronger than what they are supposed to justify*. As Wittgenstein points out, if a piece of evidence has to count as compelling grounds for our belief in a certain proposition then that evidence must be more certain than the belief itself. This cannot happen in the case of a Moore's proposition such as 'I have two hands' because, at least in normal circumstances, *nothing* is more certain than the fact that we have two hands (Pritchard, forthcoming a, b). As Wittgenstein writes in OC:

> If a blind man were to ask me "Have you got two hands?" I should not make sure by looking. If I were to have any doubt of it, then I don't know why I should trust my eyes. For why shouldn't I test my *eyes* by looking to find out whether I see my two hands? *What* should be tested by *what*? (OC 125).

Imagine, for instance, that one attempted to legitimate one's claim to know that p by using the evidence that one has for p (for example, what one sees, what one has been

told about p and so on). Now, if the evidence we adduce to support p is less secure than p itself, then this same evidence would be unable to support p:

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

Wittgenstein's point is not only that such knowledge-claims could not be made on the basis of evidence; the criticism is rather that the request for grounds or evidence is not applicable. The intelligibility of a knowledge claim depends on the intelligibility of the claim "How do you know?": the claim is appropriate when and only when one can "add how one knows" (OC 40). But crucially Moore cannot tell us how he knows the 'commonsense truisms' listed in DCS; hence, argues Wittgenstein, his 'knowledge claims are deeply misguided. As he writes in OC:

> One says "I know" when one is ready to give compelling grounds. "I know," relates to a possibility of demonstrating the truth. Whether someone knows something can come to light, assuming tat he is convinced of it. But if what he believes is of such a kind that the grounds he can give are no surer than his assertion, than he cannot say that he knows what he believes (OC 243).

 Moreover, the fact that (OC 245) our looking at our hands does not make us surer about their existence than we were before shows some other oddities of Moore's use of the expression 'to know'. A proper first person knowledge claim should be (Pritchard, 2002c, 7) *informative*; and this condition is not met in the case of Moore's first person knowledge-claims: Moore knows a proposition p such as 'I know that there are external objects' or 'I know that I have two hands' only provided that everyone else knows it as well. As per Wittgenstein, then, his use of the expression 'I know' is misleading, since his first person knowledge-claims can lead to the wrong assumption that he has some special epistemic access to the propositions at issue that others lack. Wittgenstein discusses this point in a number of ways, for instance by arguing that when p is one of Moore's 'obvious truisms', the 'I' in 'I know that p' is superfluous:

Back to the question whether "I know that that's a..." says anything different from "that is a..." In the first sentence a person is mentioned, in the second, not. But that does not show that they have different meanings. At all events one often replaces the first form by the second, and then often gives the latter a special intonation. For one speaks differently when one makes an uncontradicted assertion from when one maintains an assertion in face of contradiction. But don't I use the words "I know that..." to say that I am in a certain state, whereas the mere assertion "that is a..." does not say this? And yet one often does reply to such an assertion by asking "how do you know?" - "But surely, only because the fact that I assert this gives to understand that I think I know it." - This point could be made in the following way: in a zoo there might be a notice "this is a zebra"; but never "I know that this is a zebra". "I know" has meaning only when it is uttered by a person. But, given that, it is a matter of indifference whether what is uttered is "I know..." or "That is..." (OC 587-588)

That is to say, when using an expression such as 'I know that p', an agent should justify his beliefs on grounds particular to his vantage point. But as the certainty accorded to Moore's 'obvious truisms' is common to everyone, at least in normal circumstances, Moore's use of the first-person pronoun is at best misleading. Another objection against Moore's use of 'I know' is that the certainty accorded to Moore's 'commonsense certainties' is not the result of any inquiry or recognized process of investigation. Quoting Wittgenstein:

[...] We don't, for example, arrive at any of them as a result of investigation. There are e.g. historical investigations and investigations into the shape and also the age of the earth, but not into whether the earth has existed during the last hundred years [...](OC 138).

Moreover, Wittgenstein argues, a knowledge-claim can be challenged by, for instance, the appeal to evidence and reasons; more generally, when we challenge a knowledge claim we can recognise what and if something has gone wrong in the agent's process of knowledge-acquisition. Things are somewhat different in the case

of the denials of Moore's 'obvious truisms of the commonsense'; if for instance I believe that I am sitting in my room while I am not, there are no *grounds* which could explain this belief as a mistake, as an error based on negligence, fatigue or ignorance. On the contrary, a similar "false belief" would more likely be the result of a sensorial or mental disturbance (OC 526). As Moyal-Sharrock points out (2004, 74), in fact, for Wittgenstein if someone is holding seriously a denial of Moore's 'truisms' (i.e., she believes she has no body or that both her parents were men) we would not investigate the truth-value of her affirmations, but her ability to understand the language she is using or her sanity. Wittgenstein makes this point in a number of remarks, as in the following:

> If my friend were to imagine one day that he had been living for a long time past in such and such a place etc. etc, I should not call this a *mistake*, but rather a mental disturbance, perhaps a transient one (OC 71).

> Not every false belief of this sort is a mistake (OC 72).

> […] a *mistake* does not only have a cause, it also has a ground […] roughly: when someone makes a mistake, this can be fitted into what he knows aright (OC 74).

> In certain circumstances a man cannot make a *mistake*. (Can here is used logically, and the proposition does not mean that a man cannot say anything false in those circumstances). If Moore were to pronounce the opposite of those propositions which he declares certain, we should not just not share his opinion: we should regard him as demented (OC 155).

There is a radical difference between mistakes and madness; while mistakes involve false judgments which can be corrected, at least in principle, madness involves judgments against which nothing could serve as evidence to the contrary. That is, we can imagine how it is possible to make an error in the case of an everyday knowledge claim, and this error would be recognisable on the basis of some form of evidence. But this cannot happen in the case of Moore's 'commonsense certainties' such as

'There are external objects' or 'I am a human being'; they are certain, and to consistently deny them would look like a sign of madness.

3.2 PROPER AND IMPROPER DOUBTS

As we have seen above, for Wittgenstein, Moore's 'obvious truisms of the commonsense 'are not knowable; nonetheless they are also immune from rational doubt. As Wittgenstein writes in OC:

> Doubting has certain manifestations, but they are only characteristic of it in particular circumstances. If someone said that he doubted the existence of his hands, kept looking at them from all sides, tried to make sure it wasn't all "done by mirrors", etc, we should not be sure whether we ought to call that doubting. We might describe his way of behaving as like the behavior of doubt, but his game would not be ours (OC 255).

As per Wittgenstein, radical skeptical doubts are at odds with reasonable ones for several reasons. Firstly, because proper doubts 'belong to a language game: that is, they belong to a precise epistemic practice and respond to precise purposes. For instance, a doubt about the existence of a planet is perfectly understandable and answerable, at least in principle, given our scientific procedures. More generally, proper doubts must be solvable, at least in principle. As he writes in the following entries:

> Can you be mistaken about this colour's being called 'green' in English?" My answer to this can only be "No". If I were to say "Yes, for there is always the possibility of delusion", that would mean nothing at all.
> For is that rider [Nachsatz] something unknown to the other? And how is it known to me? But does that mean that it is unthinkable that the word "green" should have been produced here by a slip of the tongue or a momentary confusion? Don't we know of such cases? - One can also say to someone "Mightn't you perhaps have made a slip?" That amounts to: "Think about it

again." -But these rules of caution only make sense if they come to an end somewhere. *A doubt without an end is not even a doubt* (OC 624-625, my italics).

Accordingly, a never-ending doubt such as the Cartesian skeptical one cannot even be considered, strictly speaking, a doubt. Also, for Wittgenstein doubts must be based on *grounds*: that is, they are internal to a precise practice (practical or theoretical) and must be in a way or another *justified*; if they don't, they are constitutively empty. Consider the following passages:

> A pupil and a teacher. The pupil will not let anything be explained to him, for he continually interrupts with doubts, for instance as to the existence of things, the meaning of words, etc. The teacher says "Stop interrupting me and do as I tell you. *So far your doubts don't make sense at all."* (OC 310, my italics)

> Or imagine that the boy questioned the truth of history (and everything that connects up with it) - and even whether the earth existed at all a hundred years before […] the teacher will feel that this is not really a legitimate question at all. And it would be just the same if the pupil cast doubt on the uniformity of nature, that is to say on the justification of inductive arguments. - The teacher would feel that this was only holding them up, that this way the pupil would only get stuck and make no progress. - And he would be right. It would be as if someone were looking for some object in a room; he opens a drawer and doesn't see it there; then he closes it again, waits, and opens it once more to see if perhaps it isn't there now, and keeps on like that. *He has not learned to look for things. And in the same way this pupil has not learned how to ask questions* (OC 311-315, my italics).

The pupil's doubt is analogous to the Cartesian skeptical one; she questions whether the earth has existed long before his birth, the real existence of external objects, the very meaning of the works she is using and so on. Far from being a legitimate intellectual task, Wittgenstein argues, the pupil's doubt will lack any sense, and will

at most lead to a sort of epistemic paralysis; she will just be unable to learn the skill or the subject we are trying to teach her.

This part of Wittgenstein's treatment of skepticism can be better understood once seen in the light of Pryor and Neta's Neo-Moorean proposals which we encountered in the previous chapter. Recall that following Pryor's dogmatist account of PEW, Cartesian skeptical doubts are constitutively irrational, as to accept a proof based on perceptual evidence is what rational epistemic agent must do. In a similar fashion, Neta considers skeptical hypotheses unreasonable, even if not completely irrational, because of the intrinsic rationality of taking for granted our perceptual beliefs. As I have argued in Chapter 2, both these manoeuvres are informed by pragmatic considerations of the nature of our ordinary epistemic practices and can thus be roughly summarised as follows: as in our everyday life there is no reason to doubt the general reliability of our perceptual experience, we should rule out Cartesian-style skepticism as irrational or unreasonable.

On the contrary, as per Wittgenstein, Cartesian style skepticism is not only at odds with our everyday ordinary practices, but rather *undermines the very meaning of the words in which we are expressing our doubts*. Wittgenstein stresses this point in many entries of OC, as in the following remark where he writes:

> If, therefore, I doubt or am uncertain about this being my hand (in whatever sense), why not in that case about the meaning of these words as well? (OC 456).

> But even if in such cases I can't be mistaken, isn't it possible that I am drugged?" If I am and if the drug has taken away my consciousness, then I am not now really talking and thinking. I cannot seriously suppose that I am at this moment dreaming. Someone who, dreaming, says "I am dreaming", even if he speaks audibly in doing so, is no more right than if he said in his dream "it is raining", while it was in fact raining. Even if his dream were actually connected with the noise of the rain (OC 676).

That is to say, once we assume *ex hypothesis* that we could be victims of a skeptical scenario, it would be hard to understand what could count as evidence for what; each

and every of our perceptions would likely be the result of a constant deception. Thus, to doubt one of Moore's 'obvious truisms' is not only irrational/unreasonable in the context of our ordinary epistemic practices, as in Neta's and Pryor proposals, but will rather radically alter if not completely undermine the very meaning of expressions such as 'evidence' and 'justification'.

This is so, Wittgenstein argues, because all reasonable doubts presuppose *certainty* (OC 114-115); that is, the very fact that we usually raise doubts of every sort at the same time shows and implies that we take something for granted. For example, a doubt about the real existence of an historical figure presupposes that we consider certain an 'obvious truism of the commonsense' such as 'The world existed a long time before my birth'; a doubt about the existence of a planet presupposes the absence of any doubt about the existence of the external world and so on. As Wittgenstein remarks at one point:

> If you are not certain of any fact, you cannot be certain of the meaning of your words either. If you tried to doubt everything you would not get as far as doubting anything. The game of doubting itself presupposes certainty (OC 114-115, 514-515).

That is, the same structure of our ways of inquiry presupposes that something is taken for granted; and this happens not only out of practical consideration but is rather the way in which rational inquiries are put forward. Accordingly, Cartesian skeptical arguments are self-refuting given their same *universality*; even if apparently legitimate, they are both based on a misleading representation of the structure of our rational inquiries.

3.3 'HINGES'

So far, we have seen that Wittgenstein considers both Moore's knowledge-claims and the Cartesian skeptical doubt as misguided, for the 'obvious truisms of the

commonsense' cannot be sensibly doubted or known[17]. But if the statements listed by Moore in DCS are not knowable or doubtable, what is their status? With regard to Moore's 'truisms', Wittgenstein introduces a concept that is at the same time pivotal to understand his anti-skeptical strategy and extremely elusive; Moore's 'commonsense certainties' are, in his words, 'hinges'. Wittgenstein uses this term in different occasions, as in OC 341-3, where he writes

> "The question that we raise and our doubts depend on the fact that some propositions are exempt from doubt, are as it were the 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 [...] If I want the door to turn, the hinges must stay put".

That is to say, 'hinges' are just apparently normal empirical contingent claims, but on closer inspection they perform a different, more basic role in our epistemic practices. As Wittgenstein writes with regard to this point:

> So is the hypothesis possible, that all the things around us don't exist? Would that not be like the hypothesis of our having miscalculated in all our calculations? (OC 55).

That is, all these statements are not vulnerable to recalcitrant experiences; no evidence can undercut or support them. Thus, Moore should not have said that he knew his 'obvious truism', unless he was using the expression 'I know' as a synonymous for 'I can't be wrong' or 'There can't be a doubt in this case' (OC58-59). Rather, he should have said that his 'commonsense certainties' "stand fast for him and for each one of us" (OC 116, OC 253).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this chapter, I have presented Wittgenstein's main criticisms against Moore's epistemology and I have also sketched the uncontentious aspects of his anti-skeptical

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[17] As we will see in Chapter 5, as per Wittgenstein, Cartesian skeptical doubts are not only misguided but constitutively senseless, for a proponent of radical skepticism treats 'hinges' as propositional beliefs while they have an altogether different status. I will consider this pivotal feature of Wittgenstein's epistemology in Chapter 6, while discussing the analogy between 'hinges' and 'rules of grammar'.

reflections. As we have seen, there is a huge difference between Moore's and Wittgenstein's positions; Moore, along with other Neo-Mooreans like Sosa, Greco and Pryor, claims that it is possible to know 'commonsense certainties' such as 'There are external objects' or 'I have a body' and that this knowledge can be used to refute skeptical arguments. On the contrary, for Wittgenstein, both Cartesian skepticism and Moore's anti-skeptical attempts are the result of a systematic misuse of the expressions 'to know' and 'to doubt' and of a misleading way of representing the structure of a rational inquiry.

Wittgenstein's anti-skeptical remarks have been very influential and have led to a number of competing interpretations. In the next chapter, I will present and discuss these 'OC inspired' anti-skeptical strategies and assess their anti-skeptical strength; this will also give me the opportunity to cast more light on Wittgenstein's anti-skeptical strategy and his notion of 'hinges'.

CHAPTER 4

READINGS OF WITTGENSTEIN'S 'ON CERTAINTY'

4.0 INTRODUCTION

So far, I have just sketched Wittgenstein's anti-skeptical reflections. Given the elusiveness and the obscurity of his work, there is no consensus about how we should interpret Wittgenstein anti-skeptical strategy and especially the concept of 'hinges'.

In this chapter I present and assess the dominant current interpretations of OC, in order to see whether they represent plausible interpretations of Wittgenstein's thought and, more importantly, viable anti-skeptical strategies.

Section 1 is devoted to James Conant's *therapeutic reading*, for which we should read Wittgenstein's anti-skeptical remarks in light of his theory of 'meaning as use'. In Section 2, I present Crispin Wright's 'OC- inspire' anti-skeptical strategy, that stems from his reflections on Moore's Proof which I have already considered in Chapter 3. In the third section I discuss Michael Williams' 'Wittgensteinian contextualism', while in Section 4 I introduce Pritchard's reflections on the structure of reason and his account of 'hinge commitment'. Finally, in Section 5 I discuss Marie McGinn's '*framework reading'*, for which we should consider 'hinges' as non-epistemic 'judgements of the frame'.

4.1 THE THERAPEUTIC READING

 The starting point of James Conant's 'therapeutic reading' of OC are the remarks in which Wittgenstein talks about Moore's 'misuse' of the expression 'to know':

Now, can one enumerate what one knows (like Moore)? Straight off like that, I believe not. - For otherwise the expression "I know" gets misused. And through this misuse a queer and extremely important mental state seems to be revealed (OC 6)."

 "I know that a sick man is lying here? Nonsense! I am sitting at his bedside, I am looking attentively into his face. - So I don't know, then, that there is a sick man lying here? Neither the question nor the assertion makes sense. Any more than the assertion "I am here", which I might yet use at any moment, if suitable occasion presented itself. […] And "I know that there's a sick man lying here", used in an unsuitable situation, seems not to be nonsense but rather seems matter-of-course, only because one can fairly easily imagine a situation to fit it, and one thinks that the words "I know that..." are always in place where there is no doubt, and hence even where the expression of doubt would be unintelligible (OC 10).

As per Conant, we should read these passages in light of the Wittgensteinian theory of 'meaning as use', for which the meaning of a word consists in its use in a given linguistic practice. As he writes in his *Philosophical Investigations* (PI 1997, henceforth PI):

For a *large* class of cases -though not for all- in which we employ the word "meaning" it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language (PI 43).

This allows Conant to reconstruct Wittgenstein's treatment of skepticism as follows. Moore fails to mean something quite particular by stating his 'obvious truisms' outside of a language-game, that is outside of an ordinary practice; thus, in the circumstances in which they are actually used it is not clear what has been said, if anything.

At the same time, a Radical skeptic fails to recognise the role - or, using Wittgenstein's expression, the use - that expressions such as 'knowledge' and 'doubt' play in our ordinary 'language-games'; and as in our everyday life there is nothing

similar to the kind of general investigation pursued by the radical skeptic (OC 209 "A doubt without an end is not even a doubt"), the skeptical challenge is, strictly speaking, senseless:

> The point of [Wittgenstein's investigation is] to show the skeptic that he is faced with a dilemma; either he stays within our language-games and his words express a doubt but not the sort of super-doubt he is after […] or he will be led to speak 'outside language-games', stripping his putative context of use of the concrete specificity (and hence the foothold for our criteria) which permits us to mean and thus say what we do on the occasions on which we ordinarily employ the word 'doubt' to express the concept of doubt.. [The skeptic is to find] that either he is making perfect sense but failing to ask the question he wants or that it remains unclear which of the many things he can mean by his words he wants to mean (Conant, 1995, 250).

Both Cartesian skepticism and Moore's anti-skeptical strategy would then be based on a misunderstanding of how language works; it is not clear what Moore and the skeptic are doing while using the expression 'to know' and 'to doubt' and thus their words lack any sense.

If there are passages in which Wittgenstein considers skeptical conclusions senseless rather than simply false (OC 155, 526), this rendering of his anti-skeptical position is too crude. Just consider the following entries:

> The statement "I know that here is a hand" may then be continued: "for it's *my* hand that I am looking at". Then a reasonable man will not doubt that I know. Nor will the idealist; rather he will say that he was not dealing with the practical doubt which is being dismissed, but there is a further doubt *behind* that one. That this is an *illusion* has to be shewn in a different way (OC 19).

> But is it an adequate answer to the skepticism of the idealist, or the assurances of the realist, to say that "There are physical object' is nonsense? For them

after all it is not nonsense. It would, however, be an answer to say: this assertion, or its opposite, it's a misfiring attempt to express what can't be expressed like that. And that it does misfire can be shewn; but that isn't the end of the matter. We need to realize that what presents itself to us as the first expression of a difficulty, or of its solution, may as yet not be correctly expressed at all. Just as one who has a just censure of a picture to make will often at first offer the censure where it does not belong, and an *investigation* is needed in order to find the right point of attack for the critic (OC 37).

These remarks alone seem to suggest that Wittgenstein was well aware that simply showing how the skeptic was using terms such as 'knowledge' and 'doubt' outside of any ordinary practice was not enough to dismiss skeptical worries. On the contrary, he seems to concede that nothing prevents us from thinking that the skeptic and his opponent are engaged in a 'language-game', that is philosophical inquiry, in which the expressions 'to know' and 'to doubt' are used in a way at odds with their everyday usage but that is still, at least apparently, meaningful and legitimate.

Also, (Rudd, 2005), even if we read Wittgenstein's remarks in light of his theory of 'meaning as use', it is not obvious that we should simply dismiss skeptical worries because they have no practical consequences. As we have seen in the previous chapters, the Cartesian skeptical problem is first and foremost a *philosophical paradox*, which requires a viable philosophical solution (or dissolution), and cannot be thus dismissed on the basis of pragmatic considerations about its irrelevance for our everyday life.

Finally, as we have seen extensively in Chapter 3, Wittgenstein's criticisms against Moore's use of the expression 'to know' are not related to considerations about use as meaning in ordinary situations. On the contrary, they are just a preliminary part of his argument that prepares grounds for his conception of 'hinges' and their peculiar epistemic status; a feature of Wittgenstein's treatment of skepticism which is at the same time extremely important and completely absent in Conant's 'therapeutic reading' of OC.

4.2 WRIGHT'S RATIONAL ENTITLEMENT STRATEGY

Another influential 'Wittgenstein-inspired' anti-skeptical position is Crispin Wright's 'rational entitlement strategy' (2004a, 2004b), based on his diagnosis of Moore's Proof which I have already presented in Chapter 2. As we have seen, for Wright we can roughly sketch Moore's PEW as follows:

> I) I know that this is a hand;
>
> II) If I know that this is a hand, I know that there is at least an external object;
>
> III) Therefore, there is a material world.

Moore can then infer that III), namely the conclusion of his Proof, only if he knows the premises I) and II) to be true; but crucially the truth of I) and II) depends on collateral information that can be provided only if we already consider III) true. That is to say, we can take I) and II) as acceptable evidence to support the conclusion 'There is an external world' only if we implicitly assume the general reliability of our perceptual experiences (our looking at our hands in the case of PEW) and the existence of external objects. But skeptical scenarios are just meant to put under discussion the general reliability of our senses and the existence of an external world; thus, PEW is unable to convince the skeptic as the premises of Moore's Proof fail to transmit warrant to its conclusion, what Wright's calls *transmission failure*.

However, Wright argues, in many cases our inquiries are based on commitments or presuppositions that cannot be justified, but that nonetheless we take for granted whenever we are involved in an epistemic practice; and this is what happens with Moore's 'obvious truisms of the commonsense'. On Wright's account, 'hinges' are beliefs whose rejection would rationally necessitate extensive reorganisation, or the complete destruction, of what should be considered as empirical evidence or more generally of our epistemic practices.

Each and every one of our ordinary inquiries would then rest on ungrounded presuppositions, 'hinges'; but still, since the warrant to hold Moore's 'obvious truisms' is acquired in an epistemically responsible way, we cannot dismiss them simply because they are groundless as this would lead to a complete *cognitive paralysis* (2004a, 191). As Wright puts the matter:

> If a cognitive project is indispensable, or anyway sufficiently valuable to us-in particular, if its failure would at least be no worse than the costs of not executing it, and its success would be better-and if the attempt to vindicate (some of) its presuppositions would raise presuppositions of its own of no more secure an antecedents status, and so on ad infinitum, then we are entitled to-may help ourselves to, take for granted-the original presuppositions without specific evidence in their favour. More generally, wherever we need to carry through a type of project, or anyway cannot lose and may gain by doing so, and where we cannot satisfy ourselves that the presuppositions of a successful execution are met except at the cost of making further presuppositions whose status is no more secure, we should-are rationally entitled to-just go ahead and trust that the former are met (2004a, 192).

Following Wright's reading of OC, then, Cartesian skepticism can only show that every epistemic process rests on ungrounded presupposition. But a system of thought, purified of all liability to Moore's 'obvious truisms of the commonsense', would not be that of a rational agent; thus, we have a default rational basis, an *entitlement,* to believe in 'hinges'. In this way, Wright argues, we would be able to know the denials of skeptical hypotheses; and if we can have some sort of knowledge of 'hinges' such as 'I have a body' or 'There are external objects', we will also be able to retain our confidence in our everyday empirical knowledge claims.

Wright's reading of OC is not completely sound for a number of reasons. Firstly, following his account the Cartesian skeptical challenge would be a perfectly legitimate inquiry, which can also highlight a constitutive limit of our epistemic practices. On the contrary, for Wittgenstein, Cartesian-style skepticism undermines

the very notion of what *an epistemic practice is*; for once we doubt statements such as 'There are external objects', expressions like 'evidence', 'justification' and 'doubt' will radically alter if not completely lose their meaning. Wittgenstein stresses this point in many entries of OC, as in the following remark where he writes:

> If, therefore, I doubt or am uncertain about this being my hand (in whatever sense), why not in that case about the meaning of these words as well? (OC 456).

That is to say, once we assume *ex hypothesis* that we could be victims of a skeptical scenario it would be hard to understand what could count as evidence for what as each and every of our perceptions would be the result of constant deception. Thus, to doubt Moore's 'commonsense certainties' will put in question the very meaning of the words in which we are expressing our doubts.

Also, for Wright we are rationally entitled to claim that we know the denials of skeptical hypotheses, even if in an unwarranted way; an anti-skeptical move which is excluded by Wittgenstein in many remarks of OC, as in the following entries:

> Moore has every right to say he knows there's a tree there in front of him. Naturally he may be wrong. (For it is not the same as with the utterance "I believe there is a tree there".) But whether he is right or wrong in this case is of no philosophical importance. If Moore is attacking those who say that one cannot really know such a thing, he can't do it by assuring them that he knows this and that […] (OC 520).

> Moore's mistake lies in this - countering the assertion that one cannot know that, by saying "I do know it" (OC 521).

That is, as we have already seen, for Wittgenstein 'hinges' cannot be known, as any evidence we could adduce to support a proposition p such as 'I have an hand' would be less secure than p itself. As he writes at one point:

One says 'I know' when one is ready to give compelling grounds. 'I know' relates to a possibility of demonstrating the truth. Whether someone knows something can come to light, assuming that he is convinced of it. But if what he believes is of such a kind that the grounds he can give are no surer than his assertion, than he cannot say that he knows what he believes (OC 243).

A second and more important problem for the entitlement strategy is that (see Pritchard, 2005; Jenkins, 2007 and Pedersen, 2009) Wright seems to miss a crucial distinction between *practical* and *epistemic* rationality. That is, to accept a non-evidentially warranted hinge would be *practically* rational, as we obviously need to set aside Cartesian skeptical concerns to pursue any kind of inquiry and to achieve cognitive results (Jenkins, 2007, 26). But Cartesian skeptical scenarios are not meant to put under discussion the practical rationality of taking for granted Moore's 'obvious truisms of the commonsense'; rather, they are meant to assess the epistemic rationality of trusting our senses when it is impossible to refute a skeptical scenario such as the BIV one. Thus, even if it would be entirely rational to set aside skeptical concerns whenever we want to pursue a given epistemic practice, a Cartesian skeptic can nonetheless argue that the fact that we *need* true beliefs about the world does not make our acceptance of 'hinges' epistemically rational.

Third, as has been highlighted by Duncan Pritchard (forthcoming a, forthcoming b), another problem for the entitlement strategy is the very idea of a belief being rationally grounded in something like an entitlement. This is so because to believe a proposition is to believe that proposition *to be true*; and if this is right, then it is hard to understand how we can have a rational entitlement to take for granted a 'hinge' without having any reason to consider the 'hinge' at issue to be true.

Accordingly, if we cannot say, strictly speaking, that we believe in a 'hinge', for we have no reason to consider it true, then we cannot have knowledge of it either; a mere trusting of or acceptance in the hinge at issue will not suffice. And if this is right, then we cannot have knowledge of 'hinges', even if we are 'rationally entitled' to take them to be true.

4.3 WILLIAMS' 'WITTGENSTEINIAN CONTEXTUALISM'

Another influential reading of OC is Michael Williams' 'Wittgensteinian contextualism', which he has proposed in his book *Unnatural Doubts* and in a number of other more recent works (1991, 2001, 2004a, 2004b, 2005).

According to Williams, Wittgenstein's remarks on skepticism do not provide a direct response to skepticism or a merely pragmatist way to dismiss them. Rather, they lead us to what he calls a "theoretical diagnosis" of the Cartesian skeptical challenge (2001, 146), which questions the naturalness and intuitiveness of skeptical arguments in order to understand the unacknowledged theoretical preconceptions that make them so *prima facie* compelling.

As per Williams, Cartesian skepticism would be implicitly committed to what he names "Prior Grounding Requirement" (2001, 24, henceforth PGR), a structure of epistemic justification which can be sketched as follows:

> PGR1: Our justification in believing that p must be earned via an epistemically responsible behavior;
> PGR2: We are not entitled in believing that p is true when our grounds to believe that p are less than adequate;
> PGR3: grounds are evidence: that is, in order to be justified in believing that p there should be a proposition, or a set of propositions, that count in favor of the proposition believed;
> PGR4: in order to believe that p, the believer must possess, and make proper use of, evidence that makes p likely to be true (2001, 147).

In light of the PGR model, each and every one of our knowledge claims would be unjustified, at least when skeptical hypotheses are in play; following Cartesian skeptical arguments nothing can count as an adequate evidence to support our beliefs in 'obvious truisms' such as 'I have a body' or 'There are external objects', for our empirical beliefs can all be the result of constant deception.

Still, Williams argues, PGR is not the only model available for epistemic justification or the most compelling. Recall that in some passages of OC (OC 114, 115, 315, 322) Wittgenstein argues that any proper inquiry presupposes *certainty*, that

is, some unquestionable prior commitment; in these remarks Wittgenstein also alludes to the importance of the context of inquiry, hence stating that without a precise context there is no possibility of raising a sensible question or a doubt.

Williams generalises this part of Wittgenstein's argument as follows: in each epistemic context there is necessarily a set of 'hinge' beliefs (that he names *methodological necessities*), which will hold fast and are therefore immune to epistemic evaluation in that context. Accordingly, far from being based on the PGR model our epistemic practices would have what, following Brandom (1995), Williams calls a "Default and Challenge "(henceforth, DAC) structure.
According to this model,

> "[…] epistemic entitlement is the default status of a person's belief and assertion. One is entitled to a belief or assertion [....} in the absence of appropriate defeaters: that is, reason to think that one is not entitled (2001, 149.)

While according to the PGR the Cartesian skeptic is somewhat right in his never-ending search for grounds and evidential support, following the DAC structure of reason all our epistemic practices depend on unquestionable prior commitments.

For instance, an historical inquiry about whether, say, Napoleon won at Austerlitz presupposes a 'hinge' such as 'The world existed long before my birth'; all our everyday epistemic practices presuppose Moore's 'obvious truisms of the commonsense' such as 'I have a body' and 'There are external objects' and so on.

Crucially, for Williams to take for granted the 'hinges' of a given epistemic practice is not only a matter of practical rationality as in Wright's entitlement strategy; as he writes at one point:

[...] one reason we have lots of default entitlements is that holding many true beliefs, or not being subject to certain kinds of error, is a *condition of making sense,* thus of being in a position to raise question at all (2001,159, my italics).

That is to say, while following Wright we have to rest on 'hinges' mostly because it is the only practical alternative, for Williams to take them for granted is a *condition of possibility* of an ordinary inquiry. That is to say, to seriously doubt

'hinges' such as 'I have a body' or 'There are external objects' will not result in a more scrupulous approach to our everyday epistemic practices, but will on the contrary preclude any engagement in these practices at all. And this is not a reflection of the limits of our enquiries, as in Wright's proposal, but a reflection of the constitutively 'local' and 'context-dependent' (hence 'Wittgensteinian contextualism') nature of all our enquiries.

 Cartesian-style arguments, and the PGR model of epistemic justification which underlies the skeptical challenge, are then based on what Williams labels 'epistemological realism', namely, the view for which the propositions we believe in have an epistemic standing simply in virtue of the proposition they are. Rather, argues Williams:

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

That is, according to epistemological realism there is an invariant set of epistemic relations which are applicable in different contexts and which can be discovered by philosophical reflection. On the contrary, in different contexts different 'methodological necessities' are taken for granted, and any context of inquiry has its own rules of evidence and its own model for justification.

Still, Williams' 'methodological necessities' are not immutable even within their particular contexts; they can lose their status as a new problem arises. This part of Williams' proposal resembles Wittgenstein's metaphor of the river-bed (OC 93-99), for which Moore's 'commonsense certainties' describe

> a kind of mythology [...] it may be imagined that some propositions, of the form of empirical propositions, were hardened and functioned as channels for such empirical propositions as were not hardened but fluid; and that this relation altered with time, in that fluid propositions hardened, and hard ones became fluid [....] the mythology may change back into a state of flux, the river bed of flux may shift.

As Williams reads OC, these passages would suggest that in different contexts different beliefs, different 'methodological necessities' play a 'hinge role'; 'hinges' may change from context to context, and what can be indubitable in a context can be the object of an inquiry in another.

Williams draws this interpretation also from the following remark, in which Wittgenstein seems to concede that, in exceptional circumstances, a doubt about Moore's 'commonsense certainties 'can be legitimately held:

> But now it is also correct to use "I know" in the context which Moore mentioned, at least *in particular circumstances* […] For each of these sentences I can imagine circumstances that turn it into a move in our language-games, and by that it loses everything that is philosophically astonishing (OC 622, my italics).

On Williams' reading this will suggest that Moore's 'obvious truisms', and more generally the methodological necessities presupposed by our epistemic practices, can *all* at least potentially be doubted and dismissed.

A consequence of this thought is that the certainty of the 'hinges' is strictly *context dependent*. That is to say, in the context of our everyday epistemic practices it is illegitimate to doubt 'commonsense certainties' such as 'I have a body' or 'There are external objects'; but, still, these 'methodological necessities' are open to doubt in the demanding context of epistemic inquiry.

As per Williams, by doubting the 'hinges' of our most common epistemic practices the skeptic is simply leading us from a context in which it is legitimate to hold these 'hinges' fast without question toward a philosophical context in which everything can be doubtable. However, the skeptical move cannot affect our everyday knowledge, for in ordinary contexts it would be irrational to doubt Moore's 'obvious truisms of the commonsense' such as 'The earth existed long before my birth' or 'I have a body'. At most, what the Cartesian skeptic is able to show us is that in the more demanding context of philosophical reflection we do not know, strictly speaking, anything at all. Quoting Williams:

> The skeptic takes himself to have discovered, under the condition of philosophical reflection, that knowledge of the world is impossible. But in

fact, the most he has discovered is that knowledge of the world is impossible *under the conditions of philosophical reflection* (1991, 130).

A consequence of this thought is that, even if legitimate and constitutively unsolvable at a philosophical level, the Cartesian skeptical paradox cannot affect our ordinary practices as they belong to different contexts, with completely different 'methodological necessities' or 'hinges'. Moreover, the same propositions that we cannot know at a philosophical level are known to be true, albeit tacitly, in other contexts, even if they lack evidential support. Evidential support is something that they cannot constitutively possess, insofar as any hinge has to be taken for granted whenever we are involved in a given inquiry.

There are many problems that Williams' 'Wittgensteinian contextualism' has to face, both as a plausible interpretation of Wittgenstein's thought and especially as an anti-skeptical strategy. Firstly, on his account the skeptical enterprise is both completely legitimate and constitutively unsolvable. That is to say, in the context of our ordinary epistemic practices it is illegitimate to doubt Moore's 'obvious truisms' such as 'I have a body' or 'This is a hand'; nonetheless, 'hinges' would still be doubtable and dismissible in the more demanding context of philosophical inquiry.

Even if in some passages of OC Wittgenstein seems to concede that a skeptic might be using the expressions 'to know' and 'to doubt' in a specialised and, so to say, 'philosophical' way, this does not lead him to admit that the skeptic is somewhat 'right', even if only in the philosophical context. Rather, throughout OC Wittgenstein stresses that there is no context in which we can rationally held a doubt about Moore's 'commonsense certainties'; as I have said *supra*, to seriously doubt a 'hinge' would look more similar to a sign of mental illness than to a legitimate philosophical inquiry:

In certain circumstances a man cannot make a *mistake*. (Can here is used logically, and the proposition does not mean that a man cannot say anything false in those circumstances). If Moore were to pronounce the opposite of those propositions which he declares certain, we should not just not share his opinion: we should regard him as demented (OC 155).

"If someone said to me that he doubted whether he had a body I should take him to be a half-wit. But I shouldn't know what it would mean to try to convince him that he had one. And if I had said something, and that had removed his doubt, I should not know how or why (OC 257).

According to Wittgenstein, then, there is no context in which we can reasonably doubt Moore's 'obvious truisms of the commonsense'. On the contrary, as we have seen presenting Wright's entitlement strategy, once we doubt a 'hinge' such as 'There are external objects' it would be hard to understand what could be evidence for what. Also, and more importantly, for Wittgenstein to question 'hinges' goes against the same notion of 'rational inquiry'; as he points out in the following entries:

If someone doubted whether the earth had existed a hundred years ago, I should not understand, for this reason: I would not know what such a person would still allow to be counted as evidence and what not (OC 231).
I believe that I have forebears, and that every human being has them. I believe that there are various cities, and, quite generally, in the main facts of geography and history. I believe that the earth is a body on whose surface we move and that it no more suddenly disappears or the like than any other solid body: this table, this house, this tree, etc. *If I wanted to doubt the existence of the earth long before my birth, I should have to doubt all sorts of things that stand fast for me* (OC 234, my italics).

If I now say "I know that the water in the kettle in the gas-flame will not freeze but boil", I seem to be as justified in this "I know" as I am in any. 'If I know anything I know this'. - Or do I know with still greater certainty that the person opposite me is my old friend so-and-so? And how does that compare with the proposition that I am seeing with two eyes and shall see them if I look in the glass? - I don't know confidently what I am to answer here. - But still there is a difference between cases. If the water over the gas freezes, of course I shall be as astonished as can be, but I shall assume some factor I don't

know of, and perhaps leave the matter to physicists to judge. But what could make me doubt whether this person here is N.N., whom I have known for years? *Here a doubt would seem to drag everything with it and plunge it into chaos* (OC 613, my italics).

If Williams' proposal is not a sound interpretation of OC, the anti-skeptical strength of his 'Wittgensteinian contextualism' is also somewhat moot. As has been pointed out by Pritchard (2005a) there is a crucial tension in Williams' account; from one side, Cartesian skepticism would be based on a misleading way of representing the structure of reason; from another, there is a philosophical context in which the skeptic is right and in which our knowledge is *de facto* impossible.

Thus, Williams' 'Wittgensteinian contextualism' is at most able to show that our ordinary knowledge-claims are in some sense untouched by the Cartesian challenge, and this cannot count as a viable anti-skeptical strategy at all. As I have extensively argued throughout this work, Cartesian skepticism is first and foremost a philosophical *paradox*, which we cannot dismiss on the basis of pragmatic consideration about the irrelevance of the skeptical challenge for our epistemic practices.

Therefore, if Cartesian skepticism persists as an unsolvable philosophical problem, Williams' 'Wittgensteinian contextualism' leads, at most, to the recognition of skepticism as a sort of philosophical 'incurable disease'; and it is far from obvious which sort of intellectual comfort this view can give us.

Even setting aside its weaknesses as an anti-skeptical device, Williams' proposal has to face another serious issue. Recall that following his 'Wittgensteinian contextualism' any context of inquiry has its own rules of evidence and its own model of justification; accordingly, if any different context of inquiry has its own specific rule of evidence, confirmation and verification, there would be no way to judge whether one system of thought is better than another. This is a problem also raised in some remarks of OC, where Wittgenstein seems willing to countenance a *plurality* of epistemic systems, all perfectly legitimate even if based on different 'hinges'. Just consider the following entries:

I can imagine a man who had grown up in quite special circumstances and been taught that the earth came into being 50 years ago, and therefore believed this. We might instruct him: the earth has long… etc. We should be trying to give him our *picture of the world*. This would happen through a kind of persuasion (OC 262).

I could imagine Moore being captured by a wild tribe, and their expressing the suspicion that he has come from somewhere between the earth and the moon. Moore tells them that he knows etc. but he can't give them the grounds for his certainty, because they have fantastic ideas of human ability to fly and know nothing about physics…(OC 264).

Is it wrong for me to be guided in my actions by the propositions of physics? Am I to say I have no good ground for doing so? Isn't precisely this what we call a 'good ground'? Supposing we met people who did not regard that as a telling reason. Now, how do we imagine this? Instead of the physicist, they consult an oracle. (And for that we consider them primitive.) Is it wrong for them to consult an oracle and be guided by it? - If we call this "wrong" aren't we using our language-game as a base from which to combat theirs? And are we right or wrong to combat it? Of course there are all sorts of slogans which will be used to support our proceedings. Where two principles really do meet which cannot be reconciled with on another, then each man declares the other a fool and heretic (OC 608-611).

In the 'Moore and the Wild tribe' example mentioned above, the agents do not disagree over a particular thesis but rather on the very concept of 'evidence' and of what is epistemically relevant to the dispute. Moore believes in modern physics and more generally in the, so to say, scientific view of the world; the tribe does not consider physics as a telling reason and consults oracles instead. In Williams' jargon, Moore and the tribe belong to different epistemic contexts in which different 'methodological necessities' are in play; but following his account of the structure of reason their disagreement would be unsolvable, for every epistemic context has its own legitimate concept of evidence and justification. Williams' 'Wittgensteinian

contextualism' will then lead to a sort of *epistemic relativism*, namely the view for which epistemic disagreement between agents committed different world views cannot be rationally solved, for our knowledge-claims rest on pre-rational, unjustifiable social or cultural commitments. With regard to this point, Williams writes that

> It should be clear that contextualism does not encourage epistemic relativism. Epistemic relativism depends on the idea that ultimate source principles cannot be justified in a non-circular way. The main trust of contextualism is to deny that justification depends on such principles in anything like the simple way that the skeptical relativist requires. "Epistemic systems" are more complex, variable and fact dependent than the fundamental relativism argument supposes. […] So while the relativist suggests that an epistemic system either undermines itself, and is thus incoherent, or offers only question begging self-support, the contextualist replies that that the dilemma is false. Self-support (of the kind envisaged) is not needed, and self-undermining is not incoherence but the occasion for revising our epistemic procedures and standards (2007, 107).

Thus, for Williams his position is not relativist but at most *fallibilist* (2004b, 2007); any responsible epistemic agents should be aware that his knowledge claims rest upon 'methodological necessities' which are beyond evidence and thus open, at least potentially, to debate and discussion.

As Pritchard points out (forthcoming b, 13-15), Williams seems to miss a crucial distinction between radical skepticism and epistemic relativism. The epistemic relativist does not in fact argue that a 'closed' epistemic system undermines itself or that it can offer only 'question begging support'; rather, she claims that such systems are perfectly able to generate justified belief, but that nonetheless different epistemic systems, where different 'methodological necessities' are in play, can generate other justified beliefs that may well run counter to the justified beliefs generated by another system.

Also, the fact that epistemic systems are "more complex, variable and fact dependent" than the relativist supposes cannot help us to solve the kind of epistemic disagreement between agents committed to radically different worldviews. Williams himself admits that, following his contextualist proposal

> What we can argue for depends on rich commitments about the world around us. This means that individuals and groups can vary widely in their epistemic resources. Accordingly, *whether you can convince another person by argument depends on how much common ground there is between you.* However, these limitations are contingent and variable: they do not reflect imprisonment in permanently incommensurable worldviews […] As a rule, when people's beliefs differ profoundly, there is no guarantee that there will be a neutral epistemic principle for determining who is right and who is wrong (2007, 108-9, 111, my italics).

Still (Pritchard, forthcoming b, 14) this does not address the real problem of epistemic relativism, for which there would be no rational way to choose between different epistemic systems. If there is 'no neutral epistemic principle for determining who is right and who is wrong', then again there is no way of judging whether one system of thought is better than another. Thus, it would be impossible to solve any epistemic disagreement between agents committed to different worldviews; a conclusion which is not more reassuring than the skeptical one.

4. 4 PRITCHARD ON THE STRUCTURE OF REASON

Wittgenstein's reflections on the structure of reason have influenced a more recent 'Wittgenstein-inspired' anti-skeptical position, namely Pritchard's 'hinge-commitment' strategy (forthcoming b).

To understand his proposal, recall the following remarks we have already quoted *supra*:

If you are not certain of any fact, you cannot be certain of the meaning of your words either […] If you tried to doubt everything you would not get as far as doubting anything. The game of doubting itself presupposes certainty (OC 114-115).

The question that we raise and our doubts depend on the fact that some propositions are exempt from doubt, are as it were the 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 [...] If I want the door to turn, the hinges must stay put (OC 341-3).

As per Pritchard, here Wittgenstein would claim that the same logic of our ways of inquiry presupposes that some propositions are excluded from doubt; and this is not irrational or based on a sort of blind faith, but rather belongs to the way rational inquiries are put forward (see OC 342)[18]. As a door needs hinges in order to turn, any rational evaluation would then require a prior commitment to an unquestionable proposition/set of 'hinges' in order to be possible at all.

A consequence of this thought (forthcoming b, 3) is that any form of universal doubt such as the Cartesian skeptical one is constitutively impossible[19]; there is simply no way to pursue an inquiry in which nothing is taken for granted. In other words, the same generality of the Cartesian skeptical challenge is then based on a misleading way of representing the essentially *local* nature of our enquiries.

This manoeuvre helps Pritchard to overcome one of the main issues of Williams' 'Wittgensteinian contextualism'. Recall that following Williams the Cartesian skeptical challenge is both legitimate and unsolvable, even if only in the more demanding philosophical context. On the contrary, as per Wittgenstein there is simply nothing like the kind of universal doubt employed by the Cartesian skeptic, both in the philosophical and in the, so to say, non-philosophical context of our everyday epistemic practices. A proponent of Cartesian skepticism looks for an universal, general evaluation of our beliefs; but crucially there is no such thing as a general evaluation of our beliefs, whether positive (anti-skeptical) or negative

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[18] Cfr OC 342: […] it belongs to the *logic of our scientific investigations* that certain things are indeed not doubted.

[19] See OC 450 "A doubt that doubted everything would not be a doubt".

(skeptical), for all rational evaluation can take place only in the context of 'hinges' which are themselves immune to rational evaluation.

Another important consequence of Pritchard's proposal is that it will not affect Closure. Each and every one of our epistemic practices rest on 'hinges' that we accept with certainty; a certainty which is the expression of what Pritchard calls ''über-hinge' commitment'. This would be an a-rational commitment toward our most basic belief that, as we mentioned above, is not itself opened to rational evaluation; but that importantly *is not a belief*.

To understand this point, just recall Pritchard's criticism toward Wright's rational entitlement. As we have seen, Wright argues that it would be entirely rational to claim that we know Moore's 'obvious truisms of the commonsense' whenever we are involved in an epistemic practice which is valuable to us; but, Pritchard argues, in order to know a proposition we need reasons to believe that proposition *to be true.* And as, following Wright, we have no reason to consider 'hinges' true but the fact that we need to take them for granted, then we cannot have knowledge of them either.

With these considerations in mind, we can come back to Pritchard's ''über-hinge' commitment'. As we have seen, this commitment would express a fundamental a-rational relationship toward our most basic certainties, a commitment without which no knowledge is possible. Crucially, our basic certainties are not subject to rational evaluation; for instance, they cannot be confirmed or disconfirmed by evidence and thus they would be *non-propositional* in character (that is to say, they cannot be either true or false). Accordingly, *they are not beliefs at all*. This can help us retain both the Closure principle and our confidence in our most basic certainties. Recall the reformulation of the Closure principle I have mentioned throughout this work:

> *The Competent Deduction Principle*
> If S knows that *p,* and S competently deduces from *p* that *q*, thereby coming to believe that *q* on this basis, while retaining her knowledge that *p,* then S knows that *q* .

The crucial aspect of this principle to note (Pritchard, forthcoming b, 14) is that it involves an agent *forming a belief* on the basis of the relevant competent deduction; the idea behind Closure is in fact that an agent can came to acquire new knowledge

via the competent deduction where this means that the belief in question is based on that deduction. Accordingly, if we cannot rule out a skeptical scenario such as the BIV one, we would be unable to know Moore's 'obvious truisms of the commonsense' such as 'I have a body' or 'There are external object' and thus, given Closure, we would be unable to know anything at all.

But our most basic certainties are not beliefs; rather, they are the expression of *a-rational, non-propositional commitments*. Thus, the skeptic is somewhat right in saying that we do not know Moore's 'obvious truisms of the commonsense'; but this will not lead to skeptical conclusions, for our 'hinge commitments' are not beliefs so they cannot be objects of knowledge. Therefore, the skeptical challenge is misguided in the first place.

Pritchard's account is concerned first and foremost with the *psychology* of our inquiries, and not with the epistemic status of the 'hinges'; thus, his reflections on the structure of reason are just meant to stress the local nature of our epistemic practices, for which we have to rule out general doubts such as the skeptical one. But even if, following his strategy, we will be able to retain our knowledge of 'mundane' propositions, the skeptic will still be able to undermine our confidence in the *rationality* of our ways of inquiry; under the skeptical scrutiny, we will be forced to admit that all our practices rest on unsupported, ungrounded *a-rational* presuppositions that are not, and crucially cannot be, rationally grounded.

Still, Pritchard's insight about the non-propositional nature of our basic certainties, which make them different from ordinary beliefs, is pivotal in order to understand Wittgenstein-anti-skeptical remarks and more generally to develop a compelling rebuttal of Cartesian-style skepticism. I will come back to this point in more detail in Chapter 6, while discussing the epistemic status of the 'hinges'.

4.5 THE FRAMEWORK READING

Before concluding this chapter I will consider a more promising interpretation of Wittgenstein's thought, namely McGinn's 'framework reading' of OC (1989).

This proposal stems from the passages in which Wittgenstein highlights the analogy between Moore's 'obvious truisms of the commonsense' and basic mathematical truths:

> But why am I so certain that this is my hand? Doesn't the whole language-game rest on this kind of certainty? Or: isn't this 'certainty' (already) presupposed in the language-game? […] Compare with this 12x12=144. Here too we don't say "perhaps". For, in so far as this proposition rests on our not miscounting or miscalculating and on our senses not deceiving us as we calculate, both propositions, the arithmetical one and the physical one, are on the same level. I want to say: The physical game is just as certain as the arithmetical. But this can be misunderstood. My remark is a logical and not a psychological one (OC 446- 447).

> I want to say: If one doesn't marvel at the fact that the propositions of arithmetic (e.g. the multiplication tables) are 'absolutely certain', then why should one be astonished that the proposition "This is my hand" is so equally? (OC 448).

According to McGinn, we should read Wittgenstein's remarks on 'hinges' in light of his views about mathematical and logical truths. In the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (henceforth TLP) Wittgenstein held what we might call an 'objectivist' account of logical and mathematical truths, for which they were a description of the *a priori* necessary structure of reality. In the later phase of his thinking Wittgenstein completely dismissed this view, suggesting instead that we should think of logical and mathematical truths as constituting a system of *techniques* originating and developed in the course of the practical life of human beings. What is important in these practices is not their truth or falsity but their technique-constituting role; so, the question about their truth or falsity simply cannot arise. Quoting Wittgenstein:

> The steps which are not brought into question are logical inferences. But the reason is not that they "certainly correspond to the truth-or sort-no, it is just this that is called "Thinking", "speaking", "inferring", "arguing". There is not any question at all here of some correspondence between what is said and

reality; rather is logic antecedent to any such correspondence; in the same sense, that is, as that in which the establishment of a method of measurement is antecedent to the correctness or incorrectness of a statement of length (RFM, I, 156).

That is to say, logical and mathematical truths define what 'to infer' and 'to calculate' is; accordingly, given their 'technique-constituting' role these propositions cannot be tested or doubted, for to accept and apply them is a constitutive part of our techniques of inferring and calculating.

If logical and mathematical propositions cannot be doubted, this is also the case for Moore's 'obvious truisms of the commonsense'. Even if they resemble empirical, contingent knowledge claims, all these 'commonsense certainties' play a peculiar role in our system of beliefs; namely, they are what McGinn's calls "judgment of the frame" (1989, 139).

As mathematical and logical propositions define and constitute our techniques of inferring and calculating, 'hinges' such as 'This is a hand', 'The world existed long before my birth' and 'I am an human being' would then define and constitute our techniques of empirical description. That is to say, Moore's 'obvious truisms of the commonsense' would show us how to use words: what 'A hand' is, what 'The world' is, what 'A human being' is and so on (1989, 142).

Both Moore and the skeptic misleadingly treat 'hinges' such as 'I have a body' or 'There are external objects' as empirical propositions, which can be known or believed on the basis of evidence. But Moore's 'obvious truisms' are *certain*, their certainty being a criterion of linguistic mastery; in order to be considered a full participant of our epistemic practices an agent must take Moore's 'obvious truism' for granted.

McGinn's strategy, and especially her insistence on the difference between propositional beliefs and Moore's 'commonsense certainties', is a more viable interpretation of Wittgenstein's thought; nevertheless, there are some serious objections that can be raised against the 'framework reading'. Firstly, as per McGinn to take 'hinges' for granted is a condition of possibility of our epistemic practices (1989, 116-120); still (Minar, 2005, 258), a skeptic can nonetheless argue that the indubitability of Moore's 'obvious truisms of the commonsense' is nothing but a fact about what we do. That is to say, 'hinges' such as 'I have a body' or 'There are

external objects' are presupposed by our ordinary linguistic exchanges and constitute what McGinn calls our 'framework judgments'; but once these 'obvious truisms' are brought into focus the skeptic will find that their not being up for questioning is simply what happens in normal circumstances. As we have already seen while presenting Conant's and Wright's readings of OC, the very fact that in our ordinary life we have to rule out skeptical hypotheses has no strength against Cartesian skepticism; again, what is at issue in the skeptical challenge is not the practical, but the epistemic rationality of setting aside skeptical concerns when we cannot rule out Cartesian-style scenarios.

Also, even if we agree with McGinn's that 'hinges' are indubitable for they constitute the precondition of our epistemic practices, her account is still compatible with the skeptical challenge. Just recall the feature of Cartesian-style arguments:

(S1) I do not know not-SH

(S2) If I do not know not-SH, then I do not know M

(SC) I do not know M

where SH can be a skeptical scenario such as the BIV one and M an 'hinge' such as "I have a body' or 'There are external objects'. In this argument, no doubt is employed; indeed, whether an agent is seriously doubting whether she has a body or not is completely irrelevant to the skeptical conclusion 'I do not know M'. Even if we assume that 'hinges' such as 'I have a body' or 'There are external objects' cannot be doubted, as to affirm them with certainty is a precondition of our linguistic mastery or of our epistemic practices, the main issue is that we *cannot know* whether we are victims of a skeptical scenario or not; thus, given Closure, our knowledge will still be impossible.

Finally, recall that, for McGinn, to preclude our techniques from questioning is "a reflection of our legitimate authority as accredited participants in the practice" (1989, 138). Accordingly, any question about the truth or falsity of an epistemic practice cannot arise; the very fact that a practice is accepted and used by a given epistemic community will guarantee its 'truthfulness'. Similar to Williams' proposal, the 'framework reading' would then license a form of epistemic relativism. Recall the 'Moore and the Wild tribe' case we have encountered in the previous section; as per

McGinn, Moore and the Wild tribe belong to communities committed to radically different practices, namely physics and oracles' divination. Following the 'framework reading' of OC, we will have no rational basis to solve their disagreement; both their positions would rest on pre-rational, still perfectly legitimate commitments, that is, the agreement of their respective communities.

To conclude, then, even if McGinn's 'framework reading' is a more promising interpretation of OC, its anti-skeptical strength is nonetheless flawed, and this account can also lead to unpalatable relativist consequences.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this Chapter, I have presented and discussed the dominant readings of Wittgenstein's OC in order to see whether they represent a plausible interpretation of Wittgenstein's epistemology and, more importantly, satisfactory anti-skeptical strategies. I have argued that none of them are able to face the Cartesian skeptical challenge and to offer a satisfactory interpretation of Wittgenstein's thought. Moreover, I have argued that an account of the structure of reason based on Wittgenstein's notion of 'hinges' can license a sort of epistemic relativism, whose consequences are not more reassuring than skepticism itself.

Despite their differences, all the 'Wittgenstein-inspired' strategies we have encountered so far share a common feature, namely, they are focused on particular aspects of Wittgenstein's thought. Wittgenstein's remarks on the misuse of the expression 'to know', his considerations about the peculiar epistemic status of 'hinges' and his reflections about the structure of reason are all important parts of his strategy; but once we isolate them from one another, we fail to appreciate how all these intuitions lead to a reconsideration of the hidden assumptions that make Cartesian skeptical arguments so *prima facie* compelling. Thus, we miss the powerful anti-skeptical insights we can draw from OC.

A similar dissatisfaction toward these interpretations informs a final and more compelling Wittgensteinian anti-skeptical solution, namely Moyal-Sharrock's 'non-epistemic' reading of OC, that I will present in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

CERTAINTY AND KNOWLEDGE

5.0 INTRODUCTION

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the dominant 'OC inspired' anti-skeptical positions are not plausible interpretations of Wittgenstein's thought or viable anti-sceptical positions either.

In this chapter, I present the 'non-epistemic' reading of OC that has been proposed by Moyal-Sharrock (2004, 2010)[20].

In Section 1, I defend Moyal-Sharrock's analogy between 'hinges' and the Wittgensteinian notion of 'rules of grammar'; I argue that her interpretation is the most plausible reconstruction of Wittgenstein's treatment of Moore's 'commonsense certainties'. In the second section, I introduce Moyal-Sharrock's notion of 'objective certainty' and its epistemological implications; finally, in Section 3 I discuss some problems that the 'non-epistemic' account has to face to be considered a fully satisfactory anti-skeptical strategy.

5.1 'HINGES' AND RULES OF GRAMMAR

As we have seen in the previous chapter, all the interpretation of OC are focused on particular aspects of Wittgenstein's thought, such as his remarks on Moore's misuse of the expressions 'to know' and 'to doubt', on the structure of reason and the peculiar epistemic status of 'hinges'. This is also because OC is composed of unpolished notes, which has led many commentators to consider it more as a

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[20] A first formulation of this 'non-epistemic' line can be found in Stroll (1994, 2004), which Moyal-Sharrock explicitly recognises as one of her main influences.

collection of loosely related remarks than as a systematic work with a thematic unity; with regard to this point, Michael Williams (2004) has recently argued that OC is structurally and thematically divided by two projects along the lines of Moore's focus in PEW and DCS. The first 60 entries would be concerned with Moore's PEW, that of Wittgenstein's would be plain nonsense (2004, 87); the rest of OC would then be focused on Moore's 'truisms of the commonsense', the 'hinges'.

To clarify this matter, recall Williams' 'Wittgensteinian contextualism' we encountered in Chapter 4. On his account, 'hinges' are 'methodological necessities', implicit commitments we take for granted whenever we are involved in an epistemic practice. For instance, in order to pursue historical inquiries we have to accept a hinge such as 'The earth existed long before my birth'; and this is not the result of credulity or dullness from our side, but a reflection of the context-dependent nature of our inquiries.

Williams motivates his view also on the basis of the extreme heterogeneity of the 'hinges'; as a matter of fact, throughout OC Wittgenstein enumerates a number of 'hinges' whose certainty is indexed to an individual (such as 'My name is Ludwig Wittgenstein'), to an historical period ('No man has ever been to the moon') or to a certain geographical/cultural context ('I speak German'). On Williams' view, then, this is a way to stress a basic feature of our inquiries, namely, that they all rest on unsupported presuppositions which can nevertheless be dismissed/abandoned where new questions arise or when we are switching from one context of inquiry to another.

Williams considers 'hinges' as at least potentially open to doubts on the basis of Wittgenstein's metaphor of the "river-bed" (OC 93-99), developed in the following entries where Wittgenstein considers 'hinges' as

> a kind of mythology [...] it might be imagined that some propositions, of the form of empirical propositions, were hardened and functioned as channels for such empirical propositions as were not hardened but fluid; and that this relation altered with time, in that fluid propositions hardened, and hard ones became fluid [....] The mythology may change back into a state of flux, the river bed of flux may shift.

As per Williams, these sections suggest that Moore's 'obvious truisms of the commonsense', and more generally the 'methodological necessities' presupposed by our epistemic practices, can *all* at least potentially be doubted and dismissed.

This is what happens with Cartesian-style skepticism: when skeptical hypotheses are in play it is legitimate to doubt methodological necessities that stand fast for us in ordinary epistemic contexts.

Thus, a proponent of Cartesian skepticism can still show that our knowledge is impossible but only "*under the conditions of philosophical reflection*" (Williams, 1991, 130); outside the philosophical context we can know 'methodological necessities' such as 'I have a body' or 'The Earth existed long before my birth'.

However, while methodological necessities such as Moore's 'obvious truisms' are opened to doubt, things are somewhat different with the conclusion of PEW, namely 'There are external objects'. As Williams writes with regard to this point:

> We learn to think by learning to talk; and we learn to talk by being trained to make particular judgments about things around us. It is therefore inconceivable that there should be discursive beings who had not mastered 'physical object" talk (2004, 87).

Thus, while 'methodological necessities' are open to doubt, 'There are external objects' is obviously not, for 'There are physical objects' cannot be tested or doubted. The very fact that we think, we talk and we make judgments about the world shows that 'There are physical objects'; therefore, any attempt to prove or doubt this statement would be plain nonsense.

On the other hand, on Williams' reading, while considering the 'obvious truisms of the commonsense' Wittgenstein is only stressing that they are ordinarily out of doubt, for to take them for granted is a condition of possibility of our everyday knowledge-claims.

Moyal-Sharrock (2004, 2010) has persuasively rejected Williams' interpretation of OC in a number of influential works. A first line of criticism toward William's 'Wittgensteinian contextualism' goes as follows. Williams motivates his division in order to make sense of Wittgenstein's saying that 'There are physical objects' is *nonsense*; but, (Moyal-Sharrock, 2004, 91-92), Wittgenstein does not

necessarily use the term *nonsense* in a derogatory way. Consider this passage of the *Philosophical Grammar* (Wittgenstein, 1974, henceforth PG):

> [...] when we hear the two propositions, 'This rod has a length' and its negation 'This rod has no length', we take sides and favor the first sentence, instead of declaring them both nonsense. But this partiality is based on a confusion; we regard the first proposition as verified (and the second as falsified) by the fact 'that rod has a length of 4 meters (PG 129, quoted in Moyal-Sharrock, 2004, 90).

In this entry, and more generally throughout the second phase of his thought, Wittgenstein used the term nonsense as a *technical term* to define not only what violates sense but also what defines or elucidates it; thus, Moyal-Sharrock argues, Wittgenstein considers 'There are physical objects' as nonsense for it has a *regulative* and not a descriptive role. Quoting Wittgenstein:

> 'A is a physical object is a piece of instruction which we give only to someone who doesn't yet understand either what 'A' means or what "physical object" means. Thus it is instruction about the use of words, and 'physical object' is *a logical concept*. (Like color, quantity...). And that is why no such proposition as "There are physical objects" can be formulated. Yet we encounter such unsuccessful shots at every turn (OC 36, my italics).

> So one might grant that Moore was right, if he is interpreted like this: a proposition saying that here is a physical object may have the same logical status as one saying that here is a red patch (OC 53).

> Now might not 'I *know*, I am not surmising, that here is my hand' be conceived of as a proposition of grammar? Hence *not* temporally. But in that case isn't it like *this* one: 'I know, I am not just surmising that I am seeing red'? And isn't the consequence 'So there are physical objects' like: 'So there are colors? (OC 57).

> If 'I know etc" is conceived as a grammatical proposition, of course the 'I' cannot be important. And it properly means 'There is no such thing as a doubt in this case'. And of course it follows from this that 'I know' makes no sense either (OC 58).

> 'I know' is here a *logical* insight. Only realism can't be proved by means of it (OC 59).

That is, though it resembles an empirical proposition, 'There are external objects' is a norm of representation, for it draws a line between sense and nonsense rather than between truth and falsity. And this is true not only for the conclusion of PEW, but also for the 'obvious truisms of the commonsense' listed by Moore:

> There exists at present a living human body, which is my body. This body was born at a certain time in the past, and has existed continuously ever since, though not without undergoing changes; it was, for instance, much smaller when it was born, and for some time afterwards, than it is now. Ever since it was born, it has been either in contact with or not far from the surface of the earth; and, at every moment since it was born, there have also existed many other things, having shape and size in three dimensions […] from which it has been at various distances…(1925, 33).

What all these statements have in common is that they refer to the empirical world (physical objects, events, interactions) and so they look like empirical propositions. But differently from empirical claims they are *unquestionable, indubitable and nonhypothetical* (Moyal-Sharrock, 2004, 85), statements that cannot be confirmed or falsified by experience; and as Wittgenstein states in his *Cambridge Lectures* (1980, 16, quoted in Moyal-Sharrock, 2004, 92) "a statement which no experience will refute" is a 'rule of grammar':

> […] The proposition describing this world-picture might be a part of a kind of mythology. And their role is like that of *rules of a game* (OC 95, my

italics).When Moore says he *knows* such and such, he is really enumerating a lot of empirical propositions which we affirm without special testing; propositions, that is, which have a peculiar logic role in the system of our empirical propositions (OC 136).

Thus, even if they have the *form* of empirical propositions Moore's 'obvious truisms' play a more basic, peculiar role in the system of our empirical beliefs; namely, they are all 'rules of grammar'. In light of these remarks, Moyal-Sharrock proposes the following taxonomy (2004, 101-155) of 'hinges': Personal hinges, Local hinges, Linguistic hinges and Universal hinges.

Personal hinges are statements such as "I live in such and such a city", "I live in such and such a place", "I am in England", "I have never been in Asia Minor" etc. (OC 67, 70, 552-3, 421, 269, 419, 111, 659, 613). All these and similar ones are hinges as they regard basic facts about our life we cannot be mistaken about. Error, doubts or uncertainties in the case of our autobiographical 'hinges'[21] would be more likely the result of abnormal circumstances (i.e. amnesia or madness) than mistakes; indeed, argues Wittgenstein, in the case of these kinds of statements a mistake is 'logically impossible'. As he writes in the following remarks:

> I cannot possibly doubt that I was never in the stratosphere (OC 222).

> If I were to say 'I have never been on the moon-but I may be mistaken', that would be idiotic (OC 662).

That is, in the cases of our most basic autobiographical beliefs we seem to have a kind of certainty that would be at the same time superfluous and difficult to support with evidence; also, in these cases we cannot seriously conceive of doubts or mistakes.

Linguistic hinges, on the other hand, are statements such as "2+2= 4", "What the color of human blood is called", "What is called a slab/a pillar", "Which color is meant by the word blue", "This color is called blue/green (in English)", "The words composing this sentence are English", "A is a physical object" (OC 455, 340, 565,

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21 Here, I am following only part of Moyal-Sharrock reconstruction; an important part of her work on the 'personal hinges' is devoted to an analysis of what she names 'perceptual hinges' and to a number of issues in philosophy of perception that would be impossible to summarise here. See Moyal-Sharrock, 2004, 124-135.

545, 126, 624, 158, 36). These 'hinges' are grammatical rules *sensu strictu*, as they precisely define our use of individual words and of numbers.

Moyal-Sharrock calls 'local hinges' statements such as "There is an island, Australia", "No one was ever on the moon", "The earth is round", "Trains normally arrive in a railway station" (OC 159, 106, 291, 339). These 'hinges' constitute the framework of knowledge of all or only some human beings at a given time, what Wittgenstein calls 'the river-bed' or 'the mythology' which forms the background of our inquiries.

Finally, Universal hinges are statements such as "The earth exists", "There are physical objects", "Things don't systematically disappear when we're not looking", "If someone's head is cut off, the person will be dead and not live again", "Trees do not gradually change into men and men into trees", "I have a brain", "I am a human being", "I have forbears" (OC 209, 35-36, 234, 274, 513, 159, 4, 234), along with the 'obvious truisms of the commonsense' listed by Moore in DCS. All these 'hinges' delimit the universal bounds of sense of all human beings and they cannot be abandoned, as this will destroy our whole system of beliefs (Moyal-Sharrock, 2004, 149). Wittgenstein stresses this point in many entries of OC, as in the following remarks where he writes:

> It is quite sure that motorcars don't grow out of earth. We feel that if someone could believe the contrary he could believe *everything* that we say is untrue, and could question everything that we hold to be sure […] someone who could not believe that does not accept our whole system of verification (OC 279).

As per Moyal-Sharrock (2004, 74), these passages suggest that for Wittgenstein it would be *logically* impossible both to doubt and be wrong about a 'hinge', for to withdrawn these beliefs would put us outside the ken of normal *human understanding*. Quoting Wittgenstein:

> Suppose a man could not remember whether he had always had five fingers or two-hands? Should we understand him? Could we be sure of understanding him? (OC 157)

If I now say 'I know that the water in the kettle on the gas-flame will not freeze but boil' I seem to be as justified in this 'I know' as I am in *any*. 'If I know anything I know this'. Or do I know with still *greater* certainty that the person opposite me is my old friend so-and so? And how does that compare with the proposition that I am seeing with two *eyes* and shall see them if I look in the glass? -I don't know confidently what I am to answer here. But still there is a difference between the cases. If the water over the gas freezes, of course I shall be as astonished as I can be, but I shall assume some factor I don't know of, and perhaps leave the matter to physicists to judge. But what could make me doubt whether this person here is N.N., whom I have known for years? *Here a doubt would seem to drag everything with it and pludge it into chaos* (OC 613, my italics).

Thus, for Moyal-Sharrock the indubitability of the 'hinges' is not contextual, as in Williams' 'Wittgensteinian contextualism', but *conceptual* (2010); once we doubt an 'obvious truism' such as 'I have a body', we are not simply switching from the ordinary context into the philosophical one. Rather, we are departing from our human bounds of sense into complete nonsense.

5.2 OBJECTIVE CERTAINTY VS KNOWLEDGE

Despite their differences, then, for Moyal-Sharrock all 'hinges' share a common feature; namely, they are all *rules of grammar* which underpin our 'language-games'. This is why, she argues, Wittgenstein considers Moore's knowledge claims in both DCS and PEW as misleading if not completely wrong; for differently from empirical beliefs, 'hinges' cannot be known. To clarify this matter, consider the following entry:

And now if I were to say "It is my unshakeable conviction that etc", this means in the present case too that *I have not consciously arrived at the conviction by following a particular line of thought* [my italics], but that it is anchored in all my questions and answers, so anchored that I cannot touch it (OC 103).

As per Moyal-Sharrock this entry highlights the peculiarity of our relationship with 'hinges'. Our taking them for granted is not based on justification or grounds; for instance, "I cannot say that I have good grounds for the opinion that cats do not grow on trees or that I had a father and a mother" (OC 282). That is, we hold these beliefs unreflectively, and they are at odds with ordinary knowledge-claims as they are not the result of any inquiry and they cannot be supported by any kind of evidence.

Still, our lack of grounds for holding 'hinges' does not entail the dramatic conclusions of the Cartesian skeptic, for our relationship with Moore's 'commonsense certainties' is based on training, instinct, repeated exposure (Moyal-Sharrock, 2010, 9); that is, hinges are the result of pre-rational, still perfectly legitimate commitments and are the expression of what Moyal-Sharrock (2004, 2010) calls "objective certainty" (2004, 15-17). A concept that she sees as constitutively different from knowledge; knowledge-claims, in fact, require grounds and/or justifications, are opened to doubt and can be verified or disconfirmed by evidence. To the contrary, our confidence in the hinges "...lie[s] beyond being justified and unjustified; as it were, as something animal." (OC 359).

As per Moyal-Sharrock, our relationship with the 'hinges' is not epistemic or rational at all (hence 'non-epistemic reading'); following her notion of objective certainty our confidence in the hinges should be seen as kind of *doxastic attitude*, both as a *disposition* and an *occurrence* (2004, 54-56). Quoting Wittgenstein:

> It is just like directly taking-hold of something, as I take hold of my towel without having doubts (OC 510).

> And yet this direct taking-hold corresponds to sureness, not to a knowing (OC 511).

On Moyal-Sharrock's reading, these remarks suggest that our 'objective certainty' is "akin to instinctive or automatic behavior: to a direct taking hold or thought-less grasp" (2004, 62). That is to say, this certainty is a disposition of absolute, animal confidence that is not the result of reasoning, observation or research but it is rather a basic attitude of unreasoned, unconscious trust that shows itself in our everyday experience.

Thus, 'hinges' are the rules that underpin our 'language-games'. They can be instinctive (e.g. 'I have a body'; 'There are external objects') or acquired *via* training or repeated exposure (e. g 'If someone's head is cut off, the person will be dead and not live again'; 'Human beings have various innards'); in any case, they define and describe 'the inherited background against which [we] distinguish between true and false' (OC 94).

Here, Moyal-Sharrock draws on John Searle's thesis of the Background (1983, 2010), for which

> […] linguistic meaning in particular and all intentionality in general only function given a Background of abilities, capacities, tendencies, dispositions and other causal structures that do not themselves consist of meaning or other intentional phenomena. In order to work with such things as sentences, beliefs and desires you have to have a set of abilities that do not themselves consist entirely in more sentences, beliefs and desires (2010, 8).

To understand this point, take the following sentence[22]: 'I am in Edinburgh writing my doctoral dissertation'. In order to understand this sentence as we do, we have to believe a large number of things; for instance, that Edinburgh is located in Scotland and that Scotland is part of the United Kingdom; that dissertations are documents submitted in support of candidature for a degree, and so on. Searle calls this network of beliefs, which enable us to make sense of any particular sentence or belief, 'the Network'. Still, this network is not enough to account for the functioning of sentences and intentional states; the whole network of our beliefs can only function given a Background of things we take for granted. Among them, there are Moore's 'obvious truisms of the commonsense' such as 'I have a body', 'The earth existed long before my birth', 'There are external objects' etc; to believe the negation of one of these statements will make the same meaning of a phrase like 'I am in Edinburgh writing my doctoral dissertation' different if not unintelligible.

Moreover, as per Searle, the Background is made not only of beliefs and assumptions but also of practices, dispositions, ways of behaving and know-how. Thus, Searle's Background consists of

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[22] This is a slightly adapted example given in Searle, 2010.

[…] mental capacities, dispositions, stances, ways of behaving, know-how, savoir fare etc, all of which can only be manifest when there are some intentional phenomena, such as an intentional action, a perception, a thought, etc (1992, 196).

As per Moyal-Sharrock, these '*Background ways of behaving* (Searle, 1992, 77), are the occurrent version of our objective certainty; that is to say, our background of abilities is a set of dispositions that can only actualise themselves into outright know-how. Take our certainty of the fact that tables offer resistance to touch (Searle, 1983, 142): in this case, we would not say that we just *believe* that tables offer resistance to touch, which on Searle's view would imply a *theoretical* or *intentional* attitude. Rather, our certainty can be better described as a *stance* or a *disposition* that we have towards tables and other solid objects; that is, I expect tables to remain solid when I touch them, and not, for instance, to vanish or become humans. And this instinctive, non-reflective stance or disposition can only manifest itself in our *way of acting*, thus in an expert *know-how*. In other words, our 'knowledge' of statements such as 'Tables are solid objects' can be expressed only by our *actions*; we know how to sit on tables and how to write on them, we handle tables as solid, unthinking objects and so forth. Thus, our certainty of the fact that 'Tables are solid objects' can manifest itself only in our practical interacting with tables; an interaction that is at the same time *expert* and *thoughtless*.

As per Moyal-Sharrock, this 'thoughtless and expert' confidence characterises our relationship with the 'hinges'. That is to say, our confidence in Moore's 'obvious truisms of the commonsense' such as 'There are external objects' or 'I have a body' is not a theoretical or presuppositional certainty but a *practical* certainty that can express itself *only as a way of acting* (OC 7, 395). More generally, the objective certainties of 'hinges' can only be expressed by our actions: for instance, a 'hinge' such 'I have a body' is disposition of a living creature which manifests itself in *her acting in the certainty of having a body* (Moyal-Sharrock, 2004, 67), and manifests herself in her acting embodied (walking, eating, not attempting to walk through walls etc).

5.3 NON-EPISTEMIC READING AND CARTESIAN SKEPTICISM

Following Moyal-Sharrock's account of Wittgenstein's strategy, Cartesian-style skepticism is the result of a *Categorial Mistake*[23]. That is, Cartesian skeptical arguments, even if *prima facie* compelling, rest on a misleading assumption: the skeptic is simply treating 'hinges' as empirical, propositional knowledge-claims while on the contrary they express a pre-theoretical animal certainty, which is not subject to epistemic evaluation of any sort.

Due to this Categorical Mistake, a proponent of Cartesian Skepticism conflates *physical* and *logical possibility* (2004, 170). That is to say, skeptical scenarios such as the BIV one are *logically possible*, but just in the sense that they are *conceivable*; in other words, we can imagine skeptical scenarios, then run our skeptical arguments and thus conclude that our knowledge is impossible. Still, skeptical hypotheses are nothing but *fictional* scenarios; and once we conflate the logical possibility with the human possibility of being a BIV, then we are making a categorical mistake. As Moyal-Sharrock writes:

> The sentence 'I have a body' is a falsifiable proposition in a fictional context (e.g. a tale in which some of the fictional character are said to have bodies and others are not); in our human world, it is a non-falsifiable bound of sense. There is no *meaningful* description of my possibility not having a body *in this, our human world*. To seriously assert this as possible in our world is to have transgressed the bounds of sense into nonsense, indeed into madness […] To introduce doubt in the form of a fictional proposition does nothing to unsettle a hinge. Where skeptics believe they are negating or destabilizing our certainty they have not even addressed it. [Skeptical scenarios] *look* more like sense; and all the more, because in some [fictional] contexts, [they seem to] *make sense* (2004, 170-171).

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23 See OC 308: 'Knowledge' and 'Certainty' belong to different *categories*. They are not two 'mental states' like; say 'surmising' and 'being sure'. (Here I assume that it is meaningful for me to say "I know what (e.g.) the word "doubt" means and that this sentence indicates that the word "doubt" has a logical role.) What interests us now is not being sure but knowledge. That is, we are interested in the fact that about certain empirical propositions no doubt can exist if making judgments is to be possible at all. Or again: I am inclined to believe that not everything that has the form of an empirical proposition *is* one.

That is to say, Cartesian skeptical scenarios depict a fictional possibility, not a human one. As long as we take them as fictional scenarios they make sense; but their apparent intelligibility conflates with human possibility. For instance, the BIV hypothesis is a scenario, but is just a fictional one that cannot be applied to 'our human form of life'; in the world as we know it we cannot even sensibly conceive the existence of bodiless brains connected to supercomputers, or the existence of Evil Deceivers that systematically deceive us and so forth (2004,178). Thus, the strength of Cartesian-style skepticism is, so to say, only apparent; and once we take skeptical hypotheses as mere 'philosophical fiction', we should simply dismiss skeptical worries, for a fictional scenario such as the BIV one does not and cannot have any consequence whatsoever on our epistemic practices or more generally on our 'human form of life'.

Thus, the skeptical challenge is not a sensible or legitimate doubt but rather an 'idle mouthing of words' (2004, 174). The mere hypothesis that we might be disembodied brains in the vat has no strength against the objective certainty of 'hinges' such as 'There are external objects' or 'I have a body', as merely thinking that 'human beings can fly unaided' has no strength against the fact that human beings cannot fly without help.

This is also because the certainty of 'universal hinges' can only manifest itself, as we have seen above, *in the way we act* and in what we do; that is, for instance, in our acting embodied, in our interacting with material objects and so on. Accordingly, a consistent denial of Moore's 'obvious truisms of the commonsense' can only manifest itself in the way an agent acts and in what she does. But in these cases we will not consider her actions the result of a theoretical stance, or a false belief that can be pointed out and corrected; for her actions would be more likely to be the result of a mental condition. As Wittgenstein writes:

> If Moore were to pronounce the opposite of those propositions which he regards as certain, we should just not share his opinion; we should regard him as demented (OC 155).

Following D.Z. Phillips (1996), Moyal-Sharrock compares Cartesian skeptical doubts to neurotic ones. In both cases, the agents in question doubt in absence of any reason; the only difference is that in the case of the philosopher the doubt is not accompanied by the kind of behaviour that gives to practical and neurotic doubts their sense. Thus, the Cartesian skeptical doubt is not a doubt at all, but at most a 'doubt-behaviour'[24]. Therefore, skeptical beliefs such as 'I might be a disembodied BIV' or 'I might be the victim of an Evil Deceiver' are nothing but belief-behaviour (2004, 176) and the conclusion we can draw from them, namely that our knowledge is impossible, should be regarded as fiction and not as a possibility (ibid):

> Indeed, in what circumstances could I be said to find out *from the evidence of my senses* that 'I have a body'? Perhaps in the extreme case of my losing both proprioception and eyesight, and then recovering one or both. But we need not resort to such extreme cases to find propositional *doppelgänger* for *universal* hinges: they are readily available in the form of fictional propositions. In *fictional* contexts, individuals can be imagined who, like 'The Invisible Man' in the defunct television series, have *no* body. The Invisible Man could drink a potion which would give him a body; and he would then exclaim, in empirical amazement: 'I have a body!' […]Indeed, we can *imagine* circumstances where that sentence would make sense: say, a fictional situation in which Martians and Earthlings cohabited a planet, but there was no telltale way of distinguishing their provenance and they were themselves unaware of it. An individual would have to consult the planet's archives to find out her origin. So that upon being asked if she knew what species she belonged to, an Earthling would reply: 'I know that I am a human being (I've consulted the archives)'. There *are* contexts then, for the most part: *fictional* contexts, where the *doppelgänger* of a *universal* hinge constitutes a falsifiable proposition. But the negation of a fictional proposition does not entail the negation of any of its

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[24] See OC 255 "Doubting has certain characteristic manifestations, but they are only characteristic of it in particular circumstances. If someone said that he doubted the existence of his hands, kept looking at them from all sides, tried to make sure it wasn't 'all done by mirrors', etc., we should not be sure whether we ought to call this doubting. *We might describe his way of behaving as like the behaviour of doubt, but this game would be not be ours* (my italics)".

doppelgänger. 'I do not know whether I am a human being' pronounced in ordinary circumstances is nonsense. It is not nonsense when pronounced in a fictional context. *The problem is that philosophers illegitimately transfer the meaningfulness inherent in the fictional situation to real-life situations* (ibid, 169-170, my italics).

Following the 'non-epistemic reading', then, Wittgenstein would dismiss Cartesian-style skepticism as the result of a Categorial mistake, based on a confusion between imagined and human/logical possibility. Differently from Williams, then, according to Moyal-Sharrock hinge certainties such as 'There are external objects' and 'I have a body' can *never* be questioned, for they are *conceptually*, not contextually, indubitable (2004, 161), whereas the empirical *doppelganger* of a hinge (i.e. a sentence made up of the same words as a hinge, but which does not *function* as a hinge) can be doubted. So in ordinary and philosophical contexts 'hinges' can't be doubted; but the same sentence used as an empirical proposition in a sci-fi novel can be.

This part of the 'non-epistemic reading' seems weak for a number of reasons. If, from one side, Moyal-Sharrock rejects a contextualist reading of OC, she nonetheless seems to grant that the certainty of 'hinges' stems from their function in a given context, to the extent that they can be sensibly questioned and doubted in fictional scenarios where they can 'play the role' of empirical propositions. But crucially, if 'hinges' are 'objectively certainty' because of their role in our ordinary life, a skeptic can still argue that in the context of philosophical inquiry Moore's 'commonsense certainties' play a role which, similar to the role they play in fictional scenarios, is both at odds with our 'human form of life' and still meaningful and legitimate.

Moreover, despite Moyal-Sharrock's insistence on the conceptual, logical indubitability of Moore's 'truisms of the commonsense', her rendering of Wittgenstein's strategy seems to resemble Conant's and Wright's proposals, thus incurring the objections I have already raised against these readings. As I have already argued throughout this work, to simply state that Cartesian skepticism has no consequence on our 'human form of life' sounds like too much of a pragmatist response against the skeptical challenge. This is so because a skeptic can well agree

that skeptical hypotheses have no consequence on our everyday practices or that they are just fictional scenarios; also, she can surely grant that Cartesian-style arguments cannot undermine the pre-rational confidence with which we ordinarily take for granted Moore's 'obvious truisms of the commonsense'. But crucially, and as Wittgenstein was well aware, a skeptic can always argue that she is not concerned with a practical doubt (OC 19) but with a, so to say, purely philosophical one.

Also and more importantly, even if we agree with Moyal-Sharrock on the 'nonsensical' nature of skeptical doubts, this has nonetheless no strength against Cartesian style skepticism. Recall the feature of Cartesian skeptical arguments; take a skeptical hypothesis SH such as the BIV one and M a mundane proposition such as 'This is a hand'. Now, given the Closure principle, the argument goes as follows:

(S1) I do not know not-SH
(S2) If I do not know not-SH, then I do not know M
Therefore
(SC) I do not know M

In this argument, no 'doubt' is employed, indeed whether an agent is seriously doubting if she has a body or not is completely irrelevant to the skeptical conclusion 'I do not know M'. Also, a proponent of Cartesian-style skepticism can surely grant that we are not BIV, or that we are not constantly deceived by an Evil Genius and so on. Still, the main issue is that *we cannot know* whether we are victim of a skeptical scenario or not; thus, given Closure, we would be unable to know anything at all.

Moyal-Sharrock does not explicitly discuss this issue, but her 'non-epistemic' reading so construed seems to leave us with two options, neither of which is particularly appealing .

If we stress the 'non-epistemic' nature of 'hinges' while claiming that Cartesian skeptical hypotheses have no strength whatsoever against our knowledge claims, we will be forced to reject a very intuitive principle such as Closure , thus inheriting all the problems of the Dretske-Nozick line of argument that I mentioned in Chapter 1.

If, on the other hand, we do not want to reject Closure, it is hard to see how the 'non-epistemic' reading can help us to solve the skeptical problem. For the

conclusion we can draw from this proposal is that Cartesian skepticism is unlivable and at odds with our everyday experience; but still, given Closure and the fact that we cannot know the denials of skeptical scenarios, it would be impossible to escape skeptical conclusions.

Another problem for Moyal-Sharrock's 'non-epistemic reading' is related to her account of 'Local Hinges'. As we have seen *supra*, according to Moyal Sharrock while 'hinges' such as 'There are external objects' or ' I have a body' are objectively certain for any rational human being, other 'hinge certainties ("There is an island, Australia", "No one was ever on the moon", "The earth is round", "Trains normally arrive in a railway station") have a social or cultural origin and constitute the framework of knowledge of only some human group at a given time, what Wittgenstein calls 'the river-bed' or the mythology' which forms the background of our inquiries . With this point in mind, recall the 'Moore and the Wild tribe case' we already encountered in Chapter 4. In this scenario, Moore is captured by a wild Tribe; the former believes in the, so to say, scientific view of the world, while the tribesmen consult oracles and hold several odd beliefs about the world (for instance, they believe that men can go to the Moon while sleeping). Thus, even if both Moore and the Tribe must take for granted 'Universal Hinges' such as 'There are external objects' and 'I have a body' (which would at least prevent disagreements on these 'basic certainties') they are nonetheless committed to different 'Local Hinges'; Moore considers scientific knowledge as a telling reason while the tribesmen do not.

But crucially, following the 'non-epistemic reading, 'Local Hinges' are objectively certain; accordingly, as objective certainty is the result of pre-theoretical commitments such as training and repeated exposure, we would have no rational basis to solve the epistemic disagreement between Moore and the tribe and more generally between communities with different 'Local Hinges'. Every epistemic community could legitimately hold its own 'Local Hinges', which following Moyal-Sharrock's account are not opened to doubt and or verification; thus, similar to Williams' 'Wittgensteinian contextualism' and 'McGinn's 'framework reading', this proposal would license a form of epistemic relativism within which it would be impossible to solve disagreement between epistemic agents with radically different worldviews. A conclusion that, as I have already argued, is not more palatable or reassuring than skepticism itself.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Even if more promising than the other 'OC inspired' anti-skeptical proposals I have considered so far, it seems that, nonetheless, the 'non-epistemic reading' cannot represent a satisfactory anti-skeptical strategy. Moreover, in this chapter I have argued that, similar to Williams' 'Wittgensteinian contextualism' and McGinn's 'framework reading', Moyal-Sharrock's account can lead to unbearable relativistic conclusions.

Nevertheless, there are many promising insights we can draw from Moyal-Sharrock's interpretation of Wittgenstein's thought and especially from the analogy between 'hinges' and 'rules of grammar', which I consider in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6

WITTGENSTEINIAN EPISTEMOLOGY AND CARTESIAN SKEPTICISM

6.0 INTRODUCTION

As we have seen in the previous chapter, even if Moyal-Sharrock's analogy between 'hinges' and 'rules of grammar' is the most plausible interpretation of Wittgenstein's anti-skeptical thought, her account of objective certainty as opposed to knowledge presents too many weaknesses in order to be considered a fully viable anti-skeptical strategy.

In the first section of this chapter, I sketch Wittgenstein's conception of 'rules of grammar' and their status, which make them at odds with empirical propositional beliefs. Then, in Section 2, I argue that 'hinges' draw the boundaries of the practice called 'rational epistemic agency', while in the following section I show that the analogy between 'rules of grammar' and 'hinges' can help us dismiss both Cartesian Skepticism and Moore's anti-skeptical attempts as the result of a *logical error*. Finally, in the forth section I highlight some of the worries that can be raised against Wittgenstein's conception of the structure of reason.

6.1 RULES OF GRAMMAR

Very generally, in the second phase of his thought Wittgenstein calls rules of grammar 'the conditions, the method necessary for comparing a proposition with reality' (PG, 88). Thus, for Wittgenstein, everything that determines the sense of an expression belongs to its 'grammar', which also specifies the licit combinatorial possibilities of an expression (for instance, which combinations make sense and which don't, which are allowed and which are not allowed', cfr. Hacker and Baker, 2005, 146).To understand this point, consider the following statements:

i)   What is red must be coloured

ii)   Nothing can be red and green all over

iii)   All bachelors are unmarried

iv)   A proposition is either true or false

v)   12 x 12 = 144

Despite their differences, all these share a number of significant common features. Firstly, they are all normative as they delimit what it makes sense *to say*, for instance licensing and prohibiting inferences. Just consider i): if p is called red is correctly characterised as 'coloured', to say that it is red and to deny that it is coloured would be a *misuse of language*, that is a move excluded from a language-game. Similarly ii), even if it looks as if it is a description of the physics of colour, is in fact a rule that we use to exclude the description of an object as being red and green all over. iii): apparently an empirical description, is not meant to make a true statement of fact about bachelors but rather to explain the meaning of the word 'bachelor'. iv) looks like a description, a generalisation about propositions in the same way that the statement 'All lions are carnivorous' is a generalisation about lions. However, things are somewhat different for we use iv) to define what may be correctly called 'a proposition' in logical reasoning; also, it does not exclude a third possibility but rather *excludes as meaningless* the phrase 'a proposition which is neither true nor false'[25].

Finally[26], central to Wittgenstein's philosophy of mathematics is the view that mathematically necessary truths are not descriptive but normative; for instance, v) licenses and prohibits inferences, in the sense that it licenses transformations of empirical statements and at the same time excludes other inferences as invalid. Following v)[27], we can legitimately transform the statement: 'There were 12 books each on 12 shelves in the bookshop' into 'There were 144 books in the bookshop';

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[25] According to the proponents of 'many-valued logic' such as Weber and Colyan (2010), statements of the form 'a proposition which is neither true nor false' are 'borderline cases', whose truth value lies between 0(full falsehood) and 1(full truth); thus, they would not be mere senseless combinations of signs as in Wittgenstein's account. Even if this approach has been extremely useful in order to treat a number of philosophical issues such as 'the vagueness problems', this view is still far from uncontroversial and has originated a huge debate that would be impossible to summarise here. For an up to date discussion on multi-valued logic and the 'vagueness problem', see Sorensen, 2012.

[26] In the following, I will just sketch some uncontroversial aspects of Wittgenstein's philosophy of mathematics, in order to cast more light on his conception of ''rules of grammar''. A detailed reconstruction of Wittgenstein's views on the matter and of the debate they originated would fall beyond the scope of this work.

[27] This is a slightly modified example used by Hacker and Baker, 1985, 269.

also, v) excludes as illegitimate, 'There were 12 books each on 12 shelves, so there were 1212 books in the bookshop' (an inference which is also excluded by the true inequation $12 \times 12 \neq 1212$).

A second feature of Wittgenstein's 'rules of grammar' is that they cannot be confirmed or disconfirmed by reality; rather, they determine *what counts as a possible description of reality*. That is to say, statements like i) and ii) cannot be confirmed by empirical evidence, but are rather presupposed by any 'language game' with colour words; also, these grammatical rules cannot possibly be disconfirmed by reality, say by the existence of a 'colourless red object' or of 'something that is red and green all over'. Likewise, we could not verify that iii) by, for instance investigating the marital status of people identified as bachelors, and no 'married bachelor' could possibly disconfirm iii).

Similarly, even if we do perfectly well speak of half truths, or rough or approximate truths or of something being partly true or partly false, this does not affect iv) in any way for the objects of such assertions are not cut to the pattern required for logical inference and thus cannot be considered propositions; therefore, these assertions cannot confirm or disconfirm iv) (Hacker and Baker, 1985, 265).

Finally, even if we can imagine a different arithmetic in which v) can turn out to be wrong and v*) $12 \times 12 = 1212$ is correct, this would not disconfirm v), for this v*) would simply not belong to the practice we call 'arithmetic'.

A third and important feature of Wittgenstein's 'rules of grammar' is that they are not propositions, namely they cannot be either true or false; for their 'negation' is not false but *senseless*. Just consider the following sentences:

i*) p is red and is not coloured

ii*) p is red and green all over

iii*) Some bachelors are married

iv*) a proposition is neither true nor false

v*) $12 \times 12 = 1212$

All these are nothing but *nonsensical*, even if intelligible, combinations of signs[28]. If this is obvious for the putative statements from i*) to iv*), as per Wittgenstein even

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[28] It is worth noting that Wittgenstein considers 'senseless' every combination of signs excluded from a

an 'equation' such as v*) is *senseless* rather than simply false. As he argued in one of his lectures:

> The application of a mathematical sentence occurring in our language is not to show us what is true or false but what is sense and what is nonsense. This holds for all mathematics- arithmetic, geometry, etc. For example, there are mathematical propositions about ellipses which show that 'I cut the elliptical cake in 8 equal parts' does not make sense. And there are mathematical propositions about circles which show that it does make sense to say "I cut the circular cake in 8 equal parts'. The terms 'sense' and 'nonsense', rather than the terms 'true' and 'false', bring out the relation of mathematical propositions to non-mathematical propositions (AWL 152)[29].

Thus, the difference between 'rules of grammar' and their negations is not similar to the difference between true and false statements, *but between a rule of expression and a use of words or symbols which that rule excludes as nonsensical.*

6.2 HINGES AND THE BOUNDARIES OF RATIONAL AGENCY

To sum up, Wittgenstein's 'rules of grammar' have three features which make them different from empirical beliefs. Firstly, they are not descriptive but *normative*; secondly, they cannot be confirmed or disconfirmed by reality but rather are *ways to make sense of reality*; finally, they are not propositions as their negations are not false but *senseless*. In order to understand the anti-skeptical implications of this point, consider the following passages of OC, in which Wittgenstein explicitly compares Moore's 'obvious truisms' to mathematical truths:

'rule of grammar'. This is so because as grammatical rules are ways to make sense of reality, their correctness is antecedent to questions of truth of falsity and so they lack a truth-value. Accordingly, their putative negations lack truth-value as well; thus, they cannot be considered strictly speaking false but senseless, that is illicit, combinations of signs.

[29] It can be argued that there are mathematical and geometrical discoveries, as in the case of 'Non-Euclidean' geometry. Still, as per Wittgenstein, these are different from empirical discoveries for they do not tell us anything about reality but are rather different *techniques* to *describe* reality. I will come back to this issue in Chapter 7.

"So is the hypothesis possible, that all the things around us don't exist? Would that not be like the hypothesis of our having miscalculated in all our calculations? (OC 55)

I cannot be making a mistake about 12x12 being 144. And now one cannot contrast mathematical certainty with the relative uncertainty of empirical propositions. *For the mathematical proposition has been obtained by a series of actions that are in no way different from the actions of the rest of our lives, and are in the same degree liable to forgetfulness, oversight and illusion* […] The mathematical proposition has, as it were officially, been given the stamp of incontestability. I.e.: "Dispute about other things; this is immovable - *it is a hinge on which your dispute can turn"* (OC 651-655, my italics).

As we have seen while considering McGinn's 'framework reading' of OC, for Wittgenstein logical and mathematical truths constitute a system of *techniques* originating and developed in the course of the practical life of human beings. Given their technique-constituting role, then, to deny or doubt mathematical truth such as v) 12x12= 144 is not only an error internal to a practice, but does, rather, amount to the rejection of an entire system of representation:

If someone supposed that all our calculations were uncertain and that we could rely on none of them (justifying himself by saying that mistakes are always possible) perhaps we would say he was crazy. But can we say he is in Error? Does he not just react differently? We rely on calculations, he doesn't; we are sure, he isn't (OC 217).

If mathematical truths, *qua* rules of grammar, license possible ways to describe reality, then to deny or doubt a rule such as v) 12x12=144 will not display factual ignorance but rather the inability to competently engage in the language game called 'arithmetic'.

With this point in mind, recall the following example we have already encountered in Chapter 3:

A pupil and a teacher. The pupil will not let anything be explained to him, for he continually interrupts with doubts, for instance as to the existence of things, the meaning of words, etc. The teacher says "Stop interrupting me and do as I tell you. So far your doubts don't make sense at all." *That is to say, the teacher will feel that this is not really a legitimate question at all*. And it would be just the same if the pupil cast doubt on the uniformity of nature, that is to say on the justification of inductive arguments. - The teacher would feel that this was only holding them up, that this way the pupil would only get stuck and make no progress. […] *this pupil has not learned how to ask questions. He has not learned the game that we are trying to teach him* (OC 315, my italics).

As I have already mentioned throughout this work, for Wittgenstein 'the game of doubting itself presupposes certainty (OC 115), that is that something is taken for granted, at least the meaning of words (OC 676). Accordingly, the pupil's never-ending doubt will deprive his words of their meaning and will at most show his inability to engage in the ordinary 'language-game' of asking meaningful questions, as to deny or doubt that v) 12x12= 144 will display an agent's inability to engage in the language game called 'arithmetic'.

Wittgenstein's insistence on the differences between our everyday notion of 'doubt' and the skeptical challenge would seem to resemble Conant's *therapeutic reading* of OC, and thus to inherit its problems. Recall that for Conant, Wittgenstein would consider both the Cartesian challenge and Moore's anti-skeptical strategy as nonsensical for they are made outside any given epistemic practice, and are thus at odds with the ordinary usage of the expressions 'to know' and 'to doubt'. As I have extensively argued in Chapter 4, this is not a plausible interpretation of Wittgenstein's thought and not a viable anti-skeptical strategy either, for a skeptic can still argue that she is using the terms 'to know' and 'to doubt' in a, so to say, purified and philosophical but still meaningful way (cfr. OC 19, 37).

But, following Wittgenstein's account, to doubt or deny hinges such as 'There are external objects' or 'I have a body' is not only at odds with our everyday language; rather, it will undermine the same notions of 'evidence' and 'justification' (OC 676):

If someone doubted whether the earth had existed a hundred years ago, I should not understand, for this reason: *I would not know what such a person would still allow to be counted as evidence and what not* (OC 231, my italics). I believe that I have forebears, and that every human being has them. I believe that there are various cities, and, quite generally, in the main facts of geography and history. I believe that the earth is a body on whose surface we move and that it no more suddenly disappears or the like than any other solid body: this table, this house, this tree, etc. *If I wanted to doubt the existence of the earth long before my birth, I should have to doubt all sorts of things that stand fast for me* (OC 234, my italics).

As we have seen in Chapter 3, in fact, Wittgenstein considers Moore's knowledge-claims in DCS and PEW misguided also because 'hinges' cannot be evidentially grounded (OC 245); as Wittgenstein points out, if a piece of evidence has to count as compelling ground for our belief in a certain proposition then that evidence must be more certain than the belief itself. And this cannot happen in the case of 'obvious truisms of the commonsense' such as 'There are external objects' or 'I have a body' for nothing is more certain than these 'hinges':

> But I did not get my picture of the world by satisfying myself of its correctness; nor do I have it because I am satisfied of its correctness. No: it is the *inherited background against which I distinguish between true and false* (OC 94, my italics).

> All testing, all confirmation and disconfirmation of a hypothesis takes place already within a system. And this system is not a more or less arbitrary and doubtful point of departure for all our arguments: no*, it belongs to the essence of what we call an argument.* The system is not so much the point of departure, as *the element in which arguments have their life* (OC 105, my italics).

In other words, for Wittgenstein both to doubt and to provide evidence and reasons for or against our beliefs presupposes 'hinges' such as 'There are external objects' or 'I have a body'. Far from being the expression of a theoretical, 'purified' use of the expressions 'to know' and 'to doubt', then, to question Moore's 'obvious truisms of the commonsense' will undermine the same notion of epistemic inquiry. This is so because once 'hinges' come into question there will be no possibility of raising a meaningful doubt or of supporting our beliefs with reasons and evidence; thus there will be no 'epistemic inquiry' at all.

This part of Wittgenstein's proposal can resemble Wright's rational entitlement strategy and incur similar problems. Recall that, following Wright, we are rationally entitled to take for granted 'hinges' such as 'I have a body' or 'There are external objects', for to dismiss them will end up with the impossibility of pursuing any inquiry at all; as practical rational agency is a basic way for us to act, it would be rational to say that we know 'hinges', even if in an unwarranted way.

As I have extensively argued in Chapter 4, even if to take 'hinges' for granted would be *practically rational*, for not to do so would lead to a cognitive paralysis, a skeptic can nonetheless argue that the very fact that we need to act as if 'hinges' are true does not make this acceptance epistemically rational.

But following Wittgenstein's reflection on the normative nature of 'hinges', not to doubt or deny Moore's 'obvious truisms' is not something that we do merely out of practical considerations as in Wright's proposal; rather, it is a constitutive part of 'the essence of the language-game' called 'epistemic inquiry' (OC 370):

> How does someone judge which is his right and which his left hand? How do I know that my judgment will agree with someone else's? How do I know that this colour is blue? If I don't trust myself here, why should I trust anyone else's judgment? Is there a why? Must I not begin to trust somewhere? *That is to say: somewhere I must begin with not doubting; and that is not, so to speak, hasty but excusable: it is part of judging* (OC 150, my italics).

I should like to say: Moore does not know what he asserts he knows, but it stands fast for him, as also for me; regarding it as absolutely solid is part of *our method of doubt and enquiry* (OC 151).

I want to say: propositions of the form of empirical propositions, and not only propositions of logic, *form the foundation of all operating with thoughts (with language)* […] If I say "we assume that the earth has existed for many years past" (or something similar), then of course it sounds strange that we should assume such a thing. But *in the entire system of our language-games it belongs to the foundations*. The assumption, one might say, forms the *basis of action, and therefore, naturally, of thought* (OC 401-411, my italics).

As per Wittgenstein, 'hinges' such as 'There are external objects' and 'I have a body' play a basic, foundational role in our system of beliefs, and to take them for granted belongs to *our method of doubt and enquiry*. In other words, even if they resemble empirical propositions or their origin is empirical, within our practices they are used as *rules* which enable us to make sense of reality, thus drawing a line between sense and nonsense rather than between truth and falsity.

Thus, to doubt or deny Moore's 'obvious truisms of the commonsense' will not only go against our practical rationality, but more crucially will also undermine the same notion of 'rational enquiry'.

6.3 WITTGENSTEINIAN EPISTEMOLOGY AND CARTESIAN SKEPTICISM

As we have seen, then, for Wittgenstein, Moore's 'commonsense certainties' are a condition of possibility of any meaningful inquiry; as he puts the matter, "about certain empirical propositions no doubt can exist *if making judgments is to be possible at all*" (OC 308, my italics). A thought which is stressed in a number of remarks of OC, where Wittgenstein defines 'hinges' as "the scaffolding of our thoughts" (OC 211), "foundation-walls" (OC 248), the "substratum of all our enquiring and asserting" (OC 162) "the foundation of all operating with thoughts" (401) and "fundamental principles of human enquiry" (670).

The anti-skeptical implications of this account of 'hinges' and their peculiar status can be better understood in comparison with Moore's anti-skeptical attempts. As we have extensively seen in Chapters 2 and 3, both in DCS and PEW Moore tries to directly refute Cartesian style skepticism and to show *contra* the skeptic that we can know the denials of skeptical hypotheses.

Both a proponent of Cartesian style skepticism and his Moorean opponent treat these 'hinges' as *hypotheses*, which can be supported by evidence or, conversely, legitimately questioned once we run skeptical arguments; but given the normative epistemic status of Moore's 'obvious truisms', to treat 'hinges' like propositional beliefs is misleading for several reasons:

> This situation is thus not the same for a proposition like "At this distance from the sun there is a planet" and "Here is a hand" (namely my own hand). The second can't be called a hypothesis. But there isn't a sharp boundary line between them. When one says: "Perhaps this planet doesn't exist and the light-phenomenon arises in some other way", then after all one needs an example of an object which does exist. This doesn't exist, - as for example does...
> Or are we to say that certainty is merely a constructed point to which some things approximate more, some less closely? No. Doubt gradually loses its sense. This language-game just is like that. *And everything descriptive of a language-game is part of logic* (OC 52-56, my italics).

> It is clear that our empirical propositions do not all have the same status, since one can lay down such a proposition and turn it from an empirical proposition into a norm of description. Think of chemical investigations. Lavoisier makes experiments with substances in his laboratory and now he concludes that this and that takes place when there is burning. He says that it might happen otherwise another time. He has got hold of a definite world-picture - not of course one that he invented: he learned it as a child. *I say world-picture and not hypothesis, because it is the matter-of-course foundation for his research and as such also does unmentioned*

(OC 167, my italics).

As we have seen above, for Wittgenstein 'rules of grammar' cannot be confirmed or disconfirmed by reality but rather constitute ways to make sense of reality. A consequence of this thought is that to support rules with evidence or reasons is not only improper but altogether misguided. Consider the following entries:

No matter how you instruct him in continuing the ornamental pattern, how can he *know* how he is to continue it by himself?" Well, how do *I* know? ⸻ If that means "Have I reasons?" the answer is: *my reasons will soon give out.* And then I shall act, without reasons (PI 211, my italics).

"How am I able to follow a rule?" If this is not a question about causes, then it is about the justification for my acting in *this* way in complying with the rule. *Once I have exhausted the justifications, I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: "This is simply what I do"*
(PI 217, my italics).

That is to say, once an agent has understood a rule, for instance i) What is red must be coloured, nothing but the rule itself can justify her calling 'coloured' any red object; given the internal relation between a rule and its application, there is no need for further justification, no room for further evidence or reasons in support of her correct application of i). This is not to not to say that rules of grammar are ultimately unjustified or based on a sort of irrational faith; on the contrary they *are reasons*, that guide our actions in rule-determined activities.

Similarly, even if 'hinges' resemble empirical propositions or their origin is empirical they cannot and have not to be based on ground such as evidence or reasons. This is so, Wittgenstein argues, because within our practices Moore's 'commonsense certainties' play a normative and not a descriptive role, for they draw the boundaries of a meaningful rational enquiry and are constitutive parts of what we call 'an argument' and 'judging':

"We could doubt every single one of these facts, but we could not doubt them all." Wouldn't it be more correct to say: "we do not doubt them all". Our not doubting them all is simply *our manner of judging, and therefore of acting* (OC 232, my italics).

Is it wrong for me to be guided in my actions by the propositions of physics? Am I to say I have no good ground for doing so? *Isn't precisely this what we call a 'good ground'?* (OC 608, my italics).

Thus, a correct application of the rule is the *only ground* we have in order to say whether an agent has understood a rule or not; at the same time, the only ground an agent can or has to provide to justify her correct application of the rule is the reference to the rule itself.

To understand a first promising anti-skeptical consequence of this account, recall the feature of Cartesian-style arguments:

(S1) I do not know not-SH
(S2) If I do not know not-SH, then I do not know M
(SC) I do not know M

where not-SH can be a 'hinge' such as 'I have a body' or 'There are external objects'. This argument seems so compelling as long as we take 'hinges' as *propositional beliefs*, which can be either confirmed by evidence or legitimately doubted once we run skeptical arguments. But even if they resemble empirical contingent propositions 'hinges' are non-propositional *rules of grammar*, which enable us to make sense of reality. Accordingly, skeptical hypotheses such as 'I might be a disembodied BIV' should not be regarded as sensible philosophical challenges but rather as *nonsensical*, even if prima facie meaningful combinations of signs. To understand this point, recall the putative 'negation' of the rules of grammar we have encountered *supra* :

i*) p is red and is not coloured

ii*) p is red and green all over

iii*) Some bachelors are married

iv*) a proposition is neither true nor false

v*) 12 x 12 = 1212

As we have already seen above, Wittgenstein's rules of grammar are non-propositional in character, thus they cannot be either true or false; accordingly, their 'negation' is not false but senseless, that is an illicit combination of signs.

In a similar fashion, as 'hinges' such as 'I have a body' or 'There are external objects' are not propositional, for they have a normative rather than a descriptive role, then their putative 'negation' should be dismissed as an illicit (and not only *fictional* as in Moyal-Sharrock's proposal) combination of signs which is excluded from the practice called 'rational epistemic inquiry', as the putative statement v*) 12x12= 1212 is a move excluded from the language-game called 'arithmetic'.

Another promising consequence of a non-propositional account so construed is that, different from McGinn's and Moyal-Sharrock's readings of OC, it will not affect the Closure principle and at the same time will not lead to skeptical conclusions.

Recall that in McGinn's reconstruction of Wittgenstein's strategy 'hinges' such as 'There are external objects' or 'I have a body' have a technique-constituting role, which puts them at odds with empirical beliefs. Still, following her account, our confidence in Moore's 'obvious truisms of the commonsense' is non-epistemic in character and amounts to nothing more than 'a reflection of our legitimate authority as accredited participants' in our everyday language-games (1989, 138).

As I argued in Chapter 4, far from being a viable solution to Cartesian-style skepticism McGinn's 'framework reading' is compatible with it. That is to say, a skeptic can well agree that not to doubt or deny 'hinges' is what we have to do whenever we are involved in a given everyday epistemic practice; however, following Cartesian skeptical arguments we cannot know whether we are victim or a skeptical scenarios or not and thus, given Closure, we will still be unable to know anything at all.

Similarly, in Moyal-Sharrock's 'non-epistemic reading' 'hinges' express what she names *objective certainty*; a pre-rational, animal commitment which is not subject

to epistemic evaluation of any sort. Accordingly, following this account we will have either to reject Closure or, with this principle still in play, to agree with the skeptic that our knowledge is impossible. Consider the formulation of Closure proposed by Williamson (2000) and Hawthorne (2005) we have encountered throughout this work:

> *The Competent Deduction principle*
> If S knows that *p,* and S competently deduces from *p* that *q*, thereby coming to believe that *q* on this basis while retaining her knowledge that *p,* then S knows that *q*.

The idea behind this version of Closure is in fact that an agent can came to acquire new knowledge via the competent deduction where this means that the belief in question is based on that deduction. Accordingly, if we cannot rule out a skeptical scenario such as the BIV one, we would be unable to know hinges such as 'I have a body' or 'There are external objects' and thus, given Closure, we would still be unable to know anything at all.

The non-propositional nature of Wittgenstein's account of 'hinges' can help us to positively address this issue. As we have seen while presenting Pritchard's 'hinge-commitment' strategy, the crucial aspect of Closure to notice is that it involves an agent *forming a belief* on the basis of the relevant competent deduction. But crucially 'hinges' are not the expressions of a propositional attitude such as a *belief in*; rather, they are the expression of non-propositional *rules*. Thus, the very fact that we, strictly speaking, do not know the denials of skeptical scenarios is then compatible with Closure; for 'hinges' are not beliefs, so they are not in the market for propositional knowledge.

An important consequence of the distinction between empirical propositions and 'rules of grammar' is that to claim that we 'know' a rule is not only improper but altogether misguided. As Wittgenstein writes with regard to mathematical truths:

> If you know a mathematical proposition, that's not to say you yet know anything yet. [If we all agree in our calculation] then we have only set our watches, but not yet measured any time. If someone knows a mathematical proposition, that's not to say that he knows *anything* yet. I.e. the

mathematical proposition supplies, that is to say, *the scaffolding for a description* (RFM 356, modified translation in Hacker and Baker 1985, 290, my italics).

As we saw in Chapter 4 while presenting McGinn's 'framework reading of OC', for Wittgenstein mathematical truths cannot be considered 'true' or 'false'. This is so for they depict meaningful ways to describe reality; thus, their correctness is antecedent to questions of truth and falsity. A consequence of this thought is that once we 'know' that, for instance, v) 12 x 12 =144, we do not know anything about reality (i.e. whether a state of affairs does or does not obtain); rather, we *master a technique* which can enable us to make sense of reality. As Wittgenstein puts the matter in his *Philosophical Investigations* (1953, henceforth PI):

> To follow a rule, to make a report, to give an order, to play a game of chess, are *customs* (usages, institutions). To understand a sentence means to understand a language. To understand a language means *to have mastered a technique* (PI 199, my italics).

The notion of 'mastery of techniques' is pivotal in Wittgenstein's later writings and is used to describe an epistemic standing which Wittgenstein sees as constitutively different from propositional knowledge. If in order to know that p an agent has to, for instance, provide evidence or reasons in support of her belief, our understanding of a rule is exhibited in what we call *following the rule and contravening the rule in actual cases* (PI 201); hence in *practice,* in making or avoiding certain 'moves' in our language games. To understand this point, recall the 'rules of grammar' we have already encountered supra along with their putative 'denials':

i)   What is red must be coloured

ii)   Nothing can be red and green all over

iii)   All bachelors are unmarried

iv)   A proposition is either true or false

v) 12 x 12 = 144

i*) p is red and is not coloured

ii*) p is red and green all over

iii*) Some bachelors are married

iv*) a proposition is neither true nor false

v*) 12 x 12 = 1212

To call a red object 'coloured', to exclude the existence of an object red and green all over, to call an unmarried person a 'bachelor', to call something which is partly true and partly false 'a proposition' and to say that '12x12= 144' are the only possible grounds we have in order to ascertain whether an agent has understood the rules at issue in i-v). This is so because Wittgenstein's 'rules of grammar' are *criteria of correctness* (PI 197, 198), for which it is possible to stipulate whether an agent has correctly applied a rule or not, with no need for further evidence or reasons; and this is not accidental, but is rather the expression of the *internal relation* (Hacker and Baker, 1985, 136) between a rule and its application. Accordingly, to deny or question a rule of grammar does not display factual ignorance but rather *lack of understanding,* for it means that an agent has not understood or fully understood the rules at issue. Similarly, all the 'obvious truisms of the commonsense' listed by Moore are normative, for they draw a line between sense and nonsense rather than between truth and falsity; and this is why for Wittgenstein we cannot claim that we 'know' hinges, for

> If "I know etc" is conceived as a grammatical proposition, of course the "I" cannot be important. And it properly means "There is no such thing as a doubt in this case" or "The expression 'I do not know' make no sense in this case". And of course it follows from this that " I know" makes no sense either (OC 58).

As in the case of the denials of the grammatical rules we encountered in the previous section, to deny or doubt Moore's 'obvious truisms' does not show factual ignorance

but a systematic misunderstanding of the role they play in our system of beliefs. Also, and more importantly, this lack of understanding will imply our inability to engage in the language game called 'rational epistemic agency', as to deny or put in question a rule of grammar like 'v) 12x12=144' only shows our inability to engage in the practice called 'arithmetic':

> But why am I so certain that this is my hand? Doesn't the whole language-game rest on this kind of certainty? Or: isn't this 'certainty' (already) presupposed in the language-game? Namely by virtue of the fact that *one is not playing the game, or is playing it wrong, if one does not recognize objects with certainty* […]
> Compare with this 12x12=144. Here too we don't say "perhaps". For, in so far as this proposition rests on our not miscounting or miscalculating and on our senses not deceiving us as we calculate, both propositions, the arithmetical one and the physical one, are on the same level. I want to say: *The physical game is just as certain as the arithmetical.* But this can be misunderstood. *My remark is a logical and not a psychological one* (OC 446-447, my italics).

The certainty accorded to 'hinges', then, is not the result of an animal trust as in Moyal-Sharrock's reading, but rather stems from the normative role they play in our language-games. Recall that following Moyal-Sharrock's proposal the certainty of 'hinges' such as 'There are external objects' or ' I have a body' can be revealed only by our *actions*, that is by our interaction with external objects or our acting embodied (I.e. not attempting to walk through walls etc) and is not subject to epistemic evaluation of any sort.

On the contrary, as per Wittgenstein, our understanding of 'hinges' can be expressed by our 'mastery of techniques', namely by our ability or inability to competently engage in the practices defined and constituted by these rules and is thus open to epistemic evaluation. Accordingly, Wittgenstein's 'mastery of techniques' is not a pre-rational, non-epistemic certainty as in Moyal-Sharrock's and McGinn's accounts but is rather a *conceptual ability*; an ability which is different from

propositional knowledge but still *epistemic* in character, as it enables us to maintain and acquire true beliefs about the world.

6.4 WITTGENSTEIN ON THE STRUCTURE OF REASON AND EPISTEMIC RELATIVISM

So far, we have seen that following the analogy between 'hinges' and rule of grammar we would be able to get rid of skeptical hypotheses as nonsensical, even if apparently meaningful, combination of signs which are excluded from the practice called 'rational epistemic agency'. Moreover, I have argued that even if 'hinges' are at odds with empirical beliefs and therefore cannot be known, they are nonetheless subject to a different epistemic standing, namely understanding or mastery of techniques and are thus opened to epistemic evaluation.

The anti-skeptical significance of this strategy can be better appreciated once read in light of Wittgenstein's conception of the structure of reason. Recall the following remarks we have already quoted *supra*:

> If you are not certain of any fact, you cannot be certain of the meaning of your words either […] If you tried to doubt everything you would not get as far as doubting anything. The game of doubting itself presupposes certainty (OC 114-115).

> The question that we raise and our doubts depend on the fact that some propositions are exempt from doubt, are as it were the 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 [...] If I want the door to turn, the hinges must stay put (OC 341-3).

As we have seen while presenting Williams' and Pritchard's proposals, according to Wittgenstein the same structure of our ways of inquiry presupposes that some statements are excluded from doubt; and this would not be accidental, but rather belongs to what he calls the "logic of our scientific investigations" (see OC 342).

With this point in mind, recall that for Wittgenstein both Moore's 'obvious truisms of the commonsense' and mathematical truths have a normative role that they

share with all the 'hinges' mentioned throughout OC. For instance, 'The earth existed long before my birth' is a basic 'hinge' of every historical inquiry (OC 66, 84-85, 206, 311, 316); colour-words such as 'This colour is blue' and 'This colour is red' are the 'hinges' of every language-game with colours (OC 527, 542-545, 566) and so on.

A consequence of this thought is that any kind of universal inquiry such as the Cartesian skeptical one is based on a *logical error*, namely on a misunderstanding of the structure of our language games (OC 599); that is to say, each and every of our epistemic practices do not rest on propositional beliefs or set of beliefs, open to doubt or question but rather on non-propositional *rules*, whose certainty stems from the foundational role they play in a given practice.

 As per Wittgenstein, even a contingent empirical assertion such as 'This is a hand', namely the first premise of Moore's Proof, can play and indeed does play a normative role in a variety of language games. With regard to this point, Wittgenstein writes in fact that

> If I wanted to doubt whether this was my hand, how could I avoid doubting whether the word 'hand" has any meaning? […] But more correctly: The fact that I use the word "hand" and all the other words in my sentence without a second thought, indeed that I should stand before the abyss if I wanted so much as to try doubting their meanings-shews that absence of doubt belongs to the essence of the language-game, that the question "How do I know…" drags out the language-game, or else does away with it (OC 369-70).
> We teach a child "that is your hand", not "that is perhaps (or "probably") your hand". That is how a child learns the innumerable language-games that are concerned with his hand. An investigation or question, 'whether this is really a hand' never occurs to him. Nor, on the other hand, does he learn that he knows that this is a hand (OC 374).

That is to say, 'This is a hand' plays a normative rule in a number of language games, from the most basic (such as explaining what 'a hand' is or means) to countless more sophisticated ones (cfr. OC 371: 'This hand is weaker than the other', 'I have a pain in this hand' and many others) and cannot therefore be questioned or doubted within

these practices. As in the case in the 'rules of grammar' we have encountered before, a denial of 'This is a hand' is nonsensical rather than false; to hold up an hand asking whether it is really an hand we are looking at would show that we do not understand or do not fully understand what 'This is a hand' means.

It is worth noting at this stage that for Wittgenstein there are particular circumstances in which 'This is a hand' can lose its normative role, for instance if we wake up in an hospital after a car crash with both our hands bandaged up (OC 622); more generally, there are other peculiar circumstances which can undermine the certainty usually accorded to other 'hinges':

> However, we can ask: May someone have telling grounds for believing that the earth has only existed for a short time, say since his own birth? - Suppose he had always been told that, - would he have any good reason to doubt it? Men have believed that they could make the rain; why should not a king be brought up in the belief that the world began with him? And if Moore and this king were to meet and discuss, could Moore really prove his belief to be the right one? *I do not say that Moore could not convert the king to his view, but it would be a conversion of a special kind; the king would be brought to look at the world in a different way.* […] (OC 92, my italics).

> I can imagine a man who had grown up in quite special circumstances and been taught that the earth came into being 50 years ago, and therefore believed this. We might instruct him: the earth has long... etc. - We should be trying to give him our picture of the world. This would happen through *a kind of persuasion* (OC 262, my italics).

The negative implications of these passages can be better understood once we read them in light of the following entries, where Wittgenstein highlights the, so to say, groundlessness and historical contingency of our language-games, which inform our system of beliefs:

When language-games change, then there is a change in concepts, and with the concepts the meanings of words change (OC 65).

The propositions describing this world-picture might be part of a kind of mythology […] It might be imagined that some propositions, of the form of empirical propositions, were hardened and functioned as channels for such empirical propositions as were not hardened but fluid; and that this relation altered with time, in that fluid propositions hardened, and hard ones became fluid. The mythology may change back into a state of flux, the river-bed of thoughts may shift. But I distinguish between the movement of the waters on the river-bed and the shift of the bed itself; though there is not a sharp division of the one from the other. And the bank of that river consists partly of hard rock, subject to no alteration or only to an imperceptible one, partly of sand, which now in one place now in another gets washed away, or deposited (OC 95-99).

The difficulty is to realize the groundlessness of our believing (OC 166).

On the other hand a language-game does change with time (OC 256).

All these remarks seem to emphasise the occurrence of fundamental changes in language games, concepts, word meaning and rationality. In particular, here Wittgenstein seems to concede that even our basic 'hinges' can change; as they define and constitute what 'rationality' is, then the same notion of 'rationality' would be open, at least in principle, to radical modifications.

The relativistic implications of this thought can be better understood when reading the following passages of OC, where Wittgenstein sketches the debate between a Christian Theist and an Atheist committed to different 'hinges':

I believe that every human being has two human parents; but Catholics believe that Jesus only had a human mother. And other people might believe

that there are human beings with no parents, and give no credence to all the contrary evidence. Catholics believe as well that in certain circumstances a wafer completely changes its nature, and at the same time that all evidence proves the contrary. And so if Moore said "I know that this is wine and not blood", Catholics would contradict him (OC 239).

But what men consider reasonable or unreasonable alters. At certain periods men find reasonable what at other periods they found unreasonable. And vice-versa. But is there no objective character here? Very intelligent and well-educated people believe in the story of creation in the Bible, while others hold it as proven false, and the grounds of the latter are well known to the former (OC 336).

There are at least two points worth noticing in these passages. A first is that the concept of what is 'rational' and 'irrational' can not only change during human history, but can also be different for two communities living in the same historical period. That is to say, the disagreement between the Atheist and the Theist with regard to an 'obvious truism of the commonsense' such as 'Every human being as two parents' is not based on evidence or reasons which are available to one community and not to another. On the contrary, these two communities disagree on the very concept of what 'evidence' is; Christian Revelation is a telling reason for a Theist but not for an Atheist.

A second and more crucial point to note is that in these passages Wittgenstein seems also to affirm that there will be no 'neutral' way to choose between the Theist and the Atheist viewpoints. The 'grounds of the latter are well known to the former'; still, the debate between an Atheist and a Theist is at least potentially unsolvable, as they have different criteria for establishing what should be considered as a reliable source of information and what not.

A worrying implication of this thought is that it would be impossible to rationally solve any kind of debate between communities committed to different systems of thought, based on radically divergent 'hinges'. With regard to this point,

recall the "Moore and the Wild Tribe" example we have already mentioned in this work:

> I could imagine Moore being captured by a wild tribe, and their expressing the suspicion that he has come from somewhere between the earth and the moon. Moore tells them that he knows etc. but he can't give them the grounds for his certainty, because they have fantastic ideas of human ability to fly and know nothing about physics. This would be an occasion for making that statement (OC 607).

> Is it wrong for me to be guided in my actions by the propositions of physics? Am I to say I have no good ground for doing so? Isn't precisely this what we call a 'good ground'? (OC 608)

> Supposing we met people who did not regard that as a telling reason. Now, how do we imagine this? Instead of the physicist, they consult an oracle. (And for that we consider them primitive.) Is it wrong for them to consult an oracle and be guided by it? - *If we call this "wrong" aren't we using our language-game as a base from which to combat theirs?* (OC 609, my italics)

> And are we right or wrong to combat it? Of course there are all sorts of slogans which will be used to support our proceedings (OC 610).

> Where two principles really do meet which cannot be reconciled with another, then each man declares the other a fool and heretic (OC 611).

> I said I would 'combat' the other man, - but wouldn't I give him reasons? Certainly; but how far do they go? *At the end of reasons comes persuasion.* (Think what happens when missionaries convert natives.) (OC 612, my italics)

As we have already seen, in these remarks Wittgenstein imagines Moore being capture by a Wild Tribe, whose beliefs are completely at odds with ours; for instance,

they think that people can go to the Moon unaided, they do not consider physics a telling reason and instead follow oracles, and so on.

In OC 609, Wittgenstein seems to suggest that our criticism of the tribesmen's customs is based on a biased background of our own language games; that is to say, the first *prima facie* reasons we have to consider the Wild Tribe beliefs as false are our own culture and our epistemic practices, for which physics is a telling reason while oracles are obviously not. Moreover, (Kusch, manuscript, 7 ff), this passage also stresses the fact that our reaction toward a similar tribe would be somewhat aggressive; in front of a tribe with similar beliefs we would feel legitimate in challenging their central beliefs.

However (OC 610), here Wittgenstein seems also to raise the possibility that this challenge against the Wild Tribe's system of beliefs would not be based on other grounds but the fact that within our culture, 'bound together by science and education (OC 298), oracles are widely dismissed and physics is a telling reason; thus, our attack would be supported by nothing else than 'all sorts of slogans' (OC 611).

That is to say, Moore and the Wild tribe are committed to different systems of beliefs, where different telling reasons are in play. As these two systems of beliefs are completely irreducible, there will be no way to rationally solve the disagreement between Moore and the tribesmen; the latter can only be persuaded or converted.

Thus, similar to other readings of OC we have already encountered throughout this work, Wittgenstein's conception of the structure of reason would seem to license a form of epistemic relativism, for which all our epistemic practices would rest on pre-rational or cultural commitments, not opened to epistemic evaluation of any sort. A conclusion which, as I have extensively argued throughout this work, is no more palatable or reassuring than skeptical ones.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this chapter I have argued that, correctly understood and developed, Wittgenstein's remarks on 'hinges' and their peculiar epistemic status can help us to dismiss Cartesian-style skepticism as the result of a *logical error,* which stems from treating non-propositional rules such as 'I have a body' or 'There are external objects' as propositional beliefs.

Still, there is another problem that an anti-skeptical strategy so construed has to face in order to be considered a fully viable proposal: namely whether and to what extent a Wittgensteinian epistemology would lead to relativist conclusions. In the next chapter, I will argue that a Wittgensteinian epistemology can help us to solve epistemic relativism rather than license it.

CHAPTER 7

'HINGES' AND EPISTEMIC RELATIVISM[30]

7.0 INTRODUCTION

As I have argued throughout this work, relativistic conclusions are no less worrying than skepticism itself, and is therefore necessary to see if and to what extent Wittgenstein's remarks can lead to epistemic relativism. To address this problem, in the first section I sketch Wittgenstein's views on alternative mathematical and metrological systems, and I will then apply this Wittgensteinian framework to the cases of apparent unsolvable disagreement between epistemic communities committed to radically different 'hinges'. I aim to show that using Wittgenstein's conception of the structure of reason, these cases are either solvable by rational means or are not cases of disagreement at all.

7.1 WITTGENSTEIN ON MATHEMATICS AND METROLOGY

In the previous chapter I argued that Wittgenstein's reflections on 'hinges' and their status is deeply influenced by his views on mathematics. Thus, in order to see if and to what extent Wittgenstein's conception of the structure of reason would license relativistic conclusions I will start this section following Martin Kusch's (2009, 2012, manuscript) systematic analysis of relativistic themes in Wittgenstein's philosophy of mathematics.

A good starting point to assess the plausibility of relativistic readings of Wittgenstein's thought is the opposition between our mathematical system and more 'primitive or altogether fictional forms of mathematical activity', discussed in his later writings. In a number of passages, Wittgenstein invites us to imagine:

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a) counting system of the form 'one, two, three, four, five, many (WLC, 117)

b) a form of arithmetic which involves numbers only up to the number seven (PG 322)

c) a tribe that decorates its walls with calculations (LFM 39)

d) a tribe that multiplies numbers and that takes numbers to be spirits (RFM V 5)

e) a tribe that uses no numerals and that employs an abacus for all counting and calculating (PG 322)

f) a tribe that multiplies large numbers only for entertainment

g) a tribe that knows only of oral calculations (RFM III 81)

h) a tribe that has no pure but several applied mathematics (RFM VI 15)

i) a tribe that uses the quantifier 'all but one' (LFM 193)

j) a tribe that calculates with what look to us like numbers written on the top of each other (Z 699).

As per Wittgenstein, all these and similarly different mathematical systems should not be considered as 'mistaken' or incomplete; on the contrary, he argues

> Primitive arithmetic is not incomplete, even one in which there are only the first five numerals; and our arithmetic is not more complete. Would chess be incomplete if we know another game which somehow incorporated chess? *It would be merely a different game* (WLC, 101-102, my italics).

> Strange as it sounds, it is possible to know the prime number, let's say, only up to 7 and thus to have a finite system of prime numbers. And what we call the discovery that there are infinitely many primes is in truth *the discovery of a new system with no greater rights than the other* (PG 322, my italics).

Here Wittgenstein seems not only to conceive the existence of different mathematical systems; also, he claims that no system has greater rights than the other. As he strikingly writes at one point, in fact, 'one symbolism is just as good as the next' (WLC 63).

This is so because, Wittgenstein argues, the standards of mathematical accuracy are internal to practices and do not depend on reality. To defend this point,

he asks us to imagine a tribe that does all its calculations in the head and never in writing, and in which mistakes are common and unnoticed. A traveller arrives, records the tribesmen's calculations and then teaches them how to write calculations; moreover, he tries to convince them that that using their previous system they made several mistakes using their mathematical practice:

> Would these people now have to admit that they had not really calculated before? That they had merely been groping about, whereas now they walk? Might they not perhaps even say: our affairs went better before, our intuition was not burdened with the dead stuff of writing? You cannot lay hold of the spirit with a machine. They say perhaps: If we repeated a digit then, as your machine asserts, well that will have been right (RFM III 81).

As per Wittgenstein, then, the correctness of a practice is also informed by the *concerns of its practitioners*; the kind of mathematical calculation used by the tribe looks more approximate but crucially *only judged by our mathematical standards*. For the tribe, in fact, their older system was perfectly fine and served their purposes even better than ours.

The legitimacy of different mathematical practices is stressed by Wittgenstein not only with reference to more or less 'primitive' or invented systems, but also with regard to the different kinds of mathematical games *within our mathematics*. Even if Wittgenstein grants that cardinal, irrational and real numbers are all numbers and noting that 'the commutative, associative and distributive laws' apply to all of them, he also points out that they *belong to entirely different games*; that is to say, all these different mathematical games are merely analogous, and thus their relationship to one another is exactly like the relationship between our arithmetic as a whole and the 'primitive' mathematical systems we have encountered before (WLC 117).

Far from being a system of necessarily true propositions, then, mathematical systems are informed also by our practical and theoretical concerns to the extent that, as Wittgenstein argues at one point, were human story different they would have been different as well or maybe not exist at all. To understand this point, consider the following example of an alternative history, where Wittgenstein asks us to consider the influence of practices such of drawing and painting on the development of geometry:

Had human beings never drawn, but always painted (so that the concept of the *contour* of shapes did not play a big part), if there were a word in common use, let's call it 'line', at which no one thought of a *stroke*, i.e. of something very thin, but always thought only of the boundary of two colors, and if at the word 'point' one never thought of something tiny, but only of the intersection of two colour boundaries, then perhaps much of the development of geometry would not have occurred (Z 87).

Even if in these passages Wittgenstein concedes the possibility of a plurality of legitimate mathematical systems, it is worth noting that this does not necessarily leads to relativistic conclusions of any sort.

Recall that for Wittgenstein mathematical truths such as v) 12x12=144 are 'rules of grammar'; thus they license possible, that is sensible, techniques to describe reality. This is why practices, such as our mathematical procedures or the different 'language games' he mentions in the works we have encountered *supra*, cannot be considered strictly speaking true or false; *qua* ways to describe reality, they are antecedent to questions of truth and falsity. At most, as we have seen while presenting McGinn's 'framework reading' of OC, these techniques can prove their merits in our interactions with the world; accordingly, both our mathematics and the 'primitive mathematical systems' described above cannot be considered true or false but useful or useless in order to face the practical and theoretical needs of a given human community.

Still, this does not necessarily commit Wittgenstein to epistemic relativism; recall that according to epistemic relativism there will be no way to rationally solve disagreement between two communities committed to two different systems of thought based on different 'hinges', as these will all stem from pre-rational, cultural commitments which are not subject to epistemic evaluation of any sort.

On the contrary, in these passages Wittgenstein is only stressing the possibility of a plurality of different *systems of representations*, which cannot be considered 'true' or 'false' for, different from empirical beliefs, their truth or falsity does not depend on reality alone. Still, this does not necessarily imply that there will be no way to judge whether a practice is more reliable than another, especially when we are faced with two or more practices with the same *aim*.

This point can be better understood once we read it in light of Wittgenstein's views on metrology. The best known instance of an alternative 'measuring' practice in the later Wittgenstein is the case of 'the Odd wood-sellers', a tribe that sells wood not by the cubic metre but by the area covered, ignoring how high the logs are piled up (RFM 148, cf. 143). In a similar case, it would seem to be in front of a different epistemic practice, where quantities are measured in an odd way and prices are determined differently. With regard to a similar community, Wittgenstein writes what follows:

How could we show them that, as I should say- you don't really buy more wood if you buy a pile covering a bigger area? I should, for instance, take a pile which was small by their ideas and, by laying the logs around, change it into a 'big' one." But there is no guarantee: "… perhaps they would say: 'Yes, now it's a *lot* of wood and costs more'—and that would be the end of the matter." We should presumably say in this case: they simply do not mean the same by "a lot of wood" and "a little wood" as we do; and they have a quite different system of payment from us (RFM 150).

Following a relativistic reading of Wittgenstein's thought, the disagreement between our community and the 'odd-wood-sellers' would be unsolvable; both our and their practices of measuring wood are based on different still perfectly legitimate 'rules of grammar' or 'hinges', which are not subject to further epistemic evaluation.

Interestingly enough, this is not Wittgenstein's verdict on the 'odd wood-sellers' case. As we have seen in the abovementioned remark, in fact, Wittgenstein's first comment on this case is that it would be possible to convince them to measure wood by weight and to pay for it accordingly *by using an entirely rational procedure*, for instance by showing them that the quantity of wood remains the same although its area and volume are changed. Thus (Coliva, 2010b, 14-15), the case of the 'odd-wood sellers' does not constitute an alternative epistemic method but rather depicts a situation where people hold *false beliefs*, which leads them to use an unreliable procedure to measure (and pay for) wood. That is to say, both our practice of measuring and the 'odd-wood-seller' one have the same *aim*, namely to measure and pay for wood. Thus, there will be a way to judge the merits and the usefulness of these practices; namely, to check whether one or the other can better fit its purpose.

And as our ways are more reliable than the method used by the 'Odd wood sellers', then it is possible to convince these people of the problematic nature of their practice. In this case, then, the disagreement can be easily solved.

There is another point worth noting at this stage. Recall that in this entry Wittgenstein seems also to concede that, if rational persuasion failed, we should suppose that the 'odd wood-sellers' "do not mean the same by 'a lot of wood' and 'a little wood' as we do" (RFM I-150). Consider the following passage, in which Wittgenstein goes on to propose a 'historical explanation' to make sense of the wood-sellers' practice:

> (a) These people don't live by selling wood, so it does not matter much what they get for it. (b) A great king long ago told them to reckon the price of wood by measuring just two dimensions, keeping the height the same. (c) They have done so ever since, except that they later came not to worry about the height of the heaps. Then what is wrong? They do this. And they get along all right. What more do you want? (LFM, 204).

Even in this case, we will not be in front of a form of unsolvable disagreement, let alone come to an implicit endorsement of a relativistic position of any sort. If in the first scenario it is possible to solve the disagreement by pointing out the unreliability of the 'Odd wood sellers' technique, in this case there is no *real disagreement to solve*.

"These people don't live by selling wood, so it does not matter much what they get for it"; that is to say, the difference between our community and the 'odd wood sellers' does not lie in our different epistemic practices, but rather in our different history and customs. Even if from our perspective they might seem to use an unreliable method to count and sell wood, this is not the case for they have no practice of counting and selling wood *at all*. Thus, even in this case for Wittgenstein we are not in front of two antagonist and still legitimate epistemic systems, but at most in front of two communities, one of which lacks an epistemic practice.

7.2 'THE WILD TRIBE CASE', DISAGREEMENT AND PRACTICES

To sum up, even after this brief excursus on Wittgenstein's views about mathematics and metrology it seems far from obvious that Wittgenstein would endorse relativistic conclusions of any sort. On the contrary, there are at least two interesting anti-relativistic themes which can be extracted from his writings: the first is that even if epistemic practices stem from different cultural backgrounds, they can nonetheless have similar aims and thus can be compared. A second is that in many cases, what looks like a prima facie unsolvable disagreement between communities committed to different 'hinges' on a closer inspection is not real disagreement at all.

With this point in mind, we can now go back to the 'Moore and the Wild Tribe Case' (OC 609-612) we have already encountered throughout this work. In this example, Wittgenstein depicts an encounter between Moore and a tribe that challenges some of our most cherished scientific and technological knowledge; they claim that Moore comes from somewhere between Earth and Moon, that we might be mistaken in believing that aeroplanes can fly, they believe in oracles rather than in physics and so on.

As has been noticed by Kusch (manuscript), even if in the paragraphs preceding OC609 Wittgenstein called it "absurd" to decide by "ordeal of fire" whether water boils at about 100C° (OC 605), and insisted on having "every right to use physics as [his] guide" (OC608), he still asks whether (OC 609) if we call "their" use of an oracle "wrong", are we "using our language-game as a base from which to *combat* theirs?". A thought which continues in the in the next paragraph (OC610) when Wittgenstein ponders whether "are we right or wrong to combat" their use of the oracle, also implying that our action might have little more than "slogans" in its support. Moreover (OC 612) Wittgenstein does not even hesitate to liken the struggle at issue between Moore and the Wild Tribe to a religious conflict: were Moore able to convince the Wild Tribesmen, this would happen due to persuasion, as "what happens when missionaries convert natives."

Still, as with the 'Odd Wood Sellers Case' we encountered in the previous section the disagreement between Moore and the Wild Tribe is far from unsolvable. With regard to this point, consider the following entry:

I fly from here to a part of the world where the people have only indefinite information, or none at all, about the possibility of flying. I tell them I have just flown there from... They ask me if I might be mistaken. - They have obviously a false impression of how the thing happens. (If I were packed up in a box it would be possible for me to be mistaken about the way I had traveled.) *If I simply tell them that I can't be mistaken, that won't perhaps convince them; but it will if I describe the actual procedure to them.* Then they will certainly not bring the possibility of a mistake into the question. But for all that - even if they trust me - they might believe I had been dreaming or that magic had made me imagine it (OC 671).

In this passage, Wittgenstein is well aware that a primitive tribe can dismiss his explanations on the basis of their cultural practices and beliefs, for instance: "… they might believe that I had been dreaming or that *magic* had made me imagine" that I have flown in an aeroplane (OC671). Still, Wittgenstein's verdict on this 'unsolvable disagreement' (Kusch, manuscript) is that "these people do not know a lot that we know"; "they are wrong and we know it"; their "system of knowledge … is the poorer one by far" (OC286), and "they have obviously a false impression of how the thing [=flying by aeroplane] happens" (OC671).

As in the case of the 'Odd Wood Sellers', then, on a closer inspection the disagreement between Moore and the Wild Tribe is not unsolvable or solvable using irrational ways such as force, for instance imposing our culture over another. On the contrary, as per Wittgenstein this disagreement is not a real disagreement at all; simply, the Wild Tribe lacks a number of epistemic practices (such as physics) that we possess. Thus, they can be convinced by 'persuasion', that is by very rational means such as training and education. What would look like an unsolvable disagreement between communities committed to radically different 'hinges' is on the contrary based either on lack of education or on a misunderstanding of the practices at issue.

This point is also crucial to make sense of what Wittgenstein says with regard to the 'hinge' 'No man has ever been to the Moon', which he considered as indubitable but has been questioned and indeed abandoned after Armstrong's voyage to the Moon in 1969. When Wittgenstein was writing OC, 'No man has been ever

been on the Moon' was part of an entire *Weltanschauung*, based on the scientific knowledge available in his times, and to seriously ponder whether there have been men on the Moon would have been completely irrational. As he writes at one point:

> Can I give the supposition that I have ever been on the moon any serious consideration at all? (OC 226)

> If I were to say "I have never been on the moon - but I may be mistaken", that would be idiotic. For even the thought that I might have transported there, by unknown means, in my sleep, would not give me any right to speak of a possible mistake here. *I play the game wrong* if I do (OC 662, my italics).

In order to play the 'language-game' of 'Science' correctly in his time, an epistemic agent had to take 'No man has ever been to the Moon' for granted. However, (see Coliva 2010, 7-8) it is perfectly plausible that within one system of justification, such as Science in this case, people may have different beliefs, dependent on the quality and quantity of the evidence available to them. Also, the system of justification 'Science' can evolve and indeed has evolved over time, when certain propositions and theories have been abandoned in the face of further evidence and information; still, these 'changes' occur in the face of new *evidence,* that is, they are driven by *entirely rational consideration* and are not, at least not only, the result of pre-rational cultural or sociological commitments.

The link between epistemic disagreement, knowledge and education can also cast new light on the several cases mentioned by Wittgenstein throughout OC, in which he imagines confronting people who deny or doubt our most basic 'hinges'; for instance they deem all our calculations uncertain (OC 599) or doubt having a body (OC 244, 257) or believe that cars grow out the earth and cats on trees (OC 282); they deny that water boils at around 100C° (567, 599) or doubt that the earth existed 100 years ago and so on.

As I have mentioned throughout this work, in several passages of OC Wittgenstein stresses the difficulties of reaching such people argumentatively: since they do not seem to accept our system of evidence and verification, it is impossible to construct a string of considerations that would force them back into the fold; also (OC

257) Wittgenstein argues that even if we succeeded in bringing them back, we would not be able to say what it was in our discourse that changed their mind.

Far from licensing a form of epistemic relativism, these remarks are nonetheless meant to highlight even further the technique-constituting role of Wittgenstein's 'hinges'. As noted by Kusch (2012, manuscript), Wittgenstein's verdict on those denying one or more of our basic 'hinges' is strict and unforgiving: they are not "in conformity" with the rest of us (OC156), they reject what they must have learnt and accepted "on human authority" (OC161), they opt out of our "community which is bound together by science and education" (OC298) for they refuse to accept the "certain authorities" that one "must recognise … in order to make judgements at all" (OC493). Thus, their doubts or denials of 'hinges' such as 'I have a body' or 'The earth existed long time before my birth' are not the expressions of alternative, still legitimate epistemic systems; rather, they amount to nothing but the rejection of any sensible epistemic enquiry, to the extent that those 'doubts' seem to Wittgenstein nothing but the rejection of epistemic rationality itself:

> I believe that I have forebears, and that every human being has them. I believe that there are various cities, and, quite generally, in the main facts of geography and history. I believe that the earth is a body on whose surface we move and that it no more suddenly disappears or the like than any other solid body: this table, this house, this tree, etc. If I wanted to doubt the existence of the earth long before my birth, I should have to doubt all sorts of things that stand fast for me. And that something stands fast for me is not grounded in my stupidity or credulity. If someone said "The earth has not long been..." what would he be impugning? Do I know? Would it not have to be what is called a scientific belief? Might it not be a mystical one? Is there any absolute necessity for him to be contradicting historical facts? Or even geographical ones? (OC 236-238).

As Wittgenstein argues throughout OC 'hinges' are "the inherited background against which I distinguish between true and false" (OC94); they are "above all the substratum of all my enquiring and asserting" (OC162); "the matter-of-course foundation for … research" (OC167). As such, they constitute a system "in which arguments have their life" (OC105, 185, 279); thus, if someone is denying 'hinges'

such as 'I have a body' or 'The earth existed long before my birth' this would not represent any form of unsolvable disagreement but is at most a "worthless" position based on "misunderstanding of the nature of our language-games"(OC 599), namely on the fact that any rational inquiry is possible only if we take these 'hinges' for granted.

7.3 'HINGES', EPISTEMIC PRACTICES AND RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

So far, I have argued that Wittgenstein's remarks on 'hinges' and the structure of reason can represent a valid response against epistemic relativism rather than license it. Once seen in light of Wittgenstein's account, in fact, several disagreements based on different cultural or historical background are either solvable or are pseudo-problems based on a misunderstanding of the very nature of our of our epistemic practices.

However, in OC Wittgenstein considers another form of epistemic disagreement that is worth addressing in order to fully understand his views on relativism: namely, the disagreement between Christian believers and non believers that we already encountered in Chapter 6. Recall the following remarks:

> Isn't this altogether like the way one can instruct a child to believe in a God, or that none exists, and it will accordingly be able to produce apparently telling grounds for the one or the other? (OC 107)

> I believe that every human being has two human parents; but Catholics believe that Jesus only had a human mother. And other people might believe that there are human beings with no parents, and give no credence to all the contrary evidence; Catholics believe as well that in certain circumstances a wafer completely changes its nature, and at the same time that all evidence proves the contrary. And so if Moore said "I know that this is wine and not blood", Catholics would contradict him (OC 239).

There are at least two relativistic themes in these remarks that are worth consideration. OC107 suggests that which views we hold about religious questions

depend upon the history of our instruction; and this would not only influence our religious views, but also what we consider a telling reason or not, for instance whether we rely on the Bible or on Science in order to explain the existence of the world.

In OC 239 Catholics are introduced as people who deny the common-sense certainty 'that every human being has two human parents'. Wittgenstein also points out that "if Moore said 'I know that this is wine and not blood'" Catholics would, at least in certain situations , "contradict him". Thus, when religious beliefs are in play it would seem that even our most basic 'hinges' are opened to dispute; and as 'hinges' define and constitute what rationality is, here Wittgenstein would seem to concede that religious and non-religious have different concepts of the same notion of 'rational belief'. The unpalatable consequences of this thought can be better appreciated in light of the following entry:

> But what men consider reasonable or unreasonable alters. At certain periods men find reasonable what at other periods they found unreasonable. And vice versa. But is there no objective character here? *Very* intelligent and well-educated people believe in the story of creation in the Bible, while others hold it as proven false, and the grounds of the latter are well known to the former (OC 336).

While for Wittgenstein if someone denies a 'hinge' of our basic epistemic practices then we cannot but treat them as wrong, the same attitude is not compelling when the encountered group expresses religious beliefs. Catholics or Christians are not expected or predicted to convert to an atheist worldview; on the contrary (Kusch, manuscript) the last sentence of OC336 suggests that, differently from what happens with 'primitive' epistemic communities such as the 'Odd Wood-Sellers' and 'The Wild Tribe', Theistic beliefs are not based on a lack of intelligence or education. Moreover, the disagreement between Theists and Atheists cannot apparently be solved for 'the reasons of the former are well known to the latter;' that is to say, the Christian Theists and the Atheists can be perfectly acquainted with what the other considers a telling reason. Believers are not ignorant of any of the arguments against the creation-story of the Bible, and Atheists can well know the Biblical account of

Creation; still, this cannot even address, let alone solve, their dispute, for they seem to argue on the same notion of what should be regarded as 'compelling evidence'.

Differently from other cases we have encountered in this chapter, here Wittgenstein would seem to endorse a form of epistemic relativism that leads toward unsolvable disagreement between communities committed to different worldviews. A problem which is further complicated by the fact that Christian believers are not a fictional, isolated, small or past human community; on the contrary they are, even if under different denominations, the largest religion in the world. Following Wittgenstein's account, this would imply that a considerable part of humankind has a different notion of what terms such as 'rationality', 'evidence' and 'telling reason' mean.

Wittgenstein had an ongoing interest in religious language and beliefs, which is attested in several writings such as the *Tractatus* and his *Lectures* in the 30s; however, his thought on these subjects is far from systematic and has created a huge debate that will be impossible to summarise here[31]. Nonetheless, (see Coliva 2010) for our present purposes it is worth considering what he writes in the following two works, namely *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough* (henceforth GB) and *Culture and Value* (henceforth CV).

In GB, Wittgenstein strongly criticises Frazer's views on religion and mythology, influenced by the latter's positivist and agnostic views on these subjects. As per Frazer, in fact, all mythological, magical and religious beliefs can be considered as a sort of proto-science, a first and imperfect attempt of humankind to make sense of and control the forces of nature; as such, these beliefs should be abandoned as outdated in light of the discoveries of more reliable epistemic practices such as modern science.

Wittgenstein's verdict on Frazer's treatment of religious and magical beliefs is trenchant and critical; "Frazer", he writes, "is much more savage than most of his savages, for they are not as far removed from the understanding of spiritual matter as a twentieth-century Englishman. His explanations of primitive practices are much cruder than the meaning of these practices themselves" (GB, 131). This is so because to treat religious or magical practices as a sort of imperfect proto-science, which can

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[31] A good starting point to understand this debate is Nielsen, Kai and D.Z. Phillips (2005).

be criticised and considered 'false' in light of scientific explanations, will simply miss both their point and their meaning:

> The nonsense here is that Frazer represents these people [i.e. religious believers] as if they had a completely false (even insane) idea of the course of nature, whereas they only possess a peculiar interpretation of the phenomena. That is, if they were to write it down, their knowledge of nature would not differ fundamentally from ours. Only their magic is (GB, 141).

As per Wittgenstein, magical and religious beliefs respond to concerns at odds with scientific ones; hence, what is different between a religious and a non-religious person is not the notion of rationality, or the level of knowledge and education but rather the interpretation or the meaning attributed to a particular event, activity or symbol. For instance, in his book Frazer considers religious or magical beliefs in human sacrifices as a way to improve and maintain the productivity of the soil; thus, as a barbarous and wholly ineffective form of modern agricultural science. Moreover, he applies a similar method to several religious beliefs and cosmological views, both pre-Christian and Christian, in order to dismiss them as mere errors (GB 119); on the contrary, Wittgenstein argues, religious and magical beliefs and practices *express a worldview*, the general outlook on life of a human culture, with its expectations and spiritual needs which cannot be properly understood, let alone criticised or dismissed, when reduced to the expression of a pre-scientific and mostly fallacious thinking:

> [N]o phenomenon is in itself particularly mysterious, but any of them can become so to us, and the characteristic feature of the awakening mind of man is precisely the fact that the phenomenon comes to have meaning for him. One could almost say that man is a ceremonial animal. That is, no doubt, partly wrong and partly nonsensical, but there is also something right about it. But then it is nonsense for one to go on to say that the characteristic feature of these actions is the fact that they arise from faulty views about the physics of things. (Frazer does this when he says that magic is essentially false physics or, as the case may be, false medicine, technology, etc.). Rather, the characteristic feature of ritualistic action is not at all a view, an opinion,

whether true or false, although an opinion- a belief- can itself be ritualistic and part of a rite (GB, 129) .

As has been pointed out by Coliva (2010, 12-13), here Wittgenstein makes an important distinction between opinions and theories from one side and symbolic and religious elements of a ritual on another. Religious and magical thought have symbolic and ritual elements which make them different from scientific thinking; thus, their comparison is misleading in the first place, for science and religious practices have different aims and different concerns. With this point in mind, we can now go back to what Wittgenstein says with regard to the disagreement we have considered in this section, namely the 'Theist vs. Atheist' case:

> [Catholic] dogma is expressed in the form of an assertion, and is unshakable, *but at the same time any practical opinion can be made to harmonize with it; admittedly more easily in some cases than in others.* It is not a wall setting limits to what can be believed, but more like a brake which, however, practically serves the same purpose; it's almost as though someone were to attach a weight to your foot to restrict your freedom of movement. This is how dogma becomes irrefutable and beyond the reach of attack (CV, 28, my italics).

While the rejection of our everyday 'hinges' such as 'I have a body or 'There are external objects' will undermine the very notion of rational agency along with our most basic epistemic practices, Theistic beliefs are compatible with our everyday 'common-sense certainties'; this is so because religion and science are different practices with different aims, thus they do not overlap and are not supposed to do so[32].

Recall the 'Odd Wood Seller' case we have encountered *supra*. When facing a community whose 'language games' are radically different from ours, such as a tribe which sells wood not by the cubic metre but by the area covered, as per Wittgenstein, we have two possibilities. The first is that they are using an unreliable method of

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[32] This view, held by both most mainstream Christian denominations and the scientific community, has been, however, criticized by the proponents of the so-called 'Intelligent Design' theory, defended in different forms by authors such as Michael Behe (1996, 2007) and William Dembsky (1998, 1999, 2004, 2009, 2010), for which Creationism is a viable scientific theory to explain the origin of the world. However, these and similar views are extremely controversial and have resulted in a heated debate whose reconstruction would fall beyond the scope of this essay.

measuring wood, thus they can be convinced of the untrustworthiness of their method of measurement and adopt ours. A second option goes as follows: what from our perspective looks like an unreliable method for measuring wood is an altogether different practice, with a complete different role and meaning within the 'Odd Wood Sellers' tribe. Thus, also in this case, the disagreement between our and their communities can be easily dissolved, for there is nothing to disagree about in the first place: what we consider an improper method for measuring wood is not a method for measuring wood at all.

Similarly, Theistic beliefs about Creation *ex nihilo* are not meant to be a scientific explanation or to compete with contemporary scientific views on the origin of the world; this is so because scientific and religious thinking are concerned with different questions and have different aims, also expressed in different languages. Accordingly, even in this case there is no unsolvable disagreement at all, for on closer inspection what looked as a 'cultural clash' is nothing but the result of a misguided comparison between unrelated language games.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this chapter, I have argued that Wittgenstein's remarks on the structure of reason can help us to dismiss epistemic relativism as the result of a misleading way of representing the nature and aim of our epistemic practices. I have maintained that all the cases of apparent unsolvable disagreement between communities committed to radically different 'hinges' are either solvable or pseudo-problems; this is so because these disagreements are either based on lack of knowledge, thus can be solvable using entirely rational means such as education and training, or stem from misguided comparisons between constitutively different language games.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this work I have argued that Wittgenstein's remarks on 'hinges' and the structure of reason, once correctly understood and developed, represent both an alternative to and an improvement of the dominant anti-skeptical strategies.

In order to do so, in the first chapter I discussed two influential ways of dealing with the skeptical paradox, namely the 'relevant alternative' strategy and G.E. Moore ant-skeptical attempts.

Both these lines of argument have to face a number of serious concerns. If the Dretske-Nozick proposal implies the rejection of Closure, which appears to many commentators as an unsustainable position, Moore's anti-skeptical accounts have been generally considered as unviable anti-skeptical solutions for several reasons.

In particular, PEW has generally been considered both unnecessary and unconvincing. Unconvincing because, following the skeptical argument, Moore cannot know the premises of his Proof; unnecessary because PEW can, so to say, 'work' only in the context of our ordinary epistemic practices, thus so when no skeptical scenario can sensibly be hypothesized.

Despite its shortcomings, in the recent literature on skepticism we can find a number of influential anti-skeptical proposals informed by Moore's epistemology; I have presented and discussed them and I have argued that all these accounts, with the exception of the safety-based 'Neo-Moorean' approach, are unable to face the skeptical challenge. Moreover, I have shown that even if 'Neo-Mooreanism' can rule out skeptical worries it will nonetheless have significant negative consequences with regard to the value of our ordinary knowledge claims.

After this long survey of competing anti-skeptical positions, I presented Wittgenstein's main criticisms against Moore's epistemology and sketched the main features of his anti-skeptical reflections. This has helped me to highlight the differences between Moore's /'Neo-Mooreans'' and Wittgenstein's treatment of skepticism; while Moore and the 'Neo-Mooreans' aim to show, *contra* the skeptic, that we can know the denials of skeptical hypotheses, for Wittgenstein both Cartesian skepticism and Moore's anti-skeptical attempts are the result of a systematic misuse of both the expressions 'to know' and 'to doubt', of a misleading way of representing

the structure of a rational inquiry and of a misunderstanding of the role played by 'hinges' such as 'I have a body' or 'There are external objects' in our system of beliefs.

After sketching the uncontentious aspects of Wittgenstein's remarks, I presented and discussed the dominant readings of OC, in order to see whether they represent plausible interpretation of Wittgenstein's thought and viable anti-skeptical strategies. I have argued that none of them is able to face the Cartesian skeptical challenge or offer a satisfactory interpretation of Wittgenstein's epistemology.

As a matter of fact, despite their differences, all the 'Wittgenstein-inspired' strategies I have considered share a common feature: namely, they are focused on particular aspects of Wittgenstein's thought. And this undermines both their plausibility and their anti-skeptical strength; this is so because Wittgenstein's remarks on the misuse of the expression 'to know', his considerations of the epistemic status of 'hinges' and the structure of reason are all constitutive parts of his strategy, but once isolated from one another they lose the powerful anti-skeptical strengths which can be extracted from OC.

Moreover, while presenting McGinn's 'Framework reading' of OC and Williams' 'Wittgensteinian contextualism' I argued that an account of the structure of reason based on the notion of 'hinges' can license a sort of epistemic relativism, whose consequences are no more reassuring than skepticism itself.

I then considered a more plausible interpretation of Wittgenstein's OC, namely Moyal-Sharrock's 'non-epistemic' account. Even if more promising than the other 'OC inspired' anti-skeptical proposals I have considered in this work, I have argued that this reading cannot represent a viable anti-skeptical strategy either. This is so because following this strategy we will be forced either to reject the Closure principle, thus inheriting the problems of the Dretske-Nozick's line, or to agree with skeptical conclusions. Similar to Williams' 'Wittgensteinian contextualism' and McGinn's 'framework reading', Moyal-Sharrock's account can also lead to unbearable relativistic implications.

However, Moyal-Sharrock's analogy between 'hinges' and 'rules of grammar is the starting point for my own non-propositional account of 'hinges', which I developed and defended in Chapter 6. Roughly, I have argued that rules of grammar

have a normative rather than a descriptive role in our system of beliefs, and thus cannot be sensibly questioned or denied; accordingly, following Wittgenstein's remarks on 'hinges' and the structure of reason, we should be able to get rid of skeptical hypotheses as nonsensical, even if apparently meaningful, combinations of signs. This has led me to dismiss Cartesian-style skepticism as the result of a *logical error*. According to a proponent of Cartesian skeptical arguments our epistemic practices are based on propositional beliefs or set of beliefs, which can be supported by evidence or questioned when skeptical scenarios are in play; on the contrary, our language games rest on non-propositional *rules of grammar*, which are not in the market for propositional knowledge but are subject to a different epistemic standing, namely *understanding* or *'mastery of techniques'*.

Finally, I have argued that, differently from the other 'Wittgenstein-inspired' proposals, a non-propositional account so construed will help us to dismiss epistemic relativism rather than license it. This is so because following Wittgenstein's account of the structure of reason all the cases of apparent unsolvable disagreement between epistemic communities committed to radically different 'hinges' are either solvable or *pseudo-problems*, based on a misleading way of representing the nature and aims of our language-games.

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AWL *Wittgenstein's Lectures, Cambridge 1932–35, from the Notes of Alice Ambrose and Margaret MacDonald*, ed. Alice Ambrose ,Blackwell, Oxford, 1979.

BB *The Blue and Brown Books* ,Blackwell, Oxford, 1958.

BT *The Big Typescript*, tr. C. G. Luckhardt and M. A. E. Aue,Blackwell, Oxford, 2004.

CE 'Cause and Effect: Intuitive Awareness', repr. in *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Philosophical Occasions 1912–1951*, ed. J. Klagge and A. Nordmann, pp. 370–426,Hackett, Indianapolis and Cambridge, 1993.

CL *Cambridge Letters*, ed. Brian McGuinness and G. H. von Wright ,Blackwell, Oxford, 1995.

CV *Culture and Value*, ed. G. H. von Wright in collaboration with H. Nyman, tr. P. Winch ,Blackwell, Oxford, 1980.

GB 'Remarks on Frazer's "Golden Bough" ', tr. J. Beversluis, repr. In *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Philosophical Occasions 1912–1951*, ed. J. Klagge and A. Nordmann (Hackett, Indianapolis and Cambridge, 1993), pp. 118–55.

IMT *Introduction to Mathematical Thinking*, F. Waismann, tr. T. J. Benac Hafner, London, 1951.

LA *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Beliefs*, ed. C. Barrett, Blackwell, Oxford, 1970.

LFM *Wittgenstein's Lectures on the Foundations of Mathematics, Cambridge 1939*, ed. C. Diamond, Harvester Press, Sussex, 1976.

LPM *Lectures on the Philosophy of Mathematics*, F. Waismann, ed. with an introduction by W. Grassl,Rodopi, Amsterdam, 1982.

LPP *Wittgenstein's Lectures on Philosophical Psychology 1946 –47*, notes by P. T. Geach, K. J. Shah and A. C. Jackson, ed. P. T. Geach,Harvester Wheatsheaf, Hemel Hempstead, 1988.

LSD 'The Language of Sense Data and Private Experience', notes taken by R. Rhees of Wittgenstein's lectures, 1936, *Philosophical Investigations* 7 pp. 1–45, 101–40, 1984.

LWL *Wittgenstein's Lectures, Cambridge 1930–32, from the Notes of John King*

and Desmond Lee, ed. Desmond Lee Blackwell, Oxford, 1980.

M   G. E. Moore's notes entitled ' Wittgenstein's Lectures in 1930–33', repr. in *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Philosophical Occasions 1912–1951*, ed. J. Klagge and A. Nordmann pp. 46–114,Hackett, Indianapolis and Cambridge, 1993.

LPE   'Wittgenstein's Notes for Lectures on "Private Experience" and "Sense Data" ed. R. Rhees, repr. in *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Philosophical Occasions 1912– 1951*, ed. J. Klagge and A. Nordmann, pp. 202–88, (Hackett, Indianapolis and Cambridge, 1993.

LW I   *Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology*, vol. I, ed. G. H. von Wright and H. Nyman, tr. C. G. Luckhardt and M. A. E. Aue,Blackwell,Oxford, 1982.

NB   *Notebooks 1914 –16*, ed. G. H. von Wright and G. E. M. Anscombe, tr. G. E. M. Anscombe 2nd edn, Blackwell, Oxford, 1979.

PG   *Philosophical Grammar*, ed. R. Rhees, tr. A. J. P. Kenny (Blackwell, Oxford, 1974). RR *Discussions of Wittgenstein*, by R. Rhees,Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1970.

PI   *Philosophical Investigations*, revised 4th edn edited by P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte, tr. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte ,Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford, 2009.

PO   *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Philosophical Occasions 1912–1951*, ed. J. Klagge and A. Nordmann, Hackett, Indianapolis and Cambridge, 1993.

PPF   *Philosophy of Psychology – A Fragment* published in *Philosophical Investigations*, revised 4th edn edited by P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte, tr. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte, Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford, 2009.

PR   *Philosophical Remarks*, ed. R. Rhees, tr. R. Hargreaves and R. White, Blackwell, Oxford, 1975.

PTLP *Proto-Tractatus – An Early Version of Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, ed. B. F. McGuinness, T. Nyberg and G. H. von Wright, tr. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness,Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1971.

OC   *On Certainty*, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, tr.D. Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe,Blackwell, Oxford, 1969.

RC   *Remarks on Colour*, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, tr. L. L. McAlister and M. Schättle,Blackwell, Oxford, 1977.

RFM   *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, ed. G. H. von Wright, R. Rhees, G. E. M. Anscombe, rev. edn,Blackwell, Oxford, 1978.

RLF   'Some Remarks on Logical Form', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, suppl. vol. 9, pp. 162–71,1929.

RPP I   *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, vol. I, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, tr. G. E. M. Anscombe, Blackwell, Oxford, 1980.

RPP II   *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, vol. II, ed. G. H. von Wright and H. Nyman, tr. C. G. Luckhardt and M. A. E. Aue,Blackwell, Oxford, 1980.

TLP   *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, tr. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1961.

Z   *Zettel*, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, tr. G. E. M. Anscombe Blackwell, Oxford, 1967.

VoW   *The Voices of Wittgenstein*, transcribed and edited by Gordon Baker, tr. Gordon Baker, Michael Mackert, John Connolly and Vasilis Politis, Routledge, London, 2003.

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