

Chapter 6: Naturalism and Skepticism¹

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Introduction

The problem of the external world can be understood, broadly, as the problem how we can know, or justifiably believe, that there is an external world on the basis of sense experience. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1787) Kant famously wrote:

it remains a scandal to philosophy and to human reason in general that the existence of things outside 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.²

Modern philosophy has, from its beginning in Descartes's *Meditations*³, been haunted by the threat posed by skepticism and the demand to find a "satisfactory proof" of the external world. Presumably such a proof would argue from premises to which the skeptic is, or must be, committed, to the conclusion that there is an external world having many of the features that we pre-theoretically believe that it has. Call this the project of refuting the skeptic.⁴

Repeated efforts have been made to refute skepticism by appeal to God (Descartes⁵), necessary conditions of sense

experience (Kant⁶), common sense (Moore⁷), inference to the best explanation (Harman⁸), a contextualist account of knowledge (Cohen⁹) and an argument based on self-knowledge and content-externalism (Warfield¹⁰). Despite their interest and ingenuity these attempts have been uniformly disappointing. Either they, implicitly or explicitly, beg the skeptic's question without explaining why they are entitled to do so. Or, in their efforts to rationally reconstruct human knowledge on a basis of certainties or necessary conditions or explanatory posits, they tend to put a false cast on the very justification and knowledge they are trying to defend.

Against the background of the many failures of the enterprise of refuting the skeptic, one might have expected that what Kant called a "scandal to philosophy" would be even more acutely felt. Surprisingly, quite the reverse is the case, so much so, that those who take skepticism seriously can complain of philosophy's unearned insouciance in the face of the undiminished challenge of skepticism.¹¹ What accounts for this philosophical indifference and relative lack of concern about an issue that was of central importance for almost all the major early modern philosophers?

A large part of the answer can be found in the rise of *scientific naturalism* (henceforth, simply "naturalism") and its status nowadays as a philosophical orthodoxy.

Naturalism, understood broadly as the view that the account of nature provided by the natural sciences is our only guide as to what genuinely, or unproblematically, exists and/or to what is genuinely, or unproblematically, known, is widely popular within contemporary analytic philosophy.¹² The attraction of this doctrine is due in no small part to a conception of naturalism as providing a quite distinctive way of responding to the skeptic. As Richard Fumerton has put it,

the naturalist epistemology seems moved, in large part, by the conviction that it is only by taking a naturalistic turn that the epistemologist can avoid massive skepticism.¹³

Inspired by Hume, who said that "nature breaks the force of all skeptical arguments in time"¹⁴ and, more recently, by Quine, who remarked that "sceptical doubts are scientific doubts,"¹⁵ the naturalist has become supremely confident that naturalism, even if it cannot refute skepticism, at least provides a distinctive response that undermines the threat that it poses.

Naturalism is widely supposed to provide what I shall call a *quietist* response to the skeptic.¹⁶ The aim of quietism is not to refute the skeptic but to entitle oneself not to need to.¹⁷ This is a laudable ambition and, in contrast to the project of refutation, seems to stand a real chance of success. What is required in order to earn the right not to answer the skeptic is, presumably, a demonstration that there is something defective about the skeptical problem. Different versions of quietism are distinguished by their different accounts about where the defect lies, whether it is a matter of the sensicality of the skeptic's premises, their motivation, or their theoretical presuppositions. In all cases, if quietism is to be convincing it must explain why, in spite of the defect in the way the skeptic raises his question, it could have seemed to have been a legitimate problem that we had no option but to answer.

The main aim of the present paper is to argue that naturalism does not have the resources to expound a satisfactory quietist response to the skeptic. Consequently, the naturalists' confidence in being able to engage in post-skeptical epistemology is misplaced. Moreover, I hope to show that far from providing a satisfactory response to skepticism, naturalism in fact plays right into the

skeptic's hands. Naturalism is, as I shall put it, *inherently skeptical*. This is not to say that naturalism inevitably leads to skepticism. The claim is, rather, that naturalism can only resist skepticism dogmatically, by begging the question against skepticism.

The paper is divided into two sections. In Section 1 I discuss Hume's extension of naturalist explanation to the workings of the human mind and the central role given within this account to efficient causal explanations. The relevance of this discussion to contemporary concerns is this: it shows how naturalist reflection upon sense experience (henceforth, simply experience) naturally gives rise to the threat of external world skepticism. We might call this *Hume's Insight* since Hume was acutely aware that the results of his natural science of man led naturally (and, he thought, unanswerably) to skepticism with regard to the external world, causation and the self, amongst other things. In the present paper I shall only be concerned with the first of these and the term "skepticism" will refer to external world skepticism throughout.

In Section 2 I consider three representative and influential contemporary naturalist responses to skepticism, two associated with the work of Quine and the third with that of Strawson. I argue that these attempts to fashion a

naturalistic quietism all fail. Assuming that the prospects of a refutation of skepticism are dim, the naturalist can neither answer nor undermine the skeptical challenge that the naturalistic world-view naturally invites. The common conception of the relation between naturalism and skepticism is the reverse of the truth. Naturalism is not the cure, but one cause, of skepticism.

Section 1: Hume and the Origin of Naturalism

Hume is one of the first and most representative of modern naturalists.¹⁸ In this section I should like to consider a line of Hume's thought leading from naturalism to skepticism. I want to show that this argument retains its force even if we give up certain of Hume's questionable assumptions, in particular, his residual commitment to dualism and an empiricist conception of experience.

In the introduction to the *Treatise* (1740) Hume proposes a radically new alternative to the old method of "metaphysical reasonings" (p. xiv) according to which the traditional metaphysician would presume to establish a priori and once for all the presuppositions, extent and limits of what exists and what is known. The alternative, which Hume calls "experimental philosophy" (p. xvi), is the view that in considering philosophical questions about such

things as existence and knowledge, philosophy ought to employ scientific, or broadly empirical, methods of inquiry. The touchstone of the naturalist is the claim that philosophy ought to employ the methods of "experience and observation" (p. xvi) and "careful and exact experiments" (p. xvii). A representative contemporary naturalist, Quine, inherits this conception, arguing that naturalism is "the recognition that it is within science itself, and not in some prior philosophy, that reality is to be identified and described."¹⁹ It follows that, for the naturalist, all dualisms and realities posited and supported on purely a priori grounds are rejected as super-natural.

The Science of Man

An important motivation for naturalism is the idea that human beings do not stand over against nature but are, in fact, part of it. Naturalism holds that we are natural creatures and like other natural things we are susceptible to properly scientific forms of understanding by way of scientific methods of investigation. Hume regards the new "science of Man" (p. xv) as "the only solid foundation for the other sciences" (p. xvi), one that it is the central concern of the *Treatise* to articulate. According to this new

science, the method of studying the human mind is explicitly modelled on the scientific study of nature:

'Tis no astonishing reflection to consider, that the application of experimental philosophy to moral subjects should come after that to natural (p. xvi).

Just as the aim of the science of nature is to limn the causal structure of the universe and discover its principles so, too, the aim of the science of human nature is to discover universal causal principles or laws of the mind, and, in particular, to "explain the nature of the ideas we employ, and of the operations we perform in our reasonings" (p. xv).

Naturalists can be divided into two groups depending upon whether or not they hold that efficient causation is the sole criterion of ontological commitment. For some naturalists such as David Armstrong, entities are posited solely on the basis of playing a causal role, either being a cause or being caused.²⁰ The relevant notion of cause is efficient causation, something that brings about a change or difference in a law-like way.²¹ For this sort of naturalist, causation, as it were, carves nature at the joints and it is the job of science to describe the elements of nature and the causal laws that relate them.²² Of course, such a naturalist need not be committed to Hume's particular theory

of causation as a species of constant conjunction. For instance, there are prominent naturalists who regard causation as a relation of necessitation in the world.²³

Alternatively there are naturalists such as W. V. Quine who recognize non-causal abstract entities like numbers and sets on the ground that they are an indispensable part of the language of the natural sciences. In Quine's terms, since terms referring to such abstract objects figure in a properly regimented account of scientific knowledge, they exist on the grounds that the existential quantifier ranges over them. For present purposes, I shall leave the debate between these two versions of naturalistic ontology aside.²⁴

What is important for our purposes is that the naturalist, on either view, is committed to *a causal account of the mind*. The mind is thought of as nothing but a realm of efficient causal states, events and processes. And, giving up Hume's residual commitment to dualism--not Cartesian substance dualism but Hume's bundle dualism²⁵--most contemporary naturalists would say that these causal states, events and processes are realized in the brain or body.

Hume's Insight

In Hume's thought, the empiricist conception of experience as a direct awareness of mind-dependent "impressions" is treated as a consequence of the application of, and so a part of, his naturalism. Hume has traditionally been thought of as drawing a skeptical conclusion from the empiricist tradition, demonstrating that if we are directly aware of impressions in the mind, as British Empiricists such as Locke and Berkeley believed, then there is no plausible non-question-begging argument to show that the external world exists or, if it does, that it "resembles" our impressions.²⁶ If we accept that empiricism is a part of naturalism, then we cannot avoid concluding that reflection upon naturalism naturally (or reasonably or intuitively) leads to skepticism.

But contemporary naturalists block this inference. In contrast to Hume, they distinguish commitment to an empiricist account of experience from commitment to naturalism. Since the vast majority of contemporary naturalists do not follow Hume in thinking of experience as a matter of being confronted by mind-dependent "impressions," they can acknowledge the connection between empiricism and skepticism without thinking that this has any skeptical implications for a naturalism freed from Hume's mistakes.

On the standard reading, then, Hume demonstrated the bankruptcy of the British Empiricist tradition by showing how the consistent development of classical empiricism leads, inevitably and unanswerably, to a radical skepticism about the external world.²⁷ Naturalism can then be thought of as Hume's response to an empiricist-generated skepticism.²⁸ However, there is reason to think that the standard reading is seriously flawed. Apart from misinterpreting Hume's conception of the relation of naturalism and skepticism, this reading overlooks the fact that Hume discerned more than one route to skepticism from reflection upon a naturalist conception of experience.

Naturalists, in the broadly Humean tradition of thinking about the mind, are committed to what I shall call *the causal model of experience*. This is the view that sense experience can be decomposed into two components: 1) an inner component which carries no existential commitment to the existence of any external object (call this subjective experience)²⁹; and 2) an efficient cause (for example, an external object) that produces subjective experience. According to the causal model, the mind, thought of as an inner realm, and the world, thought of as an external realm, are separated by an efficient causal gap. As we shall see,

it is this feature of the model that invites skeptical challenge.

It is well-known that Hume interpreted this model along empiricist lines, treating the inner component as mind-dependent "impressions," and following Berkeley in rejecting Locke's account of the "resemblance" of impressions and external objects. However, it is important to see that the causal model, as I have characterized it, is independent of any empiricist assumptions about how we are to understand subjective experience. The naturalist need not think in terms of the impressions or sense-data of the empiricist tradition. He may prefer treating subjective experience as bearing an externally directed intentional content given by a that-clause. Or he may think of subjective experience along adverbialist lines, in which experiencing a red square is treated as experiencing red-ly and square-ly.³⁰ And there are no doubt other options.

For present purposes, we can think of the causal model in abstraction from these various theoretical differences about the nature of subjective experience. Understood in this theoretically neutral way, the causal model of experience is a minimal consequence of the naturalists' commitment to the causal account of the mind, one that is

compatible with both direct realism and representative realism in the philosophy of perception.

I now want to argue that, quite apart from any allegiance to classical empiricism, the naturalists' causal model of experience is inherently skeptical, by which I mean that there is an *intuitive* route from naturalist premises to a skeptical conclusion. Consequently, it is a mistake to think that in moving beyond a classical empiricist conception of experience, naturalism insulates itself from the threat of skepticism. As we shall see, Hume comes very close to demonstrating that reflection upon the causal model naturally leads to skepticism, which bears out Hume's Insight that naturalism is inherently skeptical.

The Skeptical Implications of the Causal Model of Experience

Consider this passage:

By what argument can it be proved, that the perceptions of the mind must be caused by external objects, entirely different from them, though resembling them (if that be possible) and could not arise either from the energy of the mind itself, or from the suggestion of some invisible and unknown spirit, or from some other cause still more unknown to us? It is acknowledged, that, in fact, many of these perceptions arise not from anything external, as in

dreams, madness, and other diseases . . . The mind has never anything present to it but the perceptions, and cannot possibly reach any experience of their connexion with objects. The supposition of such a connexion is, therefore, without any foundation in reasoning.³¹

If we replace Hume's reference to "perceptions" by theoretically neutral "subjective experiences" then we can reconstruct the main line of thought here as follows. It is part of our understanding of efficient causation that *the very same effect can have indefinitely many causes*. In accordance with the causal model of experience, we can think of our subjective experiences from the 1st-person perspective as a temporally extended stream of inner effects. If one asks "What is the cause of these experiential effects?" from this internal perspective then the mere existence of a causal relation to some cause or other provides no clue. The fact that a particular effect, say, fire, occurs tells us nothing about what actually caused it to occur; whether it was a match, a cigarette, lightning, a chemical reaction or something else. Similarly, what we pre-theoretically assume is the cause of our subjective experiences may be quite different from what actually causes them. The existence of a causal law is no

help either if our only basis for its existence presupposes that some of our appearances are caused by the objects that they are apparently about. For what is in question is precisely what justifies such a presupposition.

We might conclude that from a consideration of the mere fact that we are sensuously confronted by such and such inner effects in consciousness, the looseness or indefiniteness of the causal relation does allow us to say what caused them. The cause could be a familiar external object but it could also be, as Hume puts it, "the mind itself," or some "unknown spirit," or "some other cause still more unknown to us." ³²

In this way the naturalist can make perfectly good sense of the skeptical possibilities. On the naturalists' own reckoning, skeptical possibilities are alternative causal hypotheses capable, in principle, of accounting for the entire history of one's inner experiences. Illusions, dreams and hallucinations can serve to help illustrate this point but they are inessential. All we require is a scenario in which we are caused to have the very same subjective experiences by some peculiar power of our own minds or by some "world" quite unlike the world we believe in: for example, the brain-in-a-vat scenario.

The idea that there is an efficient causal gap between the mind and world plays a large part in explaining the motivation for skepticism, and especially in helping to provide a plausible explanation of how we could have the very same thoughts and experiences even if the external world had few of the features we believe it to have, or even if it did not exist.³³ The idea that the very same experiential states, when considered from the 1st-person perspective, could have been produced by one of an indefinitely large number of sets of causal antecedents, strongly supports the view that the content of such states does not depend upon any conditions external to one's mind. These causal considerations lead us to think that we could understand and individuate our subjective experiences, understood as inner effects, in complete independence of the external world that, we presume, causes them.³⁴

This is a perceptual form of what has come to be known as *individualism*: the view that one's mental states and processes (including those that are intentional or representational) can, in principle, be individuated in complete independence of the existence or nature of the external world (including, of course, the social world).³⁵ Supposing we can acquire basic sensory concepts on the basis of subjective experiences independently of the external

world, then it seems possible to acquire other concepts by virtue of reference-fixing descriptions that employ these basic concepts. In other words, local individualism with regard to experience can provide a plausible basis for the global individualism that is presupposed by the intelligibility of the skeptical problem.

The naturalist will, no doubt, resist the claim that we do not know the causes of our subjective experiences by saying that we ordinarily assume that perception is a *reliable* source of beliefs about our environment. That is, we assume that our inner experiences are generally, and for the most part, caused by the external objects that they are, apparently, experiences of; or, at least, we assume this in *core* cases of perception, those regarding medium-sized objects under normal conditions of observation.

Of course, it is precisely the naturalists' assumption of the epistemic reliability of perception that the skeptic questions. He asks, "What reason do we have for believing that perception is a reliable (that is, mostly true) source of beliefs?" Once perception is thought of as an awareness of a subjective experience whose cause may be any one of indefinitely many causes, then the claim that the cause is the external world rather than whatever it is according to

one or other of the skeptical hypotheses, seems dogmatic and ad hoc.

Especially so, when we consider that the naturalist is committed to the view that the scientific image of the world, as Sellars famously called it, is the last word as to what, properly speaking, exists and what, properly speaking, is known.³⁶ In considering how we are to conceive the world that is manifest to the senses and common sense we face a stark choice. In so far as the manifest image diverges from the scientific image, we must either translate or reduce its features to those of the more austere scientific image, or else convict the manifest image of error and illusion--perhaps with the qualification that it is instrumentally useful.³⁷ According to the majority of naturalists, natural science tells us that ordinary folk are in error in thinking that sensory qualities (for example, colours) are objective features of the world. Rather, such features of the manifest image of the world are considered to be a "projection" of the mind onto the world.

This projective metaphysics implies that there is a systematic causal mismatch between mind and world, between the contents of subjective experience and the actual nature of the world that is causally responsible for them. That thought can only strengthen the skeptical case for

questioning our assumption of perceptual reliability. The requirement for a rational justification of so important an epistemic assumption seems, especially in this context, entirely appropriate. Yet, as the history of modern philosophy attests, we seem unable to satisfy it.

What I take the foregoing argument to show is that there is a natural (intuitive, reasonable) route from naturalistic premises to a skeptical conclusion. I have not claimed that this is a valid deductive argument, so a naturalist is not inevitably a skeptic. I do not deny that a naturalist can block the argument I have offered in a number of different ways. The point of the argument is to make plausible the claim that naturalism can only avoid skepticism dogmatically. So long as the naturalist must at some point in his reasoning presuppose that appearances do, at least sometimes, provide us access to external reality, then he simply begs the skeptic's question.

I shall not now attempt to show that this is true of every naturalistic attempt to answer the skeptic--although I think it is strongly suggested by the naturalist denial of empirically indefeasible a priori truths and the assumption of at least some a posteriori scientific knowledge.³⁸ But supposing that it is true, then the situation is as follows.

From a naturalist perspective, anti-skepticism is no more or less reasonable than skepticism.³⁹ Reason does not favour either side in this debate. Is such a result acceptable to a naturalist? It is not, since, as ancient skepticism has taught us, the skeptic wins the stand-off in which reason counts no more in favour of a given conclusion than in its denial. In such a situation neither side can properly claim to be rationally justified. For the skeptic who sees himself as uncommitted to any substantial doctrine--one who works dialectically from within the naturalistic world view⁴⁰--this is a perfectly acceptable conclusion. But surely the naturalist cannot similarly admit that his position cannot finally claim to be rationally justified.

Section 2: Naturalist Responses to Skepticism

The main aim of the present paper is to explore the feasibility of a naturalistic quietism but, before I do that, there is one version of refutation that I must briefly discuss, namely, inference to the best explanation--if only because it has been described as "perhaps the best skepticism-rebutting argument in favour of the existence of body."⁴¹ What is at issue here is an inference to the existence of the external world as the best explanation of

the coherence, order or regularity of our subjective experiences. There is, of course, nothing wrong with inference to the best explanation as a form of inference. The problem is with its application in the special context of skepticism. Specifically, I deny that subjective experience *has* the coherence, order or regularity that is thought to stand in need of explanation.⁴² Of course, what our experiences are of is orderly events in the external world. But we cannot infer from that that the experiences that report such events are *themselves* orderly. Think of visual experience and the way it is interrupted by blinking, quick side glances and so on. And note that we are not to appeal to such facts as that we are experiencing things from a certain location and orientation. This would, of course, beg the very question at issue.

In the context of the skeptical challenge, we have to abstract away any assumptions about the environment, the body and the normal course of nature in considering our experiences themselves rather than the world they apparently present. I think once this is done it is clear that the hypothesis of an external world, far from explaining some intrinsic order in our experiences themselves, is itself required in order to make our experiences orderly. If one is inclined to say that the intentional content of one's

experiences is orderly I suspect one is really referring to the orderliness of the ordinary objects of perception.

For example, if we make no prior assumptions about an external world then when we are inclined to say that we seem to see a table, that could equally well be reported in this way: we seem to see a series of exactly similar tables which are replacing one another so quickly that one fails to notice. And, of course, we could think of further descriptions.

I have argued that one cannot refute the skeptic by appealing to inference to the best explanation. And other strategies have proven equally ineffectual. Suppose, then, that we come to admit that there is no way of refuting the skeptic.⁴³ Quietists, at least, see no calamity in acknowledging this. It seems a virtue of quietism that it concedes, at the outset, that we cannot provide the reasons that the skeptic demands of us. The quietists' aim is to show that there is no such requirement as we had thought because the skeptical problem is misconceived. As a way of progressing beyond what one might think of as the inevitably hopeless task of refuting the skeptic, quietism is a modest, but respectable, way of defusing the power of skepticism.

Different versions of quietism find fault with the skeptical problem in different places. The Rortian quietist

attempts to show that the skeptical problem depends upon a false representationalist picture of the mind.⁴⁴ The Wittgensteinian quietist attempts to show that the skeptical problem is subtly incoherent.⁴⁵ But I want to focus on a third version of quietism associated with naturalism.

Central to the appeal of naturalism is the claim that, in spite of our inability to answer the skeptic, naturalism can defuse the skeptical threat by showing that the skeptical problem is not well motivated. I shall now consider three influential responses that answer to this general description: those of Quine; the reliabilist tradition; and Strawson.

1) Quine's Response

It is possible to read Quine as simply turning his back on the traditional problem of the external world.⁴⁶ In particular, if we consistently replace any reference to conscious experience by reference to a physicalistic correlate such as neural stimulation, then there is no way of even formulating the traditional problem since there is no longer a contrast between the inner realm of experience and the outer world that it is apparently about.⁴⁷ But it seems ridiculous to deny or avoid the very existence of

perceptual consciousness⁴⁸; and there is ample evidence that, at least sometimes, Quine *does* mean to engage the traditional problem and that he does recognize the obvious truism that we enjoy subjective experience as of various objects. So, even if what follows does not represent the fully physicalized 3rd-personal perspective that Quine sometimes adopts, it does represent an important aspect of his thinking, one that has been very influential beyond the confines of his philosophy.

Quine's naturalistic response to the skeptic is summed up in the phrase "scepticism is the offshoot of science."⁴⁹ In this expression we can find both his diagnosis and cure. Quine regards the skeptic as one who assumes the truth of science in order to refute science. The skeptic's doubts are, we are told, really scientific doubts that rest on accepting a number of facts, observations and memories regarding such things as bent sticks in water, towers in the distance, mirages, after-images and dreams. The cure is to realize that circularity is, in spite of long tradition of resistance to it, no problem at all. In the justification of science the naturalist, like the skeptic, relies on science, if necessary, re-shaping it as he sees fit.

I think it is clear that we should not read Quine as saying that a naturalist is entitled to argue in a circle,

for that presupposes that the naturalist aims to answer the skeptic. He is better read as saying that the skeptic cannot rightly ask his question about the rational justification of empirical knowledge in general without relying on some empirical knowledge. In short, there is no general question, of the sort that the skeptic imagines, to answer. Once we see that the skeptic's formulation of his problem is at fault, it simply lapses.

Unfortunately this response is inadequate for several reasons. In the first place, it trades on an ambiguity about the scope of skeptical doubt. Quine's position is that we cannot question all of our knowledge all at once. Afloat in Neurath's boat we can only question our knowledge piecemeal, the very act of questioning depending upon a provisional acceptance of some background knowledge. But the skeptic is perfectly happy to accept all of that. What the skeptic challenges is not all knowledge *überhaupt* but only knowledge of the world external to his mind. For instance, he does not doubt that he has knowledge of his own inner experience or of the meanings of the concepts that he employs in describing it. While it may be self-defeating to doubt all knowledge all at once, we can and do raise general skeptical questions about our cognitive grasp of the external world.

Furthermore, in asking his general questions Quine says that the skeptic is "overreacting" to our vulnerability to illusion.⁵⁰ He argues that "Illusions are illusions only relative to the acceptance of genuine bodies with which to contrast them."⁵¹ It is not clear what this means. Quine might mean that in order for there to be illusions we must count something as an instance of veridical perception. Perhaps it is true that we can only discover an illusion relative to taking something else as veridically perceived, but that does not imply that there could not be undetectable illusions. Furthermore, whilst it might be true that the concept of illusion depends upon the concept of veridical perception, that is not to say that the concept of a veridical perception has any genuine application.

In any case, Quine apparently overlooks the point that the skeptic need not appeal to the traditional argument from illusion. As we have seen, a more powerful argument for skepticism is based upon the naturalists' causal model of experience and the character of the causal gap between the mind and the world. This argument does not require any questionable inference from being wrong on occasion to the possibility of global error. So, in spite of Quine's claim to the contrary, the naturalist does not seem entitled to

deny that the skeptic's questions of rational justification are legitimate and well motivated.

2) The Reliabilist Response

Philosophers in the so-called Reliabilist tradition, such as Alvin Goldman and David Armstrong, have found the resources for another anti-skeptical response in Quine's famous remark that

Epistemology, or something like it, simply falls into place as a chapter of psychology and hence of natural science.⁵²

In Quine's view, traditional epistemology--roughly, the theory of how beliefs are rationally justified and what kind of rational justification constitutes knowledge--is to be superseded by a causal account of belief formation. The reliabilist can be thought of as replacing the skeptic's assumption that a rational justification for our beliefs must be internally available by the view that justification is a matter of whether a belief has been produced by a reliable process, say, by being caused by the fact that it purports to represent.⁵³ A belief might be appropriately caused without its being the case that we know or believe that it is. On this account, there can be external justification for one's beliefs via a reliable procedure

without any requirement that such justification be internally available.

This response certainly provides a way of defending the claim that knowledge or justified belief is *possible* without our having, or being aware of, the kind of rational justification that the skeptic seeks. If the satisfaction of our cognitive aims depends upon the holding of some external condition that we need not be aware of, then, for all that the skeptic shows, it remains possible that we have indeed achieved our cognitive aims. But skepticism ought not to be thought of as primarily concerned with, or exhausted by, its challenge to the *possibility* of knowledge or justified belief.⁵⁴ As the ancient skeptics recognized, skepticism owes its devastating force to the way it challenges whether we have any good reason to think that we *actually* have knowledge or justified belief, as a matter of fact.⁵⁵ Attacking the possibility of knowledge is only one way of attacking the actuality of knowledge. And securing the possibility of knowledge still leaves open the question of its actuality. And the same goes for justified belief. Unless the naturalist can provide adequate reason for believing that his beliefs are produced by a reliable process (and citing his own reliability will be one such reason), then he is not entitled to regard them as

knowledge, or as externally justified, even by his own lights.⁵⁶

The naturalist thus finds himself facing a dilemma: 1) either he quixotically assumes, without reason, that perception is a source of mostly reliable beliefs; or 2) he (externally) justifies that perception is a reliable process by appealing to that very same process, the reliability of perception--a move that is iterable at higher and higher levels of belief. But neither position can provide a satisfying response to a skeptic who questions the underlying assumption of reliability. The naturalist cannot avoid the skeptical challenge by dogmatically assuming, at some point in his reasoning, that perception is a reliable belief-forming process.

3) Strawson's Neo-Humean Response

I shall finally turn to consider Strawson's naturalistic response to skepticism as developed in his *Skepticism and Naturalism: Some Varieties* (1985). The naturalist strategy, as Strawson explains it, is to earn the right to refuse to answer the skeptic by coming to appreciate the special character of the belief in the external world. There are two strands in Strawson's exposition. In the first place, Strawson appeals to Hume in

claiming that we are naturally and inescapably committed to this belief in such a way that reasoning is powerless to alter. Given our natural constitution we have no choice but to believe that the external world exists. Additionally, Strawson appeals to Wittgenstein in claiming that the belief in the external world is not open to doubt or question but forms an (almost) immutable part of the framework of our conceptual scheme--something he calls a "natural limit"⁵⁷--within which, and only within which, our rational capacities, including those of doubting and questioning, are exercised.

In articulating his position, Strawson quotes from Hume's with approval:

Nature, by an absolute and uncontroulable necessity has determin'd us to judge as well as to breathe and feel . . . Whoever has taken pains to refute the cavils of this total skepticism, has really disputed without an antagonist, and endeavour'd by arguments to establish a faculty, which nature has antecedently implanted in the mind, and render'd unavoidable.⁵⁸

As Strawson reads it, this passage suggests that since the belief in the existence of the external world is naturally "implanted" in the mind, its position in our cognitive life is fixed irrespective of how rationally persuasive the

skeptical argument against it is. Skepticism is a sham because there is quite simply no possibility of arguing oneself out of the belief in the external world.

Yet, it is important to see that this is not because the skeptical conclusion is logically illegitimate. According to Strawson there is no reason to deny that the skeptical argument is fully intelligible, and so, that its conclusion is, in some sense, genuinely possible.⁵⁹ The impossibility of accepting the skeptical conclusion is a natural psychological fact about us. The human mind is so constituted that we cannot fail to believe in the external world. Since it is an "inescapable natural commitment" (p. 13), there is no point in arguing against the skeptic. It is, Strawson explains,

[a] natural commitment . . . so profound that [it] stands fast, and may be counted on to stand fast, through all revolutions in scientific thought or social development. (p. 27)

Since we owe the belief in an external world to human nature, not reason, the skeptic is misguided in thinking that any serious consequences follow from a demonstration that this belief lacks rational justification. It cannot lead us to suspend or deny this belief for it belongs to a framework that we have no option but to presuppose in all

the operations of reason. On this ground Strawson enjoins us to see that skepticism "is idle, unreal, a pretence" (p. 19). There is quite simply no point in engaging in skeptical arguments or in the attempt to refute them.⁶⁰

An initial problem with this position is the positing of unrevisable framework beliefs. All Strawson offers in defence of this claim is Wittgenstein's so-called "theory of hinge propositions" in *On Certainty*.⁶¹ I shall leave aside discussion of the flaws in Strawson's exegesis of Wittgenstein except to remark that Wittgenstein repeatedly warns against reading him as holding any philosophical thesis.⁶² In any case, one might wonder how Strawson can appeal to a meta-level claim about the character of specific beliefs, since such claims will, on the naturalists' account, presumably be established empirically. Why are they not also undermined by the skeptical hypotheses? It is a weakness in Strawson's presentation not to provide any account of his entitlement to these theoretical claims about the character of natural belief.

Moreover, there is an internal conflict between unrevisability and the commitment to naturalism. In Quine's famous image of knowledge as a field of force even central elements in the field, such as mathematical statements and statements of logical laws, are not immune from revision.⁶³

Even those who do not follow Quine in entirely rejecting the notion of the a priori have tended to accept that the tradition was mistaken in conceiving of the a priori as unrevisable.⁶⁴ So this is a shaky basis for securing the immunity of natural belief from skeptical challenge.

Belief and Reason

More significantly, naturalists generally tend to overlook the internal relation that exists between belief and reason. For example, reliabilists replace the traditional concern with internalist rational justification with externalist non-rational justification. I shall first explain the connection between belief and reason-giving in some detail and then discuss how it bears upon Strawson's conception of natural belief.

To believe that P is, at a minimum, to be committed to the truth of P. It is to take P to be true. But we also know from past mistakes in judgement and the ever-present fact of disagreement with others that it is possible to believe what is, in fact, not true. So we are aware that taking-true is distinguishable from truth even though in the 1st-person present there is no such distinction to be drawn.

Belief is not simply an attitude of taking-true, however. If belief were merely taking-true then it could not be distinguished from other attitudes of taking-true such as assuming or hypothesizing or entertaining. Belief is distinguished from these attitudes by being governed by the norm of truth rather than, say, pragmatic norms. As David Velleman puts it: "An attitude's identity as a belief depends on its being regulated in a way designed to make it track the truth."⁶⁵ To believe involves a commitment to its being the case that one's truth-taking is regulated by what is in fact true. What performs this regulative function is the answerability of belief to rational criticism.⁶⁶ Of course, we sometimes accept something on faith, without any evidence or reasons. But our entitlement to think of any given belief as true, including a belief accepted on faith, depends on its being answerable to rational criticism should we acquire sufficient reason or evidence to suggest it may be false.

That helps explain why beliefs are states for which we are responsible in the sense that we can properly be criticized for the beliefs we hold. Doxastic responsibility depends upon the fact that, if occasion arises, we are obliged to engage in rational reflection of our beliefs in order to determine whether we are entitled to continue to

endorse them. Rational criticism plays a regulative role which we have some control over, helping to ensure that what we think is true is not mere guesswork or accident but genuinely tracks the truth. Our entitlement to regard our beliefs as true thus depends upon their openness to criticism and the way such criticism is conducted.

Let us consider how these considerations bear upon Strawson's account of natural belief. A natural belief is "implanted" and sustained by nature independently of reason or reasoning. No doubt we did not acquire all, or even most, of our beliefs on the basis of reasoning. For example, many beliefs are acquired non-inferentially on the basis of perception. The trouble with a natural belief is not its origin but the claim that we would continue to hold it irrespective of the results of any actual or possible rational criticism, even in the event of there being overwhelming evidence or reasons against it. The most compelling reasons to reject such a belief could not dislodge it. Yet, as a belief, it *must* be answerable to rational criticism. The skeptic trades upon this feature of belief by apparently demonstrating that we have a fundamental belief that we ought not to accept. Far from showing that skepticism is pointless, then, Strawson's position plays right into the skeptic's hands by picturing

us as holding an apparently unreasonable but psychologically irresistible belief.⁶⁷

Strawson admits that the skeptical question is perfectly intelligible and that the skeptical hypotheses are indeed relevant to the question of justification but instead of answering the skeptic he reminds us that the skeptical conclusion has no lasting impact upon our beliefs. But, as Hume saw, this psychological observation leaves the skeptic's question as pressing as it ever was whenever we are moved to reflect upon it. The sense that the skeptic is fully within his rights to raise his question of rational justification is left intact and this cannot but create a strange sense that our ordinary commitments involve us in unanswerable difficulties whenever we reflect upon their epistemic credentials. Rather than defusing skeptical anxieties, the naturalists' psychological observations point to a paradoxical clash of everyday life and naturalistic reflection upon it.⁶⁸

Conclusion

For those who are pessimistic about the possibility of refuting skepticism, the naturalist attempt to provide a quietist response seems admirable. The general aim of the

quietist is not to refute the skeptic but to undermine the skeptical problem itself. The present paper has argued that such quietism cannot properly be developed from within a naturalist perspective.

In order to show this I have rehearsed a slightly modified version of one of Hume's arguments in which a skeptical conclusion is derived from reflection upon the (efficient) causal model of experience to which naturalism is committed. This required us to abstract from certain of Hume's own assumptions, notably, his empiricist conception of experience. In this way I hope to have shown that Hume's Insight is vindicated: naturalism is, indeed, inherently skeptical. Naturalism naturally gives rise to skepticism and the naturalists' only way of answering such skepticism is to beg the skeptic's question. Radical skepticism is not, as naturalists tend to think, a dispensable feature of the new scientific account of man but its natural corollary.

The deep connection that exists between belief and reason-giving helps to account for the power of the skeptical problem. The skeptic demands a rational justification just where our reasons have given out: in the present case, for the assumption that perception is a source of mostly true beliefs. Both the reliabilist, who posits external justification by way of reliable processes, and

Strawson, who trades on (questionable) psychological facts about our belief in the external world, fail to undermine the apparent legitimacy of the skeptical concern with rational justification.

I have been imagining a skeptic who, for the sake of argument, takes on board the naturalist position and who, from within that position, finds good reason for denying its basic epistemic assumptions. Such a skeptic can happily accept that a dogmatic naturalist can resist skepticism. What he wants to show is simply that there is a persuasive argument for a skeptical conclusion from within the naturalist position; and that there is no way the naturalist can regard his own position as rationally justified without begging the skeptic's question. This dogmatic stance is surely an unsatisfactory position and at the very least shows that naturalism has not earned the right to refuse to answer skepticism.

If naturalism naturally gives rise to skepticism, then the claim that naturalism provides a satisfactory quietist response to the skeptic can be laid to rest. Its inherently skeptical character provides a strong incentive to re-examine the adequacy of naturalism and its pretension to provide a complete and satisfying account of the human mind.

NOTES

¹ Thanks to Jody Azzouni, Mario De Caro and Peter Menzies for comments on an earlier draft of this essay. I have also benefited from many stimulating conversations with Stephen White.

² Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1929) B ed., p. xl.

³ René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. John Cottingham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

⁴ I shall also speak of this as *answering* the skeptic. Note that it is a condition of a successful refutation (or answer) that it not beg the question against the skeptic. This has proved to be a very demanding condition to meet.

⁵ Descartes, *Meditations*.

⁶ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*.

⁷ G. E. Moore, "Proof of an External World," *Philosophical Papers* (London: George, Allen & Unwin, 1959).

⁸ Gilbert Harman, *Skepticism & The Definition of Knowledge* (New York: Garland, 1990).

⁹ Stewart Cohen, "How to be a Fallibilist" in James Tomberlin ed. *Philosophical Perspectives*, 2 (1988): 91-123.

¹⁰ Ted Warfield, "A Priori Knowledge of the World: Knowing the World by Knowing Our Minds," *Philosophical Studies*, 92 (1998): 127-147.

¹¹ See Barry Stroud, "Preface," *The Significance of Philosophical Skepticism* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984).

¹² Scientific naturalism involves methodological, epistemological and ontological elements that are, in principle, distinguishable though they are often conjoined in practice. For the purposes of this paper I leave aside the semantic version of scientific naturalism which attempts to provide a reductive account of "problematic" concepts in terms of naturalistic concepts.

¹³ Richard Fumerton, "Skepticism and Naturalistic Epistemology" in P. A. French, T. E. Uehling, and H. K. Wettstein, eds., *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, vol. 19 (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1994), pp. 321-340; quotation from p. 324.

¹⁴ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 2nd ed., rev. & ed. P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), Book I, pt. iv sect. i.

¹⁵ W. V. Quine, "The Nature of Natural Knowledge," in Samuel Guttenplan ed., *Mind and Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 67-81; quotation from p. 68.

¹⁶ The distinction I draw between refutation and quietism is similar to Michael Williams' distinction between constructive and diagnostic responses to skepticism. See Michael Williams, *Unnatural Doubts* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), Preface, p. xv-xvii.

¹⁷ Compare McDowell's characterization: "my move is not well cast as an *answer* to skeptical challenges; it is more like a justification of a refusal to bother with them." John McDowell, "Knowledge and the Internal," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 55 (1995): 877-893; fn. 19.

¹⁸ As we shall see, I want to allow for the possibility that contemporary naturalism diverges from Hume's position in various respects.

¹⁹ W. V. Quine, *Theories and Things* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 21. Elsewhere he explains naturalism simply as "abandonment of the goal of first philosophy." p. 72.

²⁰ D. M. Armstrong, "Naturalism, Materialism and First Philosophy," *The Nature of Mind and Other Essays* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1980), pp. 149-165. Cynthia MacDonald captures the spirit of this position in remarking, "What unifies physicalist-naturalists and biological naturalists is the belief that all natural processes are causal processes." "What is Empiricism? Part 2: Nativism,

Naturalism and Evolutionary Theory," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, suppl. 64 (1990): 81-92.

²¹ The naturalist identifies causation with a mind- and context-independent structure of efficient law-like causal relations. At most, context only enters the account in helping to pick out "the cause" from "background causal factors." This view of causation leads naturalists to reject or overlook the possibility of other kinds of causation (for example, singular causation and formal causation), and to deny that the concept of causation has intentional or occasion-sensitive elements. For a recent defence of a contextualist view of causation see Peter Menzies, "Difference-Making in Context," *Counterfactuals and Causation*, ed. John Collins et al, forthcoming MIT Press.

²² As Strawson observes, the notion of mechanical transaction, and the related ideas of links or chains of causation, are fundamental to the concept of efficient causation. See Peter Strawson, *Analysis and Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 118-119.

²³ See David Armstrong, *What is a Law of Nature?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

²⁴ For both a good summary of the issues and a contribution to the debate see Mark Colyvan, *The Indispensability of Mathematics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

²⁵ Bundle dualism is committed to a dualism of perceptions (impressions and ideas) and the body as an external existence. Hume, *Treatise*, Book I, pt. iv sect. vi.

²⁶ This was, until recently, the standard reading of Hume. See David Fate Norton, "Introduction to Hume's Thought" in *The Cambridge Companion to Hume*, ed. David Fate Norton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) p. 7.

²⁷ Certainly, if we assume that in experience we are confronted not with ordinary things such as trees, cars and people but with an array of discontinuous mind-dependent "sensory ideas" or "impressions" then there is an obvious gap between what is immediately given in experience and the external world we believe on the basis of it. The moral to be drawn from the history of unsuccessful attempts to bridge this gap is that classical empiricism is inherently skeptical.

²⁸ This misinterpretation of the relation between naturalism and skepticism arises because Hume's causal account of the belief in the external world, in which its origin is traced to the imagination, is widely supposed to be a challenge to the skeptic's insistence that this belief stands in need of rational justification. Notwithstanding, Hume did not think of naturalism as a philosophically adequate response to skepticism. Naturalism merely *replaces* skepticism as a

matter of fact whenever we leave the study. See, for example, David Hume, *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding* 3rd ed., rev. and ed. P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon, 1777/1975), sect. xxii pt. i (119).

This reading has been convincingly defended by Janet Broughton, "Skepticism & Naturalization in Book One of Hume's *Treatise*" (unpublished manuscript).

²⁹ The independent of (subjective) experience from the external world is suggested by perceptual errors in which appearance and reality come apart.

³⁰ Note that on either the intentionalist or the adverbialist construals, subjective experience is not the object of perception but its means. That is enough to show that the causal model need not be understood as a version of what McDowell calls the highest common factor model of experience. Indeed, a skeptic could happily accept a disjunctive account of subjective experience. What he could not accept, of course, is content externalism. See John McDowell, "Criteria, Defeasibility, and Knowledge," *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 68 (1982): 455-479.

³¹ Hume, *Enquiries*, sect. xxii pt. i (119).

³² Note that this argument does not presuppose any commitment to dualism of any variety. Since we are posing the argument as a challenge to naturalists we can grant, for

the sake of argument, that the mind is realized in the brain or, perhaps, in some other material form. The inner-outer distinction will still be drawn in terms of subjective experiences and the external world. However there will now be a further distinction between the matter in which the mind is realized and the matter that lies outside the mind, if there is such.

For a further defence of the claim that the skeptical problem can arise within various non-dualist conceptions of mind (for example, behaviourism, identity theory, and functionalism) given a commitment to the autonomy or self-containedness of mind, see Gregory McCulloch, *The Mind and Its World* (London: Routledge, 1995). McCulloch seems to think that the motivation for a commitment to the autonomy of mind is Descartes' conceivability argument for the real distinction between mind and body. My claim is that a more powerful motivation arises from 1st-person reflection upon the causal model of experience.

³³ I agree with Tyler Burge in reading "Descartes as capitalizing on the causal gap that we tend to assume there is between the world and its effects on us: different causes could have produced "the same" effects." "Cartesian Error and Perception" in *Subject, Thought & Context*, ed. John

McDowell & Philip Pettit (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), pp. 117-136; quotation from pp. 120-121.

However, I contest Burge's further contention that "The causal elements by themselves do not support the individualist position" especially if we consider these elements in the context of the inner/outer distinction from the 1st-person perspective. Contra Burge, individualism is strongly suggested by the thought that different external causes would bring about the same mental effects. Burge rejects this on the ground that it begs the question against anti-individualism. But if we are concerned with those considerations which intuitively lead us to embrace individualism this response is beside the point.

³⁴ I have followed McDowell in connecting the attraction of "the idea of the inner realm as self-standing . . . [to] a plausible aspiration to accommodate psychology within a pattern of explanation characteristic of the natural sciences." "Singular Thought and the Extent of Inner Space" in *Subject, Thought & Context*, pp. 137-168, p. 152.

³⁵ See Burge, "Cartesian Error and Perception," for a more careful and elaborate account of individualism.

³⁶ Wilfred Sellars, *Science, Perception & Reality* (London: Routledge, 1963). My characterization of the manifest image is a modification of Sellars'.

³⁷ One well-known application of this general idea concerns the ontological status of colours. In so far as colours are not posited by the natural sciences, the naturalist must either ontologically reduce them to scientifically respectable properties or else deny their apparent status as objective properties of material objects. Given the difficulties in finding a plausible physicalist reduction of colour, colours come to be thought of as mere "projections" of mind at best correlated with some disjunction of physical properties (for example reflectance properties). [See C. L. Hardin, *Color For Philosophers: Unweaving the Rainbow* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1988)]. Similar considerations point to a projectivism about value.

³⁸ One case that may be worth mentioning is the naturalist who blocks the skeptical argument by presupposing content externalism. Brian McLaughlin has recently argued that externalist theories of content are, even if a priori, empirically defeasible, so that any warrant they provide for an anti-skeptical thesis inevitably begs the question against the skeptic. See Brian McLaughlin, "Self-Knowledge, Externalism and Skepticism – Part I," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* suppl. 74 (2000): 93-117.

³⁹ In conversation, I have heard naturalists suggest that their position is clearly rationally preferable to skepticism simply because it is anti-skeptical!

⁴⁰ In its strongest form, skepticism "threatens our conceptual system from the inside," as Putnam has put it. Hilary Putnam, "Skepticism" in *Festschrift für Dieter Heinrich* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2000), p. 40.

⁴¹ Strawson, *Skepticism & Naturalism*, p. 20.

⁴² This view has also been defended by Williams, *Unnatural Doubts*, pp. 54-55, and James Pryor, *How to be a Reasonable Dogmatist* (PhD Dissertation, Princeton University, 1996) pp. 57-61.

⁴³ In showing that the inference to the best explanation fails in the context of an answer to the skeptic, I have not, of course, demonstrated that there is no way of refuting the skeptic. But I believe that this does show that the hope of their being such a refutation is rather dim--especially in light of the long history of unconvincing "refutations."

⁴⁴ See Richard Rorty, *Philosophy & the Mirror of Nature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980).

⁴⁵ For a recent example of such a response see Hilary Putnam, "Strawson and Skepticism" in *The Philosophy of P. F. Strawson*, ed. L. E. Hahn (Chicago: Open Court, 1998).

⁴⁶ In "Epistemology Naturalized," *Ontological Relativity & Other Essays* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), pp. 69-90, Quine can be read as refusing to engage with the skeptic's question of rational justification, shifting instead to the genetic question of how observations, physicalistically described, can give rise to science. But even here Quine speaks of the naturalism as a continuation of traditional epistemology. And in "The Nature of Natural Knowledge," Quine is clearly appealing to naturalism as a response, but not an answer, to skepticism.

⁴⁷ In "Epistemology Naturalized," Quine's understanding of "sensory evidence" in terms of "the stimulation of his sensory receptors" (p. 75) and "certain patterns of irradiation" (p. 83) is carefully designed to avoid any reference to conscious awareness.

⁴⁸ The naturalist tendency to deny subjective awareness is noted by Peter Strawson in *Skepticism & Naturalism: Some Varieties* (London: Methuen, 1985), p. 67.

⁴⁹ Quine, "The Nature of Natural Knowledge," p. 67.

⁵⁰ W. V. Quine, "Reply to Stroud," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, vol. 6 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981), pp. 473-475; p. 475.

⁵¹ Quine, "The Nature of Natural Knowledge," p.67.

⁵² Quine, "Epistemology Naturalized," p. 82.

⁵³ See Alvin Goldman, *Epistemology and Cognition* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 36, 55.

⁵⁴ In the modern period, skepticism tends to be viewed as primarily concerned with demonstrating that knowledge is not possible. See Bernard Williams, *Descartes: The Project of Pure Enquiry* (New York: Penguin, 1978), p. 62.

⁵⁵ Ancient Pyrrhonian skeptics used arguments to show that for any belief that P one might be committed to, there is equal reason to believe not-P, so that one ought to suspend judgment on the matter. They did not argue that justified belief or knowledge is not possible, but simply that, all things considered, we find that we do not have any as a matter of fact. See Gisela Striker, "Skepticism as a Kind of Philosophy" (unpublished manuscript).

⁵⁶ Goldman makes a substantial concession to skepticism when he notes that his analysis of knowledge in terms of reliability "cannot be expected to entail that we *do* know, or that we know very much or very often." *Epistemology and Cognition*, p. 55. However, he goes on to offer a question-begging appeal to psychology as the science that can determine whether our cognitive processes are reliable.

⁵⁷ Strawson, *Skepticism & Naturalism*, p. 51.

⁵⁸ Hume, *Treatise*, Book I, pt. iv sect. i.

⁵⁹ Strawson endorses the position of many philosophers in holding that "the skeptical challenge is perfectly intelligible, perfectly meaningful." *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁶⁰ Strawson admits that if you want a reason to believe in the existence of the external world you may be able to find one. However, his point is that your belief will not be *based* on this reason; it will not be explained by the availability of this reason should you discover it.

⁶¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1969).

⁶² See, for example, Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958) §109, §128. I have argued elsewhere that Strawson's attribution of the foundationalist theory of hinge propositions to Wittgenstein is based on a familiar misreading; and that Wittgenstein is concerned to undermine the attractions of the view that there are particular beliefs, assumptions or presuppositions which frame any and every operation of our rational capacities. See *Skeptical Reason & Inner Experience* (PhD Dissertation, Harvard, 1999), ch. 4.

⁶³ See W. V. Quine, *From a Logical Point Of View* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964), ch. 2.

⁶⁴ The matter of unrevisability has to be handled carefully since there is a question whether we can even understand

what it would be to revise some a priori propositions (for example, basic truths of mathematics and logic). We might formulate the point better by saying that there is no guarantee that what we currently regard as a priori truths will not be revised in the future. See Hilary Putnam, "Rethinking Mathematical Necessity," *Words and Life* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994).

⁶⁵ David Velleman, "The Guise of the Good," *Noûs*, 26/1 (1992): 3-26; 14.

⁶⁶ This has been aptly described as reason's "transpersonal function of presenting true thoughts and guiding thought to truth, regardless of individual perspective and interest." Tyler Burge, "Reason and the First-Person" in *Knowing Our Own Minds*, ed. Cynthia MacDonald, Barry Smith, & Crispin Wright (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 243-270, p. 254.

⁶⁷ Strawson's account suggests that the skeptical threat is to our continuing to hold the belief in the external world. But this is a mistake. The skeptical challenge is meta-level, challenging whether we have good enough or sufficient reason to believe as we do. The skeptic need not dispute the tenacity of our beliefs.

⁶⁸ This is closely related to what some philosophers conceive of a clash between what are called the subjective

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and objective points of view. See, notably, Thomas Nagel, "The Absurd," *Mortal Questions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).