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Conceptions of Knowledge and Philosophy in the Problem of Scepticism

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ABSTRACT

Conceptions of Knowledge and Philosophy
in the Problem of Scepticism

Alexander Jerabek

In 1984, Barry Stroud wrote a book entitled The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism in which he reassessed the problem of scepticism and its meaning for philosophy In 1989, a former student of his, Marie McGinn, wrote Sense and Certainty: A Dissolution of Scepticism, in which she critically examined Stroud's interpretation of the problem as well as his conclusions.

These two books taken together provide a rich backdrop against which one may examine the nature of the problem of philosophical scepticism

Both Stroud and McGinn come to conclusions that are in tune with the problem as they have set it up and as they understand it. Yet both, I will argue, misrepresent some aspects of the problem of scepticism in order to resolve, or at least cope with, the perceived paradox Their reactions to the problem of scepticism derive from deeper commitments to specific understandings of knowledge and philosophy.

I will suggest certain possible ways of clarifying the metaphysical and epistemological aspects of scepticism by reappraising the operation of the conception of knowledge within philosophy. By taking scepticism in its original Greek sense of 'thoughtful and enquiring' rather than merely doubting, I hope to show that there is room to take the traditional problem seriously, and that an expanded conceptual repertoire could shed new light on an old problem.

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For my Mother

jucundi acti labores

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

In 1984, Barry Stroud wrote a book entitled The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism[1] in which he reassessed the problem of scepticism and its meaning for philosophy. In 1989, a former studen of his, Marie McGinn, wrote Sense and Certainty: A Dissolution of Scepticism[2], in which she critically examined Stroud's interpretation of the problem as well as his conclusions.

Stroud puts forth a very strong case for philosophical scepticism and denies any real or satisfactory solution within the very strict philosophical criteria which he outlines. McGinn takes issue with Stroud on several levels and offers her own dissolution of the problem.

These two books taken together provide a rich backdrop against which one may examine the nature of the problem of philosophical scepticism. It is a problem that vividly brings to the fore profound questions concerning the nature and function of philosophy. Stroud and McGinn are interesting contrasts because they reflect two quite distinct approaches and attitudes to scepticism and to philosophy in general. In broad terms one can align Stroud with the more traditional rationalist project while McGinn

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[1] Barry Stroud, The significance of Philosophical Scepticism. (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1984).

[2] Marie McGinn, Sense and Certainty: A Dissolution of Scepticism. (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1989).

looks to a more modern, Wittgensteinian, extrication.

Both Stroud and McGinn come to conclusions that are in tune with the problem as they have set it up, and acceptable as they understand it. Yet both, I will argue, misrepresent some aspect of the problem of scepticism in order to resolve, or at least cope with, the basic perceived paradox: an air-tight rational argument versus an irresistable empirical fact. It is impossible to prove that the external world exists, yet it is absurd to assert that it does not.

Stroud sacrifices the intuitive certainty that the external world exists for intellectual consistency, the primacy of reason, and philosophical rigour. McGinn restructures the traditional balance of power between rational argumentation and common sense so that the former can not so easily override the latter. As such, she is less easily carried away by the influence of reason when it issues in unacceptable or counterintuitive conclusions, and more prone to bend the traditional requirements of philosophical acceptability.

I will argue for the position that the problem of philosophical scepticism delimits rational argumentation, and provides a philosophical engine that drives inquiry. Stroud insists that the sceptic is irrefutable and that the best one can hope to do is, by grappling with the problem, to gain some insight into philosophy. This would support the notion that scepticism, rather than being a problem in need of a solution, is more kin to an impulse that, if followed, leads to a certain clarity. For Stroud there is no solution, there is only a stoic accpetanace and understanding of the situation.

McGinn, by claiming that the type of justificaion that Stroud requires to refute

the sceptic is inappropriate, supports the notion that the sceptical problematic sets a limit on the type of questions we can rationally ask.

The two approaches work against each other; whereas the payoff for Stroud comes with pushing reason and the demands of justification as far as possible, success for McGinn lies in properly limiting these same two notions. At the heart of the tension lies a profound difference in their conceptions of knowledge and in the way that they understand the nature and function of philosophy. Their reactions to the problem of scepticism derive from deeper commitments to specific understandings of knowledge and philosophy. Is philosophy something that should be pursued beyond what our common sense would tell us is acceptable? Or is knowledge something that should always be checked and gauged against what seems sensible and evident?

I propose to deal with these issues by breaking down this thesis into three chapters: the first on Stroud, the second on McGinn, and the third on an assessment of the two and an attempted reconciliation. Both the first and second chapters will follow similar outlines. Section one in the first two chapters will set out the way Stroud and McGinn formulate the problem of philosophical scepticism.

Section two in chapter two will address some of the criticisms which McGinn levels at Stroud. Section two in chater one and section three in chapter two will both deal with G.E. Moore, specifically the way both Stroud and McGinn interpret him and the way they understand the significance of his proof of the external world. A discussion of Moore is useful here since not only is he a common reference point for both authors, but he also acts as a catalyst, forcing the issue with regard to the conflict

between common sense and philosophy. In attempting to interpret Moore the authors reveal where their own commitments lie.

In chapter one, section three will deal with Stroud's treatment of Quine's project of naturalizing epistemology and pursue the related themes of the nature of philosophy and justification. Stroud's treatment of Quine is interesting because it highlights Stroud's own position on the problem of scepticism as well as his conception of the scope of philosophy; it is relevant because it serves as a bridge to McGinn's appeal to Wittgenstein where the same issues are reworked from slightly different angles.

In chapter two, section four will attempt to show how a Wittgensteinian answer to the sceptic would presuppose a corresponding rethinking of justification, knowledge, and philosophy.

In chapter three, section one will argue that there are two strong aspects to the problem that cannot always be clearly separated: a metaphysical problem regarding the existence of an external world and an epistemological problem regarding knowledge and justification. These two problems admit two different responses. There is an appropriate response to the metaphysical aspect, and another response to the epistemological aspect. By attempting to find a single response both authors misrepresent an aspect of the problem.

Section two will assess Stroud in the light of this distinction, and section three will assess McGinn in the same way.

Sections four and five will serve as concluding and summary sections where I

will suggest certain possible ways of clarifying the metaphysical and epistemological aspects of scepticism by reappraising the operation of the conceptions of knowledge and philosophy. By taking `scepticism' in its original Greek sense of `thoughtful and enquiring' rather than merely doubting, I hope to show that there is room to take the tr...itional problem seriously, and that an expanded conceptual repertoire could shed new light on an old problem.

CHAPTER 1 STROUD ON SCEPTICISM

Introduction

Scepticism is a broad designation under which one may find many different philosophical problems. For certain Ancient Greeks and some moderns and contemporaries it was, and remains, one or more of: a way of life, a code of conduct, a philosophical creed. One can address issues of justification, moral scepticism, aesthetic scepticism, religious scepticism, or scepticism regarding knowledge of the external physical world. It is this last issue that Barry Stroud grapples with in his book The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism. For Stroud, scepticism, as a philosophical thesis about knowledge of the external world, does not imply a way of life, nor is it necessarily linked to concerns raised in ethics or aesthetics. Stroud's definition of philosophical scepticism is simply the thesis that there can be no rational and conclusive justification for knowledge claims about the external world. Knowledge, cast in its empirical mode is bereft of justification and thus is indistinct from mere belief. So it is with this distinction firmly in place that Stroud undertakes to examine the sceptic's claim that we can know nothing about the world around us.

Stroud's undertaking in this regard is twofold: he wants to examine the sceptical argument and he wants to understand the nature of philosophical theories of knowledge. He writes in the preface: "By examining philosophical scepticism about the external world I hope to bring into question our very understanding of what a philosophical

theory of knowledge is supposed to be" (Stroud, 1984 p.viii).

In order to understand and evaluate the sceptic's argument Stroud looks to Descartes' formulation of the problem and proceeds to firm it up and develop it further before considering various attitudes to it taken by subsequent philosophers, both modern and contemporary. To fulfil his other objective, however, Stroud takes a less systematic approach and necessarily interweaves a discussion about the nature of philosophy, philosophical theories in general, and theories of knowledge in particular, throughout the entire book.

Stroud is less concerned with defending or attacking the sceptic than he is with unearthing the significance of philosophical scepticism. By this Stroud means to say that he holds that scepticism is neither insignificant or unimportant, nor is it meaningless, incoherent, or unintelligible. Those who dismiss scepticism as either obviously true or patently false both fail to grasp the enigmatic character of the problem and thus fail to deal with the issue. Those who claim that it is `nonsense' fail to do justice to its demonstrable tenacity throughout history. What Stroud seeks to reveal is that the problem of scepticism indicates or shows something important and illuminating about the human condition and the propensity for engaging in philosophy:

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

Stroud's conviction is that the sceptic's challenge is indeed unanswerable, yet

the struggle to clearly understand why this is so leads to a deeper understanding of more general questions about philosophy and human nature.

In this chapter I will present Stroud's version of the sceptical argument and his treatment of Moore and Quine.

Section 1 The Cartesian Problematic

Despite the fact that Stroud thinks the sceptical problem has no solution, he believes that it is necessary to understand it philosophically. Stroud looks to the Descartes of the First Meditation as the quintessential sceptic and retraces the same logical process in articulating the reasoning behind the sceptical problematic.

Descartes's mandate was to question knowledge "in order to rightly conduct reason and seek truth in science". To do this, Descartes took it upon himself to review the sum of what he believed to be the knowledge available to him. Since assessing each instance of knowledge is impossibly detailed and lengthy, Descartes attempted to assess entire categories at once. The knowledge provided by sensory perception led him to question the validity of his senses in principle, and despite the famous examples of being deceived by the senses, Descartes concluded that these were not justifiable grounds for rejecting them as grounds for knowledge. The cases where one is deceived by objects at a distance, or the rod which appears crooked when submerged underwater, are particular, and peculiar, instances that are not representative of the

usual functioning of the senses.

So Descartes took a clear, paradigm case of himself sitting by the light of a fire holding a piece of paper, in a clear, sober moment to decide whether or not he could rely on his senses for knowledge. A negative or positive verdict in such a case would legitimately be applicable across the board to the entire range of sense experience. As Descartes ably puts it: "...the destruction of the foundation necessarily involves the collapse of the rest of the edifice..."[3].

However, eventhough the case under scrutiny was eminently clear, Descartes concluded that he had no knowledge of the paper at hand since it occurred to him that it was possible that he was dreaming at the time. It is this point which Stroud seizes as the crucial turn in the sceptical argument. "With this thought, if he is right, Descartes has lost the whole world" (Stroud, 1984 p.12).

In other words, knowing that one is awake is a necessary condition for knowing anything about the world. It is here that Stroud leaves Descartes's reasoning and pursues the ramifications of the Dream Argument as the cornerstone of the sceptical argument. Showing that it is merely possible that the world exists is not enough, we have to eliminate the possibility that we are dreaming. Henceforth Stroud will "concentrate on deepening and strengthening the problem and trying to locate more precisely the source of its power" (Stroud, 1984 p.14).

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[3] Rene Descartes, The Meditations Concerning First Philosophy, 1641. Translated by Laurence J. Lafleur. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merril Company Inc, 1960), p.76.

There are three different questions that must be pressed. First, is dreaming a threat to knowledge? Second, must one rule out dreaming to know? Third, can one never know that one is not dreaming?

Concerning the possibility that dreaming is a threat to knowledge Stroud reminds us that dreaming of something which we claim to know is not incompatible with knowing that thing, but rather that we cannot claim to come to know anything by dreaming of it. At some point we have to be able to categorically say : "I am not dreaming".

The obvious strategy is to try to establish a test for determining whether or not one is dreaming. Stroud, however thinks this tack is a failure.

> ...I think Descartes would be perfectly correct in saying `there are no certain indications by which we may clearly distinguish wakefulness from sleep' and so we could never tell we are not dreaming *if* he were also right that knowing one is not dreaming is a condition of knowing something about the world around us. (Stroud, 1984 p.19).

The condition that we must know we are not dreaming in order to know something about the world around us implies we can never know that we are not dreaming. As Stroud states: "We cannot accept the terms of Descartes's challenge and then hope to meet it" (Stroud, 1984 p.20). The corollary to this statement is that if we can distinguish that we are not dreaming then Descartes is misguided in stating his condition. The strength of Descartes's scepticism resides in the inability to distinguish between waking and dreaming. In trying to make the strongest case for the sceptical position, Descartes believes that if one could distinguish waking from dreaming the

Dream Argument would not have the force which he claims it does in fact have. By eliminating all terms of justification which are possibly open to doubt Descartes hopes to provide a secure foundation for knowledge. In short, Descartes's strategy is to create an insoluble problem in terms which we are normally accustomed to so that he can provide a solution in original, more secure terms.

Moreover, it is impossible to establish any type of test to tell if one is dreaming, if a condition of knowing anything about the world is that one knows one is not dreaming. Stroud writes: "[Descartes] would have to have known at some time that he was not dreaming in order to get the information he needs to tell at any time that he is not dreaming - and that cannot be done" (Stroud, 1984 p.21). Even if such a test did exist the dream clause would be invoked and there would be no guarantee that it wasn't performed while dreaming. In effect, submitting to the dream clause enables a type of infinite regress: at any moment in the chain of evaluation there is always the lurking possibility that one is dreaming, thus dashing the validity of the effort. If it is true that "every piece of knowledge that goes beyond one's sensory experience requires that one know one is not dreaming" (Stroud, 1984 p.22), then it is impossible to arrive at a secure enough standpoint from which to assess one's state, whether it be dream or wakefulness.

Furthermore, despite the fact that many people believe that they can tell the difference between wakefulness and dreaming this does not refute the strength of the Dream Argument. Whether or not one can experientially tell the difference, and there is no shortage of contradictory opinions here, it does not invalidate the conceptual

claim being made. Even if it were granted that in terms of phenomenological characteristics dreams could be differentiated from wakefulness this would not serve the general purpose required of eliminating the possibility that we are at the present dreaming. The Cartesian challenge is issued at a conceptual level at its most forceful and not at the experiential level. As long as the doubt exists that one may be dreaming, the doubt must be addressed as a logical possibility and not at the level of empirical characteristics.

However, all these difficulties arise only if one accedes to the condition stated in the first place, viz., we must know we are not dreaming in order to know anything. Stroud comes to his second point now and questions whether or not this is so. Is it necessary to eliminate all logical possibilities that are compatible with the state of affairs if we want to ratify one version over another? In Stroud's words: "A possible deficiency in the basis of my belief can interfere with my knowledge without itself rendering false the very thing I believe" (Stroud, 1984 p.25).

The consequences of the principle of deductive closure, i.e. the entailment of all logical implications of a proposition and the subsequent elimination of all counterfactual logical possibilities, which Stroud here appeals to, involves two conditions: if such possibilities obtain then one does not know, *and* one has to know that they don't obtain in order to know. Stroud's contention is that the Dream Argument is subject to the exigencies of the condition of deductive closure. It is obligatory to rule out dreaming as a possibility if we wish to have knowledge. It is unreasonable to expect that we can know everything, but we must prove the falsity of

the things which are incompatible with what we want to claim to know.

Deductive closure of this sort may seem to be peculiar to purely philosophical speculations, in which case it would not be a valid criterion for garden-variety knowledge claims; but if it can be shown to be a typical procedure in the most mundane instances of knowledge evaluation then Descartes is right in insisting on it. As it stands, our ordinary, humdrum knowledge assessments do in fact presume such closure, yet such logical calculations are rarefied and implicit rather than explicitly posed. If pushed to extremes, requirements of deductive closure are usually dismissed as farfetched and unlikely counterfactuals. However, if one adheres to rigorous logical criteria the only conclusion can be that `yes, it's possible, so technically I don't know, (but practically the contingency is remote and therefore discountable)'. Still, Stroud's emphasis is on strict knowledge and not hopeful approximations thereof.

The crux of the issue resides in the notion of objectivity. Do we appeal to a strict and idealized conception of objectivity which we then arbitrarily dilute depending on the importance of the knowledge claim in question, or is objectivity an heuristic device which admits of no perfect expression and application?

Once again there is an ambivalence. Pushed along by logical rigour one is tempted to admit that objectivity is unimpeachable (in principle), but rarely consistently appealed to in everyday cases where knowledge is at issue. To maintain otherwise would imply a commitment to a conception of objectivity as an heuristic device. If this were the case then knowledge would concomitantly be relieved of its character of certainty, replaced instead by strong belief or likelihood. It seems that if one is

determined to lay claim to knowledge in any commonly accepted sense of the word, then one must also subscribe to the stricter sense of objectivity. To be consistent and honest then, one must admit that deductive closure is, however ill expressed or overlooked, an essential part of even our most basic knowledge claims about the world.

In our everyday claims to knowledge we make modest appeals to criteria which, if pursued to their logical conclusions, undermine any knowledge claims at all. It is this tension that defines the enigmatic character of the sceptical thesis. Stroud articulates the point wryly:

> If those platitudes about objectivity do indeed express the conception of the world and our relation to it that the sceptical philosopher relies on, and if I am right in thinking that scepticism can be avoided only if that conception is rejected, it will seem that in order to avoid scepticism we must deny platitudes we all accept. I believe this sometimes has happened in philosophy. (Stroud, 1984 p.82)

Stroud concludes his exposition of the sceptical argument by dwelling on its implications. We cannot claim to know things, we can only state how things seem now, what sort of sensory experiences is present to us at the moment. All our claims are limited to statements about our representations of the world, all discussion of the external world has to be foregone. "There is a gap then between the most we can ever find out on the basis of our sensory experience and the way things really are" (Stroud, 1984 p.32).

In a telling analogy Stroud likens our situation to that of someone who is confined to a roomful of televisions which give us detailed information about the

world, but we are never able to leave the room to confirm this information.

Furthermore, it is unwise to attempt to circumvent the seriousness of the problem by settling for a weaker more limited version of knowledge in the hope that we can get by with what is available to us rather than hopelessly aspire to something that is forever out of our reach. There is even an argument to be made based on the claim that nothing is actually left out, merely the philosopher's invention of a supposed external world. Why should we be distressed by a limitation to our knowledge if that limitation is insurmountable? Nothing in our experience seems to be affected one way or the other. This type of reaction, Stroud admits, is a natural and appealing one. However, such a reaction is based on a denial of the problem, and indicates a failure to understand the seriousness of the situation and its ramifications. It does, on the other hand, press the issue and force the philosopher to demonstrate that his conclusions are not based on contrivance but appeal to the same basic principles to which we all appeal in our everyday assessments of knowledge:

> ...so far we have every reason to think that Descartes has revealed the impossibility of the very knowledge of the world that we are most interested in and which by thinking we possess or can easily acquire. In any case that would be the only conclusion to draw if Descartes's investigation does indeed parallel the ordinary kinds of assessments we make of our knowledge in everyday life. (Stroud, p.35)

Stroud wants to maintain that the kind of knowledge that the philosopher talks about is indistinct from the knowledge that we ordinarily refer to. Simply put, knowledge is a univocal concept and it does not admit of degrees. When we say we

really know something it just means we have had second thoughts, as opposed to making the claim unreflectively, as we often do.

The distinction is not between the philosopher's knowledge and ordinary knowledge, but rather knowledge as such and seeming, or being likely, or taking for granted or being under the impression that one knows, and so on. In order to avoid Descartes' negative conclusion we must show that there is indeed a difference between a philosophical investigation and our routine assessments. Stroud, however, thinks that this can't be done. As he notes: "It is the investigation of his everyday knowledge and not the fanciful picture of a veil of perception that generates Descartes' negative verdict"(Stroud, 1984 p.37).

The situation we are left with, even if we buy into the unreflective denial of the philosopher's model, is far more dire than originally supposed. Not only have we forsaken knowledge of the world but we have forfeited the option of appealing to communal consent as well since other minds necessarily fall within the category of external objects. It is not even the case of being reduced to 'the way things seem to us' but 'the way things seem to me'. If Descartes is indeed correct in his conclusions then the resulting situation is one of the most severe solipsism. Truly a bitter harvest of one's efforts.

The only tactic left that is at all promising, concedes Stroud, is to demonstrate that the philosophical investigation of knowledge is opposed, distinct and incompatible with everyday standards and procedures for assessing knowledge.

According to Stroud, there is no solution to the problem of philosophical

scepticism. After considering attempts by such philosophers as Austin, Moore, Kant, Carnap, and Quine, the only conclusion that Stroud affords is that there is no solution, merely an appropriate response to the problem: one must acknowledge its intractability and pursue philosophical endeavours in its shadow.

If one holds to the traditional conception of knowledge, then one must concede the sceptic's conclusions. What, then, is left for the philosopher to do? Stroud suggests that what is called for is continued philosophic investigations in the shadow of scepticism. All one can hope for is a more enlightened understanding of the intractability of the problem.

Such pursuits, although not issuing in solutions per se, do illuminate the nature of the philosopher's project and the human condition. The paradox of desiring to support a working conception of knowledge in the face of its inevitable sceptical result is somehow tied in inextricably with the lot of humans and the irresistible impulse to engage in philosophy. Philosophy then is not the type of project, such as science, that builds progressively in ever widening circles, but focuses in a concentric manner on an irresolvable core tension between being irrevocably contained within an internal context, and struggling to assess and explain it externally. The compulsion to derive a purely external Archimedean fulcrum from a wholly internal spectrum of experience is the lodestar which guides the philosopher's efforts, efforts which result only in the clarification and entrenchment of the paradox and not in its resolution. One may acquire insight, but not knowledge and certainty.

Section 2 The Particular Case of Moore

Stroud's interest in Moore stems from the fact that Moore gives a distinguished and authoritative voice to the common sense objection outlined in section one, namely that of flatly contradicting the sceptic and refusing to take him seriously despite his alarmist claims. As Stroud pointed out, to unreflectively deny the sceptic's claim is to not engage the sceptic philosophically, and thus to fail to understand why it is a problem. The problem might well be side-stepped, but it is neither dealt with, nor yet understood. The difficulty with Moore is that by bluntly arguing for the existence of the external world he forces the issue regarding Stroud's use of the internal/external distinction.

The internal/external distinction emerges from the necessity of surmounting the difficulty posed by the Dream Argument. One requires an `external' position from which one can make evaluative statements. In presenting the case for a rigorous scepticism Stroud leans heavily on a distinction between internal perspectives and external perspectives. It is due to this bifurcation that the sceptical argument can be posed so forcefully. By `external' Stroud means some sort of detached philosophical position, one that is somehow self-sufficient, self-contained, or independent of any scientific or naturalistic context. All beliefs, all evidence must be bracketed; that which is placed in doubt cannot serve to justify or support any anti-sceptical arguments. However Stroud is unclear about the exact nature of this perspective and claims that it

is elusive. (A more detailed discussion follows in ch.2 sec.2).

By contrast, the internal perspective allows for justification for disputed knowledge claims in terms of that system within which the doubts have arisen. Internal means of justification, however, are helpless at establishing the validity or truth of the system as a whole to which they belong.

For instance, all internal appeals to the consistency and reliability of science and its methods do nothing to explain how science can provide us with knowledge of the world. Similarly, all appeals to the community of common sense, some functional pragmatism, or mutual consent, do not contribute to an external justification for the possibility of knowledge in general. Ultimately, Stroud believes that such an external justification is impossible, though the terms in which it is outlined are coherent and acceptable.

If one grants the validity and necessity of an external perspective then the way we perceive the world, and the way it really is, remains unbridgeable. The traditional epistemological dilemma revolves around this central question: How can we know that the world resembles that which we perceive it to be? The only way of avoiding the conclusion of the sceptic is "...[to avoid or expose] as illusory that detached external standpoint from which our epistemic position has traditionally seemed so impoverished."(Stroud 1984 p.211).

Moore's assault on the sceptic consists in an attempt to undermine the internal/external distinction by appealing to common sense as an override on absurd conclusions derived from philosophical speculations. Concurrently with this affirmation

of commonsense comes a denial of any firm delineation between the internal and the external. Moore's difficulty, however, stems from the fact that without appealing to any such distinction his arguments have a very unphilosophical quality despite their guise.

In 1939, G.E. Moore delivered a paper entitled, "Proof of an External World"[4]. This paper was intended to provide a conclusive refutation of the sort of scepticism which claims that we can never assert the existence of an independent objective external physical reality.

In "Proof of an External World" Moore takes great pains to say what it is exactly that he is setting out to prove. Moore spends the better half of his article carefully delineating the scope of his enterprise. He distinguishes between things that are presented in space and things that are met with in space. Things such as after-images, double-images, and pains are all presented in space yet they are not met with in space. Such things are not properly considered physical objects and are not the subjects of Moore's proof.

Things to be met with in space are not necessarily presented in space in the sense that if they are not perceived then they are not presented. Moore writes: "...`things which are to be met with in space' embraces not only objects of actual experience but also objects of possible experience..."(Moore, 1959 p.135). Moore is

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[4] G.E. Moore, Philosophical Papers. (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1959).

thus making sure that he addresses certain idealist claims such as Berkeley's `esse is percipi'. The type of things that Moore wants to prove exist are the garden-variety physical objects of the external world, independent of knowing minds: chairs, rocks, and so on.

Moore admits his definition of `to be met with in space' could be made clearer, yet the terms are sufficiently clear for the purpose at hand:

> That this should be clear is sufficient for my purpose, because if it is clear, then it will also be clear that, as I implied before, if you have proved that two plants exist, or that a plant and a dog exist...you will have ipso facto proved that there are things to be met with in space...(Moore, 1959 p.139)

Having thus set the stage, Moore proceeds to give his proof. He claims that he can now give:

> ...a large number of different proofs each of which is a perfectly rigorous proof...I can prove now, for instance, that two human hands exist. How? By holding up my two hands and saying, as I make a certain gesture with the right hand,`Here is one hand' and adding as I make a certain gesture with the left `and here is another'...I have proved ipso facto the existence of external things... (Moore, 1959 p.146)

According to Moore this proof satisfies the three criteria for a rigorous proof: 1) the premises are different from the conclusion; 2) the premises are known to be true; and 3) the conclusion follows from the premises.

Moore points out that some will find this proof unsatisfactory. One reason is that the premises appear to beg the question: the fact that human hands exist is precisely the issue in contention. Moore writes:

> Of course what they really want is not merely a proof of these two propositions but something like a genera' statement as to how any proposition of this sort may be proved. This of course I haven't given: if this is what is meant by proof of the existence of material things , I do not believe that any proof of the existence of external things is possible. (Moore, 1959 p.149)

This is tied in with the second reason why Moore's proof will be unsatisfactory to some, namely that in order to know something one must be able to prove it. Moore thinks that this claim is false, one can certainly know things without being able to prove them. But this is precisely the issue at hand.

Moore's proof is curious and baffling. It strikes one as obviously true in a very trite and banal way, and obviously false in that it does not resolve the tenacious problem of philosophical scepticism. The scandal of not being able to prove the existence of an external world has given way to a new, Moorian, scandal. Moore, in a bold and stark move has dismissed the sceptic out of hand by giving a rigorous philosophic voice to the common-sense view that obviously and undeniably an external world does indeed exist.

Unlike some philosophers who have tried to understand Moore's proof as a linguistic manoeuvre[5], Stroud takes the proof at face value as an empirical assertion of the truth of a proposition. Stroud holds Moore responsible for the proof as it stands. For Stroud, the question is why would Moore put forth such an obvious proof?

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[5] See especially Norman Malcolm, `Moore and Ordinary Language', in The Philosophy of G.E. Moore, ed. by P.A. Schlipp. (New York: Northwestern Univ.Press, 1952), p.343-368.

The sceptic calls into question all our knowledge claims about the world, for Moore to bring forth particular instances begs the question and suggests that the sceptic's position has been misunderstood. Puzzled, Stroud asks:

> How could Moore have failed to entertain the possibility that the philosopher's denials of knowledge might be based on general considerations designed to cast doubt on the adequacy of the very reasons Moore or anyone else thinks he has got for claiming to know such things? (Stroud, 1984 p.113)

Stroud deduces that Moore consistently answers questions from an internal perspective:

> I call the reaction `internal' because it is a response from `within' one's current knowledge; the question whether one knows a certain thing is already included among all the things one knows...(Stroud, 1984 p.117)

The sceptic's question as posed requires an external response. However, Stroud is unable to give a detailed description of what would constitute something outside our current knowledge, and he admits that the external quality which he requires for an answer to the sceptic is difficult to pinpoint: "It is easy to think we understand it when we do not" (Stroud, 1984 p.118). Nonetheless this external quality is essential for a satisfactory philosophical reply. Stroud points out that Moore refuses to address issues externally, rather he steadfastly answers all questions internally:

> It is precisely Moore's refusal or inability to take his or anyone else's words in that increasingly elusive external or philosophical way that seems to me to constitute the philosophic importance of his remarks. (Stroud, 1984 p.119)

Stroud finds Moore's proof unsatisfying since it never engages the sceptic on

external terms, yet Stroud concedes that Moore's position consistently held does pose a challenge to the sceptic and "the possibility remains that what Moore says is nevertheless incompatible with philosophical scepticism" (Stroud, 1984 p.126). But this incompatibility does not consist in a refutation of philosophical scepticism, concludes Stroud.

It remains to be elaborated exactly how the external philosophical position of scepticism collides with the internal quality of everyday experience. Furthermore, Moore's apparent rejection, or, as Stroud believes, his ignorance of the internal/external distinction raises the issue of whether such a distinction is tenable in practice as opposed to being merely theoretically cohesive.

The case of Moore perplexes Stroud since it is difficult to imagine that such a distinguished philosophical mind would so fail to grasp the nature of the sceptical problem in its intended external character. Moore epitomizes the reaction of the common sense denial of the consequences of Descartes' investigation. In refusing to honour the external requirements of answering the sceptic, the focus of the debate shifts. The onus is now on the sceptic to justify the internal/external distinction beyond deriving it from an analysis of our everyday procedures. The difficulty with the distinction, as it arises in Stroud's laying out of the problem, is that while it seems to appeal to familiar understandings of knowledge it remains unclear what would clearly constitute a thoroughly external response given our situation. So rather than the point being that we usually operate on an implicit appeal to external-type justification which is in fact coherent and essential to validating knowledge claims, it may be the case that

external-type justification is essentially impossible to provide and chimerical, and is thus not a constitutive feature of our ordinary notion of knowledge. The sceptic would then be wrong in demanding it.

If this is so, then the common-sense denial of the problem is in a better position than originally presumed. The result is a standoff between Stroud demanding external justification yet being unable to give a concrete example of what it is exactly that he requires, and Moore holding fast to his internal perspective until Stroud can come up with the goods. Both parties are stymied and both parties leave one feeling philosophically unsatisfied.

Section 3 Attempting to Undo the Problem

In chapter six of his book Stroud considers W.V.O. Quine's attempt to naturalize epistemology, and argues that not only does the Quinian attempt fail to solve the traditional epistemological problem, but that it engenders a type of scepticism itself.

In order to evaluate the criticism that Stroud levels at Quine it is necessary to clarify the nature of Quine's project. The first part of this section will deal with Quine's position and Stroud's criticism, and the second part will consist of an evaluation of Stroud's criticism of Quine. The conclusion of the section will serve as a brief appraisal of the tenability of Stroud's scepticism in general.

Stroud restates the epistemological problematic:

> The traditional Cartesian examination aims at an assessment of all our knowledge of the world all at once, and it takes the form of a judgement on that knowledge made from what looks like a detached external position. (Stroud, 1984 p.207)

Quine sets out to rescue the epistemologist from the history of miserable failure which is the heritage of first philosophy. The Quinian enterprise "rests on the denial of any such `external' position" (Stroud, 1984 p.211). Quine asserts that there are two aspects to the traditional epistemological problem, the conceptual and the doctrinal. The conceptual side deals with the internal consistency of any explanatory system designed to cope with the way our perceptual input generates our theoretical output. The doctrinal side, that which deals with the reality of the world itself, that which lays down the way the world really is, remains in the cul-de-sac to which it was brought by Hume.

Under the banner of traditional first philosophy the doctrinal issue remains at an impasse. There is no way to establish what the world is really like. Quine's strategy involves abolishing the internal/external distinction, and subsuming the doctrinal within the conceptual. The naturalization of epistemology results in the eradication of differentiation between theories of knowledge, linguistics, physiology, and cognitive science. The pursuit of traditional philosophical questions concerning knowledge is undertaken within an existing scientific, conceptual framework.

Recourse to a scientific framework is not merely permitted, nor simply encouraged, but rather, necessary. There simply is no alternative way to proceed. As

Quine puts it:

> There simply is no such cosmic exile. [The philosopher] cannot study and revise the fundamental conceptual scheme of science and commonsense without having some conceptual scheme, the same or another no less in need of philosophical scrutiny, in which to work.[6]

In Stroud's terms what was once considered a project of external justification has become, under the aegis of naturalized philosophy, the scientific description of the ways and means of knowledge acquisition, or, an extended internal explanation of knowledge. For in doing away with the external position, Quine undercuts the need for justification; one simply pursues the scientific thread wherever it may lead in the unravelling of the connection between `meagre input and torrential output'.

Not surprisingly Quine, like Moore, created something of a scandal. Taken one way, naturalized epistemology became absorbed within science and philosophical identity suffered a crippling blow; the traditional epistemologist was suddenly out of a job. Taken the other way, naturalized epistemology was question-begging and led to circular reasoning: that which was in question provided the means of justification. Credit goes to Quine for throwing into the fray enough conflicting comments to make a case for either position. At times he seems to want to radically redefine epistemology as properly within the scope of science, and at others he reasserts the importance and legitimacy of the traditional understanding of the epistemologist's role. It is confusing trying to figure out exactly what Quine is up to. Either way he runs into problems, and

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[6] W.V.O Quine, Word and Object. (Massachusetts: M.I.T. Press, 1960), p.275.

he seems reluctant to yield any quarter, giving the debate a kind of shimmering quality, a sort of philosophical shell game.

Stroud, in criticizing Quine's attempt to solve the epistemologist's problem, confronts this ambiguity head on. Rather than deciding on one interpretation, Stroud gives full rein to the limits of possibility and pursues his inquiry along several lines.

"Many things [Quine] says about his conception of epistemology make it sound as if it is meant to answer the very question the traditional philosopher found himself faced with" (Stroud, 1984 p.215). Stroud pursues this line of thought: the way Quine formulates the question that naturalized epistemology presents, itself resembles that of the traditional epistemologists: "...[there is] a completely general distinction between everything we can get through the senses on the one hand and what is or is not true of the external world on the other" (Stroud, 1984 p.216). This type of distinction has the general quality peculiar to philosophic thinking yet it lacks the external quality that Stroud insists on in any valid response to the sceptic. According to Stroud, despite Quine's overriding theoretical concerns his project remains within the internal perspective. But for Quine, "The problem a naturalized epistemology must answer is thrown up by the very science whose origins it is meant to explain" (Stroud, 1984 p.217).

And yet Quine asserts that it is not the case that the epistemologist's function has been altered in any way, it is merely that he now has legitimate access to the resources of science in defence against the sceptic's claims. The fact is that `sceptical doubts are scientific doubts' and therefore scepticism can be refuted by science, or at

least the debate may be engaged within that context.

Stroud writes:

> In the Roots of Reference [Quine] denies that the `liberated epistemologist who now marches under the banner of empirical psychology has changed the traditional subject; his `is an enlightened persistence rather in the original epistemological problem'.(Stroud, 1984 p.224)

Even granted that this were so, it would still not refute the sceptic. The amassment of empirical evidence in favour of a scientific physical object theory and the concomitant details of perceptual links to an external world still do not address the question that the sceptic poses. Quine's assertion that sceptical doubts are scientific ones is a double-edged sword: it permits him the privilege of claiming that the epistemologist's role has not changed, but it also opens him to the criticism that he fails in refuting the sceptic.

Stroud's contention is that Quine has misunderstood the nature of the sceptical challenge. It is not the fact that there are illusions that lends force to the sceptic's argument, but rather it is the fact that there is no reason not to suppose that there are countless other possibilities that could explain the apparent existence of a world. The difference is one between an internal inconsistency and a larger external questioning of the whole scientific enterprise.

If Quine's naturalized epistemology is indeed epistemology in the traditional sense then it fails to answer the sceptic, since the sceptic is asking an external question and Quine is offering an internal response. Quine, like Moore, rejects the external

perspective. Hence in his view the sceptical project cannot even be properly formulated. Resolution is thus achieved by dissolving the problem. Even if one doesn't appeal to Stroud's use of the internal/external distinction, Quine's use of science to redeem itself fails. The fact that the sceptic argues by `reductio ad absurdum' and discredits science on the basis of the Dream Argument inhibits the possibility of using the same science to vindicate itself. On Stroud's terms or on Quine's, Quine fails to answer the sceptic.

Suppose then that one reads Quine the other way. Suppose that the roles and rules have changed, can the sceptic then be answered? In other words, if we grant Quine his thoroughgoing naturalism can he, within this context, dismantle the sceptic's argument? Stroud thinks not:

> Quine's naturalistic study of knowledge proceeds in terms of a general distinction between what we get through the senses and everything we believe about the physical world on the basis those data. I would like to argue that that conception of knowledge and of the epistemological task not only tolerates scepticism, as I have been suggesting, but is actually committed to it. (Stroud, 1984 p. 234)

Quine is committed to scepticism in the same way that all unreflective naturalism is: there simply is no ground for knowing the world to be anything like our perception of it. The gap between what we perceive and what there really is, is an unbridgeable one. The world of physical objects is, and can be, nothing more than our projection, our hypothesis.

Either Quine attempts to address the sceptic traditionally and fails, or he appeals to a non-philosophical naturalism that is committed to a philosophical scepticism. Or in

Stroud's words:

> It is only Quine's project conceived in terms of `data', `evidence', `theory', and `output' that I want to say (with Kant) can never explain how human knowledge of the world is possible. (Stroud, 1984 p.254)

Roger Gibson, in his article "Stroud on Naturalized Epistemology"[7], argues that Stroud's assessment of Quine is flawed for two reasons:

> 1) no account of Quine's doctrine of the reciprocal containment of ontology and epistemology is provided, and 2) no account of Quine's genetic approach toward answering the epistemological problem is provided. (Gibson, 1989 p.1)

On the subject of the reciprocal containment Quine writes:

> The old epistemology aspired to contain, in a sense, natural science; it would construct it somehow from sense data. Epistemology in its new setting, conversely, is contained in natural science, as a chapter of psychology...There is thus reciprocal containment in different senses: epistemology in natural science and natural science in epistemology. (Quine, 1969 p.83)

By making such a move Quine accomplishes two things: he grounds epistemology in psychology, thus science, thus ontology; and he provides epistemology with the evidence of science, he provides it with its subject matter. What Quine is doing is attempting to repudiate the externalism of Stroud's position by imposing a blanket naturalism that renders anything beyond its scope incoherent. To stand outside of science and make evaluative statements is not to have a foot to stand on. Stroud is

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[7] Roger F. Gibson, "Stroud on Naturalized Epistemology". (Metaphilosophy vol. 20, No., 1 1989), p.1-11.

guilty, according to Gibson, of overreacting, of overstepping the bounds of rational and legitimate scepticism. Gibson writes: "The relevant point of the latter containment (of epistemology by ontology) just is that transcendental epistemology is incoherent" (Gibson, 1989 p.5).

Stroud's failure to understand this point is what leads him to conclude that naturalized epistemology fails to answer the sceptic. As for Stroud's claim that it fails to be epistemology, or the issue of Quine's genetic approach to epistemology, Gibson offers this observation:

> Quine's genetic approach amounts to reconstruing the epistemological problem - as the problem of explaining the evidential relation between observation sentences and theoretical sentences. (Gibson, 1989 p.10)

Stroud demands an external, transcendental solution to the epistemological problem; Quine denies the necessity of such a solution and restricts the issue by `reconstruing' epistemology, and limiting knowledge to a function of provisionary scientific hypotheses.

Insofar as Stroud's position is clearly outlined, Stroud is perfectly within his rights in criticizing Quine. Stroud's criticism hits the mark on every count. Gibson's attempt to salvage naturalized epistemology by reasserting the reciprocal containment theory merely points out the doctrinal difference between Quine and Stroud. Stroud holds firm to a very strong transcendental scepticism, so strong in fact that knowledge is impossible, on Stroud's own admission.

Quine eschews the traditional project of first philosophy, despite his hedging.

The doctrinal issue of reciprocal containment is precisely that, a doctrinal issue, and in Quine's own words `the Humean predicament is the human predicament'. Why does Quine assume, then, that he is in a position to resolve this predicament simply by laying down a new doctrine? As Gibson puts it: "[there is a deep] disagreement between Stroud and Quine having to do with the nature of epistemology and the philosophical importance of scepticism" (Gibson, 1989 p.10). As much as the power of Stroud's arguments comes from his restrictive definition of knowledge, so too does Quine's naturalized epistemology succeed due to his fallibilism, that is, his more elastic conception of what knowledge is.

The force of Stroud's arguments stems from his adherence to a concept of knowledge that is overly stringent and thus self-defeating. Stroud appeals to a conception of knowledge that operates as a Cartesian *point fixe* which serves as a secure foundation from which one may guarantee, by logical implication, the range of possible knowledge claims about the external world. This model disenfranchises the usefulness of inductive claims and the strictly subjective characteristic of empirical claims. If one admits that there are varieties or degrees of knowledge then to require the less rigorous types to conform to the requirements of the strict type is, if not illegitimate, then at least overly stringent. Quine, by championing the cause of inductive and empirical knowledge claims, is attempting to make room for a more flexible and broader conception of knowledge. The difficulty that Quine faces is to reconcile the hard, philosophical conception of knowledge which Stroud appeals to, and which gives rise to the sceptical problem, with the softer conceptions with which science operates. The

issue revolves around the question of whether there is a hierarchy of knowledge, or whether there are distinct and independent varieties. Clearly Quine subscribes to the latter, the consequences of which are that philosophy becomes disengaged from scientific pursuits. What then is the relation between properly philosophical pursuits and scientific ones? How do theories or conclusions in one sphere affect or interact with the other? Quine is at pains to provide a satisfactory reconciliation.

Stroud, on the other hand, subscribes to a hierarchy where scientific, inductive claims are subordinate to strictly philosophical, Cartesian, knowledge claims. The obvious problem here is that those things of which we are not only intuitively certain, but which actually work in application, are denied knowledge status. Therefore, on Stroud's conception of knowledge not only do very few things comply with his requirements, but things to which we are strongly committed must be excluded. So that while Quine's dilemma is to account for the difficult relation between philosophy and science, Stroud faces the problem of having an apparently unconvincing and restricted conception of knowledge purchased with the guarantee of the cohesion of intellectual fields. However, by requiring an external justification for knowledge and then denying almost all perspectives as somehow internal he sabotages the epistemologist's attempts and stacks the deck in the sceptic's favour. No wonder then that he remains at the end unconvinced by the gamut of philosophers with whom he has dealt.

Quine is no less guilty of philosophical sleight of hand. By trying to retain the banner of traditional epistemology he creates unnecessary complications for himself. It would be better for him to renounce the traditional project and firmly embrace his

naturalism, rather than try to manipulate the boundaries of established territories in order to assure himself a place in the rarefied philosophical pantheon as the saviour of epistemologists.

One is left with the strong suspicion that a strict and rigorous philosophical temperament must forfeit knowledge, and that the fruitfulness of scientific inquiry must coexist with an ultimate uncertainty. The one grounded but barren, the other adrift but fertile.

CHAPTER TWO McGINN ON SCEPTICISM

Section 1 The Problem Reconceived

In her book Sense and Certainty: A Dissolution of Scepticism, Marie McGinn, like Stroud, is concerned with the problem of scepticism as it pertains to the external world. Unlike Stroud, however, she is more curious about the way the sceptic constructs his arguments and the presuppositions and preliminary manoeuvers that are made. It is these reflections with which the sceptic begins his inquiry that intrigue McGinn. Hence her solution to the problem will depend largely on the "conception of scepticism and philosophical reflection" (McGinn, 1989 p.1) which she develops. It is the impulse which leads to sceptical reflections and their conclusion that provide the means of extricating oneself from the problem.

As McGinn sees it:

> Scepticism ceases to be an irritating and perpetual philosophical conundrum, and becomes a problem that emerges for a particular philosophical understanding of the nature of human practice, and thus a problem that may cease to arise for an alternative account. (McGinn, 1989 p.1)

McGinn begins with two facts: i) it is impossible to provide the sceptic with the justification that he requires, and thus the argument is compelling and unanswerable; and ii) the sceptical conclusion is incapable of bringing any conviction; we are wholly unaffected by the sceptic's conclusion, we proceed in our ordinary everyday affirmations without pause.

These two facts are in profound tension. We are confronted by an unimpeachable philosophical rational argument that cannot carry over any conviction to our ordinary common-sense outlook. Hence we feel forced to decide between a rational philosophical position and our "common-sense outlook which has been made to look dogmatic and presumptions" (McGinn, 1989 p.2).

Inasmuch as we tend to favour our dogmatic assertions they do not, unfortunately, constitute a satisfactory philosophical rebuttal. The difficulty remains to articulate a non-dogmatic response that is in accord with what we feel compelled to believe about the world in the light of the impossibility of providing a rational basis for this belief along the lines that the sceptic has laid out.

The first step is to get clear on what exactly is going on when the sceptic is led to his conclusion:

> Thus I want to suggest that it is extremely important that we regard the sceptic as beginning, not with any specific demands concerning the standards of knowledge or reasonable belief, but by taking a reflective attitude towards our practice of making and accepting knowledge claims. (McGinn, 1989 p.3)

By examining the framework of presuppositions which support our ordinary knowledge claims the sceptic realizes that they too are knowledge claims in need of justification. The Cartesian paradigm of the sheet of paper by the fire is an example of this framework of knowledge claims. But it is not the sort of thing which we would doubt under normal circumstances, hence the distinction and the ensuing significance for McGinn:

> It is not only that these judgements appear more certain than any others but also that, given the role they play in the grounding of knowledge claims, if they can't be grounded, then nothing can. (McGinn, 1989 p.4)

The sceptic is lead not to seeking out support for knowledge claims independent of any reference to an objective world, but in terms of his own subjectivity. By reneging on the validity of claims about the world, he must find stable epistemic support in some other terms than the sum total of the framework under question, and without committing himself "to any claims about the nature of objective reality" (McGinn, 1989 p.4). In Stroud's terms, the sceptic is seeking internal justification for the external, or trying to generate the external out of the purely internal. Such a course of action places the framework of ordinary knowledge claims in great jeopardy.

The sceptic pursues the formulation of his hypothesis by pointing out that since we can't provide this necessary justification or ground, we must forego the notion of experience as a guide to the nature of reality. By exploring subjective experience and finding it a source of delusion, and by admitting the possibility and validity of the Dream Argument, the conventional foundations are removed.

Since circumventing these arguments depends on an appeal to experience, we find ourselves reasoning in circles. Hence, while appearances are beyond doubt they cannot serve as a reliable guide to the nature of the objective world. "The project of grounding the ordinary framework judgements, and providing genuine, presupposition-free justifications for his knowledge claims, has proved incapable of completion" (McGinn, 1989 p.5). From this point onward it would be sheer dogmatism to return to

our previous unreflective world view.

By attempting to firmly ground our knowledge claims, the sceptic has uncovered an ungrounded framework of presuppositions. So that, far from providing solid justification for our ordinary knowledge claims, he has shown that our uncritical acceptance of what we consider an objective naturalistic world view is unjustified.

McGinn breaks down this sceptical reasoning into seven distinct steps:

> 1. The sceptic takes up a *reflective stance vis-a-vis* our ordinary practice of making and accepting knowledge claims.
> 2. He observes that he has fallen into error in the past and undertakes the *critical examination* of his current claims to know.
> 3. He discovers that they are made within a *framework of judgements* which he implicitly claims to know, but which he has never justified.
> 4. He formulates a *project of justification* regarding the judgements of the frame.
> 5. He uncovers an *unproved assumption* lying behind his acceptance of the framework judgements.
> 6. He constructs the *Sceptical Hypotheses* which reveal that the general assumption cannot, without circularity, be justified.
> 7. He concludes that there should be *complete suspension of judgement* concerning the nature of the objective world. (McGinn, 1989 p.6)

The argument depends on two claims which are difficult to deny: i) all depends on an unproved assumption that experience is a reliable guide to what is the case; and ii) the Dream Argument and Evil Genius argument provide intelligible counterfactual versions. *"At no point does the argument require us to accept anything that is obviously false or even open to doubt"* (McGinn, 1989 p.7).

The important point to keep in mind is that the sceptic is presented as an

ordinary person thinking about ordinary concepts in a critical and reflective way. Nothing regarding our ordinary concepts has changed. What has changed is the attitude with which they are considered. Furthermore:

> His enquiry is...motivated by the sceptic's ordinary understanding of these two epistemic concepts [knowledge and justification] and does not arise directly from reflections on the relation between subjective experience and objective reality. (McGinn, 1989 p.7)

The sceptic arrives at his solipsistic conclusions despite his starting point and not from any predetermined direction or line of argument.

Once the first step of the sceptic's argument is taken, making claims regarding the objective world becomes problematic. McGinn claims that if this consequence of the sceptic's investigation is valid then it is a mistake to focus on the conception of knowledge as such as providing a solution, nor would a reappraisal of the concept of objectivity yield any hopeful results. The source of the problem does not lie in either of these two concepts, so to suggest recalibrating them to undo the problem is misguided.

> The real origin of the problem of scepticism, I am suggesting, lies in the move from our ordinary attitude that regards the judgements of the framework as beyond question, to the belief that they are knowledge claims that stand in need of justifying. And it is to the legitimacy of this move, therefore, that we need to address ourselves. (McGinn, 1989 p.8)

In other words we have to look at the peculiar nature of the impulse to do philosophy, or perhaps less broadly, the defining characteristics of philosophical-type inquiries.

The paradox about scepticism is that it is immensely compelling and totally unconvincing, because of this, and despite being profoundly moved by philosophical speculation, we abandon those conclusions easily as we emerge from the reverie. As Descartes puts it: "But this undertaking is arduous, and a certain laziness leads me insensibly into the normal paths of ordinary life" (Descartes, 1641 p.80). McGinn points out that it is not the case that the tension arises from different arguments with different conclusions, but from a fundamental conflict arising from different perspectives on the same thing, from "the adoption of two entirely different perspectives" (McGinn, 1989 p.10). McGinn puts it starkly: "...live and be convinced or reflect and doubt. These two positions represent mutually exclusive alternatives" (McGinn, 1989 p.10).

Descartes differs in an important respect from the Ancient Sceptics in that his arguments are intended as a step towards firmly grounding knowledge, whereas the Ancients used scepticism as a preliminary to articulating a way of life. Thus, Descartes is not compelled to illustrate how the ramifications of scepticism would affect one's conduct, and the problem of the conflict between scepticism and ordinary life is not addressed. Now however, "doubt has become intrinsic to the `philosophical stance'" (McGinn, 1989 p.11). We are not trying to harmonize or reconcile scepticism and the commonsense acceptance of the world:

> What we want is a philosophical account of ordinary practice that does not generate a conclusion that is in conflict with our ordinary commonsense outlook. The question is whether ordinary practice can be revealed, from within a philosophical perspective, as something that

> is *both* ungrounded *and* non-presumptuous. (McGinn, 1989 p.11)

Moreover such an account must not tamper with our common notions of knowledge or justification, it must not fabricate any special philosophical considerations. Such a philosophical account must preserve our basic intuitions that our claims to knowledge are, by and large, true, and that the justifications which we provide for them sufficient, and "concern a mind-independent, verification-transcendent reality" (McGinn, 1989 p.12).

This was something that Moore refused to do, relying instead on an apparent dogmatic affirmation of common sense as opposed to a philosophical argument. McGinn sees such a solution as illegitimate and seeks instead to unify the engaged ordinary perspective with the philosophical. In her words: *"Philosophy must no longer undermine common sense and common sense must no longer falsify philosophy"* (McGinn, 1989 p.13).

For McGinn, the resolution of the conflict lies in bringing philosophical reflection to validate our common-sense assertions without compromising philosophical standards of rigour and non-dogmatism. The absence of justification for framework judgements must be understood as "legitimate eventhough [there is a lack of] a rational base" (McGinn, 1989 p.13).

Section 2 McGinn on Stroud

For both McGinn and Stroud, investigating the relationship between the engaged ordinary perspective and the reflective philosophical perspective is of key importance to understanding the problem of scepticism. Stroud believes that as long as we hold common sense and scepticism to be in the irreconcilable opposition outlined above, that incompatibility threatens to lead to an unacceptably hasty dismissal of the sceptic. And contrary to McGinn's tenet that the concept of knowledge must remain identical for both the ordinary affirming person and the reflective philosopher, Stroud uses a far more stringent conception of knowledge in undermining our ordinary knowledge claims. Thus, McGinn claims that Stroud "sets out to show that the sceptic's negative conclusion is not actually in conflict with our right to affirm all our ordinary claims to know about the world" (McGinn, 1989 p.17).

McGinn asserts that Stroud's strategy is to show that our philosophical realm of discourse is insulated from ordinary assertions. Despite the fact that the *same* concept of knowledge is appealed to, common sense and philosophical scepticism are *not* in conflict with one another.

McGinn identifies a weak and a strong version of this idea of insulation of the two perspectives.

In the weak version the sceptic's conclusion is compatible with our use of `know' in its practical, reasonable, and appropriate incarnation. Our knowledge claims are correct despite being unjustified. We can make justifiable assertions without

fulfilling truth conditions. Eventhough truth requires the fulfilment of the sceptic's conditions, we are nonetheless permitted to use `know' for its practical expediency.

Stroud argues that this is a satisfactory compromise which manages to retain the notion of objectivity for common use: "ordinary practice is governed by a restriction of expediency" (McGinn, 1989 p.20).

Stroud defines objectivity as: "...what we aspire to and eventually claim to know is something that holds quite true independently of our knowing it or of our being in a position reasonably to assert it" (Stroud, 1986 p.78). Both the sceptic and the common sense affirmer share the same concept of objectivity and it consists in "nothing more than the merest platitudes" (Stroud, 1986 p.76).

Thus McGinn characterizes Stroud's position as revolving around a conception of an objective relation to an objective reality. But truth conditions are distinct from assertability conditions under this model. In real life assertability is sufficient, yet in philosophical discourse the more severe qualification of truth conditions is required. In trying to understand the sceptic we must therefore suspend or bracket our everyday concerns and operate within the philosophical context.

McGinn thinks this distinction is false and that Stroud is wrong in trying to reconcile the sceptic with our ordinary stance. McGinn maintains firmly, contra Stroud, that the opposition is one of fundamental and direct conflict admitting no compromise via insulationist means.[8]

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[8] McGinn claims that Stroud is defending the distinction between it being true that one knows and it being correct to say

In the weak version which McGinn identifies we can internally justify and correctly claim all the while lacking external justification and grounding. Outrageous logical possibilities which act as counterfactuals to our knowledge claims may be discounted if there is no special reason to take them into account. Thus, while we are technically required to suspend pronouncement on the truth conditions we may be justified in *saying* we know.

McGinn is discontent with this suggestion for two reasons. Firstly, nothing in our ordinary practice suggests that failure or ignorance of truth conditions is compatible with our reasons for assertions. On the contrary, we operate on the assumption that what we assert corresponds to truth. And secondly, once it is pointed out to us that truth conditions have failed we feel compelled to withdraw our assertions. McGinn concludes from this that the principles of ordinary practice impel one to take seriously sceptical conclusions in the philosophical realm and their ramifications for ordinary practice.

So that while there is nothing in ordinary practice to suggest that a distinction between truth conditions and assertability is tolerated, it is still possible that justified false beliefs entail a failure of knowledge but not a failure of belief. "Possessing a non-defective justification for believing p is not, however, objective in the same sense."(McGinn, 1989 p.27). It is a prerequisite in ordinary practice to have a non-

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that one knows. Actually, Stroud argues against this sort of thing later in his 1989 paper on externalism entitled "Understanding Knowledge in General", in Knowledge and Scepticism, ed. by M. Clay and K. Lehrer. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989), p.30-49.

defective justification for believing p in order to assert it.

We must, in ordinary practice take the sceptic seriously despite qualifications in terms of expediency. According to McGinn, such qualifications simply don't hold up. She concludes that Stroud's attempt to establish this sort of weak version of the insulation theory is misguided and erroneous in its premises as well as its conclusions. Furthermore, the fact that the defect in justification is made clear within the external philosophical perspective serves only to reiterate the profound incompatibility between common-sense engagement and the sceptic's conclusions.

McGinn articulates the second source of unease:

> There is absolutely no evidence from ordinary practice that the distinction between truth and justified assertion is ever applied to a knowledge claim made after the failure of truth condition has been established. (McGinn, 1989 p.28)

Sceptical doubts remain unliveable when carried over into ordinary practice. What McGinn is saying, contra Stroud, is that ordinary practice operates on the same principles as sceptical reasoning and thus precludes the sort of interpretation or distinction that Stroud is arguing for: "The idea of a literal falsehood and practical expediency is as impossible to make one's own as the original straightforward sceptical conclusion" (McGinn, 1989 p.29).

Stroud, it seems, also suspects as much. His overall argument depends on the identity of principles governing knowledge claims, without which the sceptic's position is weakened. A stronger version of the insulation doctrine may be required. Yet even if

this were sufficient, the truth of ordinary knowledge claims would not constitute a refutation of the sceptic. Because they are insulated from one another there is no way for the claims of the two perspectives to interact. Thus the situation would remain a stalemate and nothing would be resolved or clarified.

Stroud's tactic, then, is to articulate the situation in such a way that the *truth* of ordinary knowledge claims is compatible with the *truth* of the sceptic's conclusions. McGinn writes:

> He believes that the task of completely separating the philosophical assessment of knowledge from our ordinary assessment of it is an essential preliminary to any philosophical resolution of the problem of scepticism. (McGinn, 1989 p.30)

McGinn thinks that this strong, truth dependent, version also fails miserably. In order to make this argument stand Stroud must appeal to a radical distinction between the internal and external:

> For Stroud, the *depth* of the issue raised by scepticism lies precisely in the fact that it forces us to question whether this conception of objectivity, and of an objective understanding of our epistemic position, which underpins it, is really coherent. (McGinn, 1989 p.31)

Stroud's argument for his distinction between the internal and external lies in the fact that certain requests for justification within ordinary practice are inappropriate, while they are permitted, and even necessary, in philosophical practice. Hence, in a philosophical context the possibility of dreaming as threatening our justification for knowledge is constant, whereas it is out of place in ordinary practice.

This leads Stroud to question whether `I know' is used in the same way in both

cases. The same phrase seems to be used in different ways requiring different justifications and carrying different implications, depending on in which context it is employed.

The conception of objectivity appealed to, similarly, differs in both cases. On the one hand, objectivity is geared towards empirical methods and internal references, and on the other, objectivity requires external means of justification. What these are is, however, unclear.

The relation between these two realms of discourse is difficult and problematic. As Stroud defines the problem, the question revolves around the issue of whether or not "our knowledge claims can survive the lifting of the restriction to our normal human perspective" (McGinn, 1989 p.34). McGinn writes:

> For Stroud, the fundamental question raised by scepticism is whether knowledge claims are true only if they are understood empirically, as confined claims concerning the realm of human experience...or whether they can still be sustained, understood as unrestricted claims concerning what is objectively the case. (McGinn, 1989 p.34)

How do we repudiate the conception of objectivity which leads to scepticism without instituting one that leads to idealism or one that contradicts our `merest platitudes'? The weak version of the insulation doctrine is clearly inadequate since objectivity must either be explained in terms of appearances and therefore subjective experience, or by restricting objectivity to internal criteria, and then the philosophical, external character of objectivity is not taken into account.

The strong version is in a better position to resolve the dilemma. By insisting

that the truth of both positions are compatible and valid then necessarily different conceptions of objectivity are implemented.

Stroud is vague and never fully explicit on the matter, with the result that a firm demarcation between the two versions is never achieved, the second risking assimilation into the first. McGinn concludes by this that Stroud is committed either way to an implausible interpretation of ordinary claims. The insulation doctrine leads to idealist, appearance-based, qualifications of ordinary knowledge claims which doesn't mesh with our "robust conception of what we are doing in claiming knowledge of the world" (McGinn, 1989 p.37). Thus, there seems to be no way to resolve the conflict between the ordinary and sceptical viewpoints without compromising what we mean when we ordinarily say we know.

There is another reason that the relation between philosophy and common sense remains dissatisfying, namely that it contradicts one of the premises of the sceptic's argument: that there no variation in the conception of knowledge should be permitted. There must be a unique conception of knowledge across the board for the argument to hold. The sceptic does not reveal an idealist content of our knowledge claims, rather he simply demonstrates that they are unjustified.

Therefore, according to McGinn, we should not look to the concepts of objectivity and knowledge in coping with the sceptical dilemma but rather at the sceptic's original tactic of questioning the entire framework of our judgements and claims. Or, precisely her task is to see: "...whether there is a non-sceptical interpretation of the fact that the judgements that form the framework of our practice

cannot be justified" (McGinn, 1989 p.38). In other words, McGinn is working towards a philosophical articulation of a non-dogmatic acceptance of our common-sense intuitions about knowledge and objective reality.

Section 3 Moore Revisited

McGinn looks to Moore to underscore her previous discussion of the relationship of philosophy and common sense and Stroud's insulation doctrine. Moore appears at first glance to be guilty of the kind of hasty dismissal with which Stroud was so concerned. While Stroud believes that Moore has misunderstood the sceptic, McGinn's dissatisfaction with Moore's reply is of a different nature.

Stroud's conclusion is determined by his conception of the relation between the sceptical and commonsense perspectives, such that even if Moore is correct he has not engaged the sceptic and thus not satisfactorily dealt with the problem. The two realms of discourse, the external-philosophical and the internal-empirical are not linked together by Moore's argument. Moore operates at a wholly internal level. As such his conclusions are insulated and carry no weight at the philosophical level:

> On Stroud's doctrine of the insulation of ordinary practice from philosophy what Moore says may be (and is) true, but at the same time it says nothing that is relevant to establishing or refuting any philosophical doctrines whatsoever. (McGinn, 1989 p.44)

Stroud, claims McGinn, believes that Moore answers thus because he takes the

sceptic's challenge to actually be occurring within the internal, empirical realm of discourse. Stroud's interpretation has two effects: i) Moore's response is comprehensible and correct, and ii) Moore's response is completely distinct from the philosophical nature of the sceptic's challenge. The significance of Moore's Proof for Stroud is that it focuses the issue at hand, that of the relation between the two realms of discourse.

Moore, however, does not share this opinion with Stroud. Moore firmly believes that the truth of his Proof is flagrantly at odds with philosophical scepticism. For Moore, the space which his proof and the sceptic's challenge occupy is the same.

McGinn feels that there is a way of interpreting Moore's Proof in such a way that it overcomes its undercutting by the insulation doctrine, and demonstrates the incompatibility of the engaged and philosophical perspectives. Furthermore, argues McGinn, only when we have understood Moore in this way will we understand why Moore believes to have provided a refutation of the sceptic, a question which puzzled Stroud.

> Thus what I want to argue is that Moore is using the fact that scepticism is simply beyond belief, and the fact that it is in conflict with what we are all absolutely convinced of, in an attempt to rout the sceptic. (McGinn, 1989 p.46)

Under such an interpretation Moore is using a reductio ad absurdum to refute the sceptic. And such a tactic is precisely what Stroud is trying to undercut with his insulation doctrine. Moore is "perfectly well aware that his proof begs the question

against the sceptic" (McGinn, 1989 p.46). Moore writes in Hume's Philosophy[9]: "Any valid argument which can be brought against it must be of the nature of a *petitio principi*: it must beg the question at issue" (McGinn, 1989 p.48). In other words, we must be prepared to accept givens, there are no presuppositionless foundations, and without such *petitio principi* we cannot proceed.

Scepticism, by virtue of its position, and its reluctance to explicitly state what would constitute adequate external justification, will consider all refutations as question-begging arguments. Thus, Moore's position is that there is a fundamental choice to be made between admitting the sceptic's conclusions and dogmatically reasserting common sense; there are simply no other alternatives.

The dilemma is then reduced to asserting philosophically something which common sense tells us is patently false, or asserting something commonsensically which under consistent rational scrutiny we should not be prepared to assert. For Moore the choice is clear: the only sensible position to take is to dogmatically assert common-sense truths over the sceptic's conclusions. Moore offers this corollary to his decision in Hume's Philosophy: "There is no reason why we should not ...make our philosophical opinions agree with what we necessarily believe at other times" (McGinn, 1989 p.47).

Moore's conviction that the sceptic makes impossible demands leads him to this strict distinction and subsequent choice. Moreover, Moore's contention that he can

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[9] G.E. Moore, "Hume's Philosophy", in Philosophical Studies. (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1922). p.147-167.

know things which he cannot prove further reinforces this rationale in coping with the sceptic (Hume's Philosophy, in McGinn, 1989 p.47). Moore's proof then, can only be understood, according to McGinn, once his assumptions are made clear: the sceptic is unanswerable and his conclusions are unliveable, and the sceptical conclusion is in direct conflict with common sense.

Moore in this instance feels it imperative to bring our philosophical theories in line with our common-sense intuitions, and that philosophy should be made to conform with our most basic beliefs.

McGinn feels that Moore's attitude is comprehensible only if we admit that the sceptic is in conflict with common sense, something which Stroud disavows in consequence of his insulation doctrine. It is then sufficient for Moore to reject the sceptic out of hand purely on the grounds that it is an absurd position at odds with what we normally believe.

Stroud's inability to comprehend Moore stems directly from Stroud's division of philosophical discourse and the engaged perspective, charges McGinn. Only in taking Moore as arguing against the sceptic within the same field of discourse does Moore's proof make philosophical sense.

All this being said, however, McGinn does not believe that Moore's proof is philosophically adequate despite being intelligible. The dogmatic nature of Moore's position renders it philosophically unacceptable. Where Stroud did not grant Moore the status of arguing philosophically, McGinn does but rejects his conclusions nonetheless. Moore's contention that justifications are not required, that we can know without

supplying proof, is objectionable. McGinn writes:

> It is impossible to use our conviction that the sceptic's conclusion is false as a legitimate ground for dismissing scepticism, for it is clearly part of our ordinary grasp of the concept of knowledge that personal conviction is never sufficient to warrant the affirmation of a knowledge claim exposed to doubt. (McGinn, 1989 p.50)

The presuppositions which support Moore's position regarding knowledge and common sense preclude his appeal to a hasty dismissal of the sceptic. Part of our ordinary conception of knowledge is the requirement that we justify our knowledge claims; to assert knowledge and deny the need for justification is contrary to the very notion of common sense to which Moore appeals and seeks to defend.

Common sense cannot serve as a sufficient refutation of the sceptic if it can only, as Moore suggests, stand dogmatically in opposition to the sceptic's conclusion. Once again we are struck with the profound tension between the convincing, irrefutable, and absurd sceptical conclusion and the common-sense conviction that it is wrong, an intuition which we cannot defend without appealing to the very requirements of justification which the sceptic has shown we cannot provide.

Moore fails to address and cope satisfactorily, i.e. non-dogmatically, with this tension. McGinn suggests that Moore's proof is unsuccessful for two reasons: he distorts `I know' by denying its justificatory basis, and

> ...he does not *earn* our commitment to common sense, by means of a philosophical understanding of *why* the impossibility of grounding our framework judgement does not constitute a threat to, or demonstrate a failure of, our ordinary practice. (McGinn, 1989 p.52)

McGinn's assessment of Moore differs from Stroud's in that she rejects Moore as philosophically unsatisfactory because Moore is dogmatic while Stroud relegates Moore's proof to a realm of discourse that is not on par with the sceptic's, and thus invalid.

So, contra Stroud, the significance of Moore's proof for McGinn is:

> ...not that it uncovers two distinct ways of employing words but that it makes clear the need to understand *why* the sceptic's argument does not show that our common-sense conviction is out of place, and *why* that conviction does not constitute a dogmatic assertion of assumptions held without the requisite justification. (McGinn, 1989 p.52)

Despite the fact that McGinn argues against Stroud's insulation doctrine, she herself appeals to vague notions of philosophical accountability and understanding:

> Although I have argued against Stroud's view that there is a special realm of philosophical discourse, in which the philosopher uses our words but with a special sense or import, it now seems clear that I am committed to the existence of something called `philosophical understanding'. (McGinn, 1989 p.53)

Thus McGinn does not agree with Moore that the role of philosophy is to simply substantiate and confirm our common-sense views. Like Stroud she feels there *is* some sort of elusive philosophical component to the discussion which is a *sine qua non* for the refutation of the sceptic.

It is not that philosophical understanding simply validates what we already wish to assert commonsensically but that philosophy must bring us to an understanding of common sense, and why we can feel vindicated in appealing to it in the face of the

sceptic's challenge.

Section 4 The Problem Dissolved

To attain this philosophical understanding of the legitimacy of our common-sense world-view McGinn looks to Wittgenstein's On Certainty[10]. There are two things to keep firmly in mind as we proceed: that the sceptic's request for justification is inappropriate, and that our ordinary convictions are *not* dogmatic. A philosophically satisfactory response must issue into "an unqualified form of common sense" (McGinn, 1989 p.101), yet we must abstain from using solely common sense to arrive at this response.

McGinn refers to the sum total of our ordinary framework judgements as `Moore-type propositions', a term which she develops from Wittgenstein's concept of `vital framework judgements'.

As handy as this concept is, Wittgenstein remains vague about nailing it down specifically: "I can enumerate various typical cases, but not give any common characteristic" (Wittgenstein, 1969, 674), and "There are cases where doubt is unreasonable, but others where it seems logically impossible. And there seems to be no

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[10] Ludwig Wittgenstein, On Certainty. Ed. by G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. Wright, translated by Dennis Paul and G.E.M. Anscombe. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1969).

clear boundary between them" (Wittgenstein, 1969, 454).

Moore-type propositions are statements which ordinarily resist doubt or demands for justification as somehow inappropriate. They form "the framework against which all enquiry, description of the world...goes on" (McGinn, 1989 p.103). Wittgenstein feels that it is only philosophers with their peculiar mental bent who question the justifiability of Moore-type propositions. The course of action undertaken here is to find some philosophically acceptable path to travel between sceptical doubt and sheer dogmatism.

The contention of McGinn, with Wittgenstein, is that since we can neither effectively doubt nor baldly affirm Moore-type propositions, our relationship to them must be a *non-epistemic* one: "...our relationships to these propositions that form the background to all normal enquiry must be understood in some entirely different way" (McGinn, 1989 p.104). By seeking to shift the ground of the discussion from a traditional epistemically-based enquiry to an alternative account of our relationship to our fundamental beliefs about the world, McGinn hopes to provide a nonsceptical and nondogmatic resolution of the problem of philosophical scepticism.

McGinn employs a two-pronged strategy to achieve her ends: she submits an analysis of Wittgenstein's reflections on the phrase `I Know' and the notion of `certainty'.

Wittgenstein claims that the philosopher misuses the phrase `I know' in the context of Moore-type propositions. McGinn sees the significance of his analysis as illuminating the "unsatisfactoriness of attempting to conceive of our relationship to

Moore-type propositions as an epistemic one" (McGinn, 1989 p.105). Our relationship is too close and involved and lacks the distance essential to the coherent application of epistemic concepts such as knowledge, belief, or doubt (McGinn, 1989 p.105).

Wittgenstein identifies four criticisms of the traditional epistemologist's claim `I know this is a hand'. The four criticisms suggest that the philosopher's and sceptic's use of `I know' cannot be coherently applied to the `I know' regarding Moore-type propositions.

The first criticism is that `know' implies an exclusive knowledge claim not generally known by those addressed. A perfectly banal claim that nobody would dispute is not properly speaking a case of the epistemologist's `I know'. It must be informative in some way, and not something accepted as a matter of course by the most dense interlocutor.

The second criticism concerns the justificatory nature of `I know'. `I know' is connected grammatically with explaining or giving grounds for knowledge claims. "Thus one says `I know' when one is prepared to give compelling grounds" (McGinn, 1989 p.109). Wittgenstein's argument is that Moore-type propositions do not coherently accept the requirement of justificatory grounding. McGinn points out that "...this rules out, as a matter of grammar, the possibility of legitimately embedding these propositions in epistemic contexts" (McGinn, 1989 p.109).

Since Moore-type propositions represent the `limits of certainty', it is not intelligible what exactly would serve as more certain prior grounding claims. So rather than dogmatically asserting such propositions as knowledge, they are seen in fact not as

knowledge claims at all but as `framework judgements'. "Wittgenstein wants to see our inability [to ground Moore-type propositions] as a logical feature of our relationship to these propositions and not as a failing at all" (McGinn, 1989 p.111).

The third criticism is that the epistemologist's `I know' admits of verification or testing, whereas the `I know' of framework judgements is not a hypothesis which may be tested. "...Wittgenstein attempts to persuade us of the total emptiness of the idea that our world view can be treated as a hypothesis" (McGinn, 1989 p.112). Our attitude to our world view is not something that permits the kind of hypothesizing that the epistemologist suggests.

The fourth criticism of the epistemologist's `I know' is that it permits the possibility of being mistaken:

> What Wittgenstein argues is that none of this makes sense in connection with Moore-type propositions: here *the idea of going wrong is not an idea of being mistaken, but of something entirely different.* (McGinn, 1989 p.114)

The sceptic is demanding that Moore-type propositions gauge themselves without an established, comparative context. By denying the type of `friction' necessary to gauge mistakes the sceptic reveals the emptiness of applying the notion of mistake to these propositions. Wittgenstein writes: "I should not call this a *mistake*, but rather a mental disturbance, perhaps a transient one" (Wittgenstein, 1969, 71).

Of these four criticisms the sceptic would argue against the validity of the first one on the grounds that it does not strictly apply to `I know', but would argue that the remaining three *are* met by Moore-type propositions. Indeed his argument depends on

these applying for it to hold.

Being clear on Moore-type propositions, placing them beyond doubt, is a requirement for participating in ordinary practice. We cannot coherently doubt Moore-type propositions since we do not in the typical sense `know' them. We interact with them via understanding, use, and shared practice. They are fundamental conditions of living, not specific facts to be known. They are not empirical truths but judgements without which knowledge would be impossible.

Therefore, the type of certainty which is associated with them is not an `epistemic' certainty, but a more vital, and integrated certainty. "...I would like to regard this certainty, not as something akin to hastiness or superficiality, but as a form of life" (Wittgenstein, 1969, 358).

We are wrong in extending the epistemic notions of grounding, hypothesis, and mistake to Moore-type propositions. We need to see our relationship to framework judgements as radically distinct from judgements made within the framework. "Our relationship to Moore-type propositions is more immediate, more profound and more inexorable than [the traditional] epistemological model suggests" (McGinn, 1989 p.117). According to McGinn what remains to be done is to define this relationship in something other than epistemic terms.

Once we move to operate epistemically vis-a-vis Moore-type propositions we fall into the sceptic's impossible situation and cannot assert them undogmatically. If we buy into the sceptic's epistemic assessment of Moore-type propositions we cannot escape his conclusions, but if, from within the engaged perspective, we fail to realize

the extension of the notions of grounding, hypothesis, and mistake to these propositions we unearth the particular relationship that we do have with them.

Wittgenstein differs from Moore in that Wittgenstein does not categorize this relationship, the certainty is not a type of knowledge, whereas Moore does make that move. By limiting the use of `I know' to internal judgements, Wittgenstein specializes and limits knowledge to within the framework, and points out the special nature of the relationship we do have with this `vital framework'.

McGinn's conviction is that by articulating `I know' and `certainty' in a non-epistemic way we can dissolve the problem of scepticism, and "questions of evidence and justification [will be] put out of play" (McGinn, 1989 p.120). We, as a community, accept and share, and are unwilling to place into doubt, Moore-type propositions, a position supported by the difficulty we have of lumping them in with other epistemic statements. There simply is "no epistemic distance between us and these propositions, that is, they are judgements that we cannot discard or entertain serious doubts about" (McGinn, 1989 p.121).

Wittgenstein's remarks about mathematics dovetail with the above discussion regarding the nature of `I know', further developing his response to the sceptic.

The traditional epistemologist appeals to a mathematical, logical conception of indubitable or intrinsic certainty. Beliefs have to be validated within an axiomatic-deductive system along the lines we usually take to validate mathematical or logical truths. The traditional epistemologist requires a `2+2=4' type of model for knowledge without which " all belief is arbitrary and knowledge is impossible" (McGinn, 1989

p.122).

There are two key difficulties with the traditional concept of the basis of empirical knowledge. One, claims about private, immediate experience do not meet the traditional epistemologist's own standards for certainty. And two, the few beliefs that do pass muster are inadequate or useless as foundations. If experience is conceived purely subjectively we are impotent to resist the sceptic and establish a solid basis for the external objective world in such terms. The ideal of certainty as the sceptic outlines it precludes justification of an external world. The intrinsic certainty of immediate experience and empirical knowledge claims ultimately results in establishing the inaccessibility and non-justifiableness of the external world.

> As long as we remain convinced that the only way to meet the sceptic's demands that we show our system of empirical beliefs to be well-grounded is to uncover indubitable beliefs that are epistemologically prior to our beliefs about the objective world, then we seem inevitably to find ourselves, either with an extremely confined set of beliefs, or with no justifiable beliefs at all. (McGinn, 1989 p.123)

Wittgenstein reinterprets this mathematically derived conception of certainty and applies it to Moore-type propositions. Rather than understanding certainty as a state of mind wherein we cannot be wrong, as an epistemic stance, Wittgenstein takes this type of certainty to be linked to the logical role it plays in our use of the propositions at hand. We are certain of the proposition `2+2=4' not because of its epistemic conviction, but because of its importance and use within the system of mathematics. Similarly, argues Wittgenstein, Moore-type propositions exert their claim to certainty

not through a privileged status but because of their importance and use in our network of empirical knowledge claims, judgements, and descriptions:

> It is not, of course, that logic somehow *corresponds* to reality, for the propositions of logic do not *say* anything *about* reality - but logic and mathematics serve to reveal what the absolutely necessary or formal properties of reality are. (McGinn, 1989 p.125)

By arguing against the intuitive epistemic nature of mathematics and logic in favour of a conception of such truths as logical structures of reality whose certainty is ratified by their use and usefulness, Wittgenstein proposes a model by which Moore-type propositions could be likewise taken in a non-epistemic light, whose certainty is due not to epistemic validity but practical strength. "...logic and mathematics represent the structural limit on the form that facts can take" (McGinn, 1989 p.125). Yet this structural limit is not strictly *in* the world, but in our ability to see and make sense of the world. The certainty which we feel with regard to Moore-type propositions is not a function of their inexorable nature, but in our consistent and relentless application of them to our world.

Rather than seeing logical and mathematical propositions as *truths* about the world we should see them as a system of *techniques* which govern our deductions and inferences:

> The question of whether the propositions are true or false is, at bottom, entirely empty, for it overlooks their technique-constituting role.

And,

> ...calling them true does not add anything to the fact of their being used, it is an honorific title which serves, if it serves any purpose at all, to show that these propositions

are not put in question. (McGinn, 1989 p.128)

`Certainty' viewed through this filter engenders a different type of justification from the traditional epistemic one of foundational beliefs or axioms. The justification of technique lies in its successful application. Instead of asking "Is it grounded?" we ask "Does it work?". The role formerly played by reality is now played by practice.

The stringent nature of absolute necessity as a bulwark for certainty is replaced by the notion of "...the `foundation' of...practice [which] lies entirely in the fact that it has woven itself indispensably into our lives" (McGinn, 1989 p.131).

Such techniques then, are not metaphysical elements but human skills whose negation or disregard implies either madness or incompetence:

> ...our certainty reflects our mastery of the techniques of practice in which we are participants ; it is a form of practical confidence that is better expressed in the words `this is what we do' than in the words `this is true'. (McGinn, 1989 p.134)

The difference between Moore's dogmatic assertion of certain truths and Wittgenstein's non-dogmatic affirmation of certain techniques is that Moore is bound to an epistemic justification based on the appearance/reality distinction which he cannot fulfil. Wittgenstein, however, is committed to satisfying criteria for the mastery of a skill which is not dependent on epistemic requirements derived from such a metaphysical distinction.

> Wittgenstein has developed a conception of certainty that is unconnected with, and prior to, the idea of knowing. It is a notion that stands apart from the concept of justification, and to that extent it provides a model of what it is to be in a position to accept or affirm

> undogmatically a proposition that, in one sense, one has no grounds for. (McGinn, 1989 p.135)

McGinn argues that this model can be extended to empirical Moore-type propositions, obviating the need to justify them according to the sceptic's requirements, and thus undercutting the sceptic's conclusions about the external world. What remains to be seen, however, is if this extension is acceptable or not, and what problems, if any, may arise.

In order to get at the substance of the issue under scrutiny McGinn offers the following line of reasoning: If meaning is seen as interpretation, then there is a non-determinate ground for the correct use of words, as Wittgenstein has suggested in Philosophical Investigations[11]. Interpretations are then defined by their applications, and understanding becomes a function of use; it becomes a practical capacity rather than simply 'knowing propositions'. So if certainty is tied in with meaning and meaning is tied in with use, then understanding (i.e. knowing) is tied in with mastery of use, and doubt becomes a function of feeble understanding of meaning and not of insecurities about the nature of reality. McGinn writes:

> The system of judgements which together constitute our techniques for describing the world is thus playing a role, vis-a-vis our practice of describing, that is analogous to that which the propositions of logic and mathematics play vis-a-vis our practice of inference and calculation. (McGinn, 1989 p.142)

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[11] Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations. Translated by G.E.M. Anscombe. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1953).

Framework judgements function as essential logical techniques by which we describe the empirical world. Of themselves, however, they do not correspond to reality, nor are they properly called true, rather, their truth, such as it is, is a *sine qua non*, a foregone conclusion.

By placing such framework judgements in doubt, we question their meaning, yet their meaning is determined by their use and not their ontological, metaphysical status. In doubting them we deprive them of their meaning and thus undermine or negate the practice by which they are defined. Framework judgements are not foundational epistemically or ontologically but by virtue of their axiomatic and definitional function. This in turn guarantees that the rest of our descriptions makes sense. Without a stable, non-negotiable set of initial parameters all subsequent talk of the world would have to submit a *nolle prosequi*. As McGinn puts it: "Thus, my certainty regarding, say, the judgement `this is a hand' is to be seen as a pre-epistemic attitude that is in part constitutive of my practical ability to speak the language" (McGinn, 1989 p.144).

The core question becomes `what do we do?' rather than `what can we know?'. The type of certainty involved in such a model vitiates the necessity for traditional epistemic justification. Instead, justification becomes a form of testing: "If the question of expertise should be raised, then, as we have seen, it is always capable of being settled" (McGinn, 1989 p.144). And, "At the bottom of our practice lies, not knowledge, but practical abilities to employ conceptual techniques" (McGinn, 1989 p.145).

McGinn identifies two possible lines of criticism: i) there is an implicit naturalism in Wittgenstein's model which can be seen as dogmatic and thus renders his argument invalid; and ii) the analogy between Moore-type propositions and mathematical, logical propositions is inappropriate and illegitimate.

Firstly, to understand why Wittgenstein's naturalism is not a dogmatic question-begging of the sceptical problem it is necessary to review precisely how the sceptical thesis emerges in the philosophical context and what sort of conception of experience is appealed to.

There are two curious features of the sceptic's questioning of human practice. One, the perplexing situation in which the sceptic's philosophical assessment is in conflict with the engaged perspective, or the philosophical uncovering of dogmatic elements in ordinary practices which we otherwise feel are beyond, or prior to, the need for justification. And two, the fact that the sceptic's own conclusions "deprive him of the right to believe in the phenomenon he began by investigating" (McGinn, 1989 p.149). The sceptic's loss of the objective world arises during his investigation and is not contained in its beginnings.

> However, once we recognize that the sceptic's solipsistic conception of experience is itself a product of what Wittgenstein believes to be a misapprehension of the nature of the judgements that form the frame of our practice, then we can see how an account which avoids this misapprehension has no need to address itself to the problems that this conception of experience gives rise to. (McGinn, 1989 p.149)

Thus, since Wittgenstein does not engage the essential presuppositions which the

sceptic operates with, Wittgenstein is not begging any questions. In Wittgenstein's account sceptical problems simply do not arise and so do not require solution. Furthermore, Wittgenstein's account is satisfactorily reflective and philosophical, it is merely the case that within this account sceptical misapprehensions are absent:

> The natural outlook that is Wittgenstein's starting point should not, therefore, be regarded as needing to regain ground from the sceptic: the sceptical question has not been allowed to arise and threaten it. (McGinn, 1989 p.150)

Only in succumbing to the sceptic's assumptions about experience do common sense, as well as the sceptic's own starting point, become engulfed. Rather than re-asserting the certainty of the common-sense perspective dogmatically as Moore does, Wittgenstein provides a reflective, philosophical understanding of the obviation of justifying framework judgements. Wittgenstein's commitment to naturalism is thus seen as a crucial element for his model of knowledge and certainty, and not as a dogmatic assertion of the nature of reality. Wittgenstein initiates his investigation in the context of a naturalistic human phenomenon: the practice of the language game. As McGinn states it:

> If we have not first appreciated that scepticism is itself something that arises within an essentially naturalistic outlook, which it only later paradoxically undermines, then we shall wrongly conceive our task to be one not of preventing scepticism from arising but of regaining naturalism from the sceptic. (McGinn, 1989 p.151)

By placing the sceptic's preliminary presuppositions in question, Wittgenstein avoids the charge of question-begging.

There remains the difficulty or objection to Wittgenstein's account of the analogy between mathematical, logical propositions and Moore-type propositions. McGinn refutes this objection by appealing to the four criteria for `I know' listed above. She claims that by and large the criteria are satisfied by Moore-type propositions. Yet McGinn is not unrestrained in her favourable assessment of the correlation. The difficulty admitted by both McGinn and Wittgenstein regarding coming to a rigid definition of, or list of the constitutive characteristics of, framework judgements, results in a looseness of the analogy. In principle what we consider to be prototypical framework judgements, e.g. `this is a hand', `there is a world out there', conform to the criteria sufficiently to render any discrepancies or exceptions negligible.

CHAPTER 3 ASSESSMENTS AND RECONCILIATIONS

Introduction

In this chapter I will attempt to accomplish three things. First, I will elaborate a version of the metaphysical/epistemological distinction, in the belief that scepticism revolves around two focal points and that understanding these two concepts sheds a crucial light on the nature of the problem. In support of this distinction and its particular impact on scepticism, I will provide an appeal in the form of a brief counterpoint of Moore to Berkeley.

Second, I will criticize both Stroud and McGinn on two levels. There is the level of minor inconsistencies and problems of procedure, the technical problems of method and definitional difficulties, which both experience when dealing with such concepts as the internal/external, philosophical/common-sense distinctions. Pursuing these criticisms will lead to some insight regarding the difference between philosophy and common sense, and how this difference is central to their discussion of scepticism.

Then there is another level, to which some of the previous criticisms point, namely the deeper problems the authors experience in coping with the metaphysical and epistemological aspects of the problem of scepticism, and the ways this contributes to the eccentric nature of the problem.

Third, I will argue that the concept of `knowledge' is an amalgam of specific rational activities that, when not properly differentiated, contribute to the general

confusion and intractability of the problem of scepticism. In this respect I will borrow from Aristotle's doctrine of the dianoetic virtues. Such an account of knowledge will lead to a deeper understanding of the odd relationship between philosophy and common sense, and reveal not only how one's conception of philosophy determines one's answer to the problem of scepticism, but also how such a prototypical insoluble problem acts as an `engine' that drives the philosophical project.

Section 1 Metaphysical and Epistemological Strains in Scepticism

The problem of scepticism has traditionally been conceived as an epistemological one. "What can we know?", "what are the justificatory bases of our knowledge?", "how do we form and sustain our knowledge claims?". These are all epistemological concerns. Yet the notion of an `external world' as conceived by Stroud, as the inheritor of a long tradition in philosophy, is a metaphysical one.

Justifying our belief in an objective external world, and ratifying such a notion as true and knowable, involves more than offering an epistemological account of knowledge, it presupposes an accepted metaphysical component: an ontology of reality, in this case, the external world.

When Descartes asks the fundamental question "How can I know that what I know is the external world?", he blends two questions together. There is the primary question of what we know and how we know, but there is also the implied question that

asks "How can I know that what I seem to know is real?". The former demands a descriptive account of the basis of knowledge, the latter demands a proof of a metaphysical/ontological concept. The two are not easily distinguished, nor are they wholly independent one from the other.

It is significant that for philosophers asking the sceptical question there can be only two ways of answering. One can, as Descartes and Berkeley both did, postulate the existence of God (or a sustaining Mind) (for both of them it was no postulate but rather the result of a proof in the case of Descartes, and an argument in the case of Berkeley), or abstain completely from passing judgement on the existence of the external world as the Pyrrhonists and Hume did.

In the case of Descartes and Berkeley the pursuit of an original epistemological impulse lead inexorably to a metaphysical commitment or standpoint, that of God as sustaining or guaranteeing an objective reality, viz. the external world. Without which Descartes would be condemned to a rational solipsistic universe, and without which Berkeley would not only lose the world but all minds as well. Without a metaphysical accounting or commitment their epistemological inquiries leave them isolated and impoverished.

As moderns, we, unlike Berkeley and Descartes, are uncomfortable with appeals to God as a sustainer or guarantor of the external world. Yet in essence the problem is the same. There seems to be an unbridgeable gap between what we would assert and our ability to arrive at that justified endpoint in an unbroken logical chain. If it is true that the nature of the external world depends on the acceptance of a

metaphysical principle, then the problem becomes determining what that principle is and how we can confirm it as knowledge. For Berkeley and Descartes the availability of the concept of God was commonly acceptable. We as contemporary philosophers do not allow ourselves that luxury, yet that type of specific metaphysical requirement or component seems to endure, whether it is couched in terms such as naturalism, idealism, or realism.

There are curious parallels between Moore and Berkeley, despite the fact that Berkeley was an immaterialist and Moore was a closet naturalist. Consider the following quote from the Principles:

> I do not argue against the existence of any one thing that we can apprehend, either by sense or reflexion. That the things I see with my own eyes and touch with my hands do exist really exist, I make not the slightest question.[12]

Berkeley was as eager as Moore was to affirm the reality of what our ordinary perceptions present to us. Berkeley's `esse is percipi' guarantees that what we see is what we get. The threat of scepticism arose from the complications posed by the postulation of a material substratum, the reality behind the veil of perception. It was this threat that Berkeley undercut by eliminating matter and aligning reality with `ideas' and not external independent objects. That these `ideas' are immediate solved the epistemological dilemma of what one could know: one simply knew one's `ideas', and if one was attentive enough error could be avoided. Similarly as with Moore, the

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[12] George Berkeley, A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge, 1710. Philosophical Works. (London: Dent and Sons, 1975), sec 35.

epistemological problem was dispatched in favour of more pressing concerns, whether these were perceptual problems, science, analysis, or the service to God.

But both Berkeley and Moore had to give some account in metaphysical terms, they both had to deal with the philosophical ramifications of such apparently easily won epistemologies. For Moore, metaphysics was ignored or implicitly taken as a non-issue[13]; philosophy ultimately was redefined in terms of analysis and method, the reality of the world taken for granted but not elaborated in philosophical terms.

Berkeley's solution to the problem required an initial and necessary reference to an infinite mind, an enduring Perceiver or Sustainer. To grant `ideas' reality with the proviso of `esse is percipi' satisfies common sense only if `ideas', as external world, exist continuously. To have the external jumping in and out of existence is not very commonsensical. Despite sound and valid philosophical argumentation, the external world presents itself with equal force as enduring, continuous, and decidedly physical and external.

It is this tension between a convincing philosophical argument and the insistent quality of everyday experience that resulted in Moore's paradoxical position of being able to fully accord with the premises of philosophical sceptical arguments and yet reject their conclusions as unacceptable in favour of a common-sense view of the world. It is this same tension which Berkeley seeks to resolve by inferring God as the

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[13] Actually, Moore was very concerned with metaphysical issues and discussed them privately and in lectures but was unable, or unwilling, to commit to any position in his published works.

sustainer of all `ideas'. Without God, Berkeley's world not only violates common sense, but more, it would simply cease to exist.

In the cases of both Berkeley and Moore the impossibility of articulating a cohesive philosophical picture that satisfies intellectual rigour, philosophical responsibility, and common sense is apparent. In both cases the tension is resolved by having to make a final decision that sacrifices philosophic consistency to accommodate common sense. To arrive at an epistemology that satisfies what we all want to believe, what we feel is undeniable, means having to compromise the philosophic rigour of metaphysics. Berkeley compromises by making an explanatory inference to a God who sustains the world, an inference dictated by the demands of common sense, not by philosophic necessity.

Both Moore and Berkeley share a temperament which favours common sense and a philosophical acumen which struggles to overcome a built-in tension of the problem of scepticism, revolving around an acceptable epistemology of knowing the world and the metaphysical implications of its existence. The fact that their ultimate stances are so divergent further supports the notion that coming to terms with the metaphysical underpinnings of the sceptical problem are at once necessary but yet may result in vastly different conclusions. That Moore skirted the metaphysical implications of the problem does not alter the fact that in his account there is a tacit assumption of a representational realism within a naturalist context, thus committing him to a physicalist ontology of logically independent entities.

An implicit naturalism carries within it an explicit ontological commitment. So

that by attempting to avoid the problem, Moore merely delays the inevitable. At the end of the day he must come up with some metaphysical account, he must confess to some ontology.

It does not seem possible to embark on an epistemological survey of the possibility of our knowledge without ultimately running into messy metaphysical issues. So that while a comprehensive account of knowledge such as Wittgenstein's may well eliminate the necessity of providing justification for framework judgements, it does nothing to help us determine what reality is, or if the reality which we perceive is the real reality. To put it less clumsily, an exhaustive epistemological account of knowledge does not rule out counterfactual logical possibilities, nor does it make any metaphysical guarantees.

Thus, if one understands or limits the sceptical problem as an epistemological conceit there is a way of extricating oneself from the dilemma. To make such a solution legitimate, however, one must somehow invalidate the metaphysical conceit. One must somehow explain away the messy indeterminateness of metaphysics. This does not seem possible for two reasons. One, metaphysics does not admit of conclusive proofs or accounts; and two, the speculative nature of metaphysical questions has an irresistible pull, we are not always content to stop at what we can know. The philosophical question then seems to be "What can I not know, and why not?" rather than simply "What can I know?"

If this is all true, then the sceptic is guilty of a fundamental deception in posing his question. The sceptic poses the question of our knowledge in the guise of an

epistemological problem when what he is really seeking is a metaphysical proof of the existence of the external world. That he demands such a proof in terms of a descriptive or axiomatic epistemology reveals the inherent impossibility of providing an answer. So McGinn and Wittgenstein are both right but for the wrong reasons. We do not need to provide justification of the sort the sceptic requires, but we do need to address the metaphysical challenge which is posed. This McGinn and Wittgenstein do not do.

Stroud, on the other hand, correctly assesses the extent of the sceptic's demands in that he recognizes the deeper, more profound implications of the issue. But in formulating the problem, Stroud falls into the difficulty of providing a conclusion in terms of knowledge per se, not in terms of ontological schema. Thus, he arrives at an impasse where the criteria for knowledge are so severe virtually nothing qualifies, and the sceptic is answered, but not held accountable for his sleight of hand, and once again the metaphysical issue is not addressed.

Section 2 Assessing Stroud

Part of the difficulty Stroud encounters in his analysis of the sceptical problem lies in the distinctions which he makes between internal/external and philosophical/common-sense. McGinn addresses these difficulties in her criticisms of Stroud but does not pursue the deeper implications of them. What I would suggest and

argue for is that the distinction between internal/external harbours not only a prejudice in favour of philosophical understanding as opposed to common-sense understanding which undermines Stroud's claims that sceptical doubts are commonsensical ones taken in a more rigorous context, but also that such a distinction points to severe problems in trying to establish a clear difference between philosophy and common sense.

The force of Stroud's argument relies on an identity between philosophical conceptions of knowledge and the unreflective variety. If sceptical doubts have any weight at all it is because the type of knowledge in question and the concomitant requirements of justification are indistinguishable from their commonsense varieties. It is merely that philosophy uncovers hidden characteristics of the question of which common sense is not aware, but which common sense appeals to nonetheless. For scepticism to be coherent it must not make use of conceptions of knowledge and justification which are contrary to common sense. Yet the difference between philosophy and common sense remains unclear, as do external requirements for justification. The intuition that philosophical analysis provides a more satisfactory account of the constitutive characteristics of knowledge is thus in tension with the requirement that the concepts in question be identical across the board.

In order to grant legitimacy to the problem of scepticism one must therefore, one the one hand, appeal to a consistent set of definitions for knowledge and justification, and on the other, articulate a hierarchy wherein philosophical accounts supersede common-sense accounts. Initially, the difference between philosophy and common sense appears acceptable to make. A deeper reflection shows, however, that

the difference is not so clear. The trademarks of the philosophical perspective are generality, disengagement, and the elusive external quality. Common sense, on the other hand, is characterized by engagement, specificity, and a willingness to rely on internal frames of reference. Thus it seems as if, prima facie, there is a sound basis for making the distinction between two concepts which are seen to be distinct.

Common sense, despite its earthbound nature, also appeals to philosophical type qualities. To claim there is no reflective portion to the engaged perspective is to simplify it so that the distinction becomes workable. Moreover, much of what passes for common sense has been derived from accepted scientific and cultural ideas which were at one time radical, suspect, and not at all commonsensical: it was once common sense to assert that the earth was flat, we inhabited a geocentric universe, God existed, orbital motion was circular, and so on. Now, however, that the contrary is true, it is no longer commonsensical to assert these things. Conversely, the type of rational argumentation or thinking that was involved in developing new perspectives regarding the above examples contained within it a type of common sense without which new theories would not enjoy the conviction they do have. If looked at closely the reasoning underlying many not so obvious claims such as the roundness of the earth, that most physical objects are porous rather than solid due to the structure of the atom, and so on, has to pass the test of whether it makes sense or not. It is this sensible quality that carries the force necessary to win over people who unreflectively hold the opposite view. In philosophy as well there is a modest appeal to `making sense' that permits one to formulate convincing arguments. A philosophical dialogue can only proceed in so far

as each step in the argument passes the requirement of `making sense' to both interlocutors.

Common sense makes a strong appeal to `making sense', and thus we are ready to uniformly characterize it by that quality. Whereas philosophy makes a strong appeal to questioning the limits of `making sense'. The parameters of each sphere are different but not wholly dissimilar. In philosophy, logical rigour is primary, in common sense what is immediately obvious to the meanest intelligence is primary. The ordinary unreflective interlocutor can be slowly lead by common sense to philosophical conclusions, and the philosopher must always answer to the check of common sense, or `making sense'.

The Socratic dialogues are a fine example of this. Socrates, by constantly operating within the commonsense sphere brings his charges on extensive philosophical journeys passing through many strange conclusions. His interlocutors are helpless in bringing commonsense to their aid in attempting to extricate themselves from the difficulties which Socrates makes apparent because it is essentially common sense which has brought them to these positions.

Stroud makes the distinction as he does to account for the tension inherent within scepticism. By opposing philosophy to common sense he can make sense of the urge to hold two contradictory views, each strongly substantiated. If one were to agree to one sphere of discourse there would be no way to establish the desired hierarchical friction necessary for resolving the problem. If one can come to a philosophical understanding of the problem in contrast to the common-sense vantage point then it

remains only to demonstrate the superiority of the philosophical vantage point, something which is more within the realm of the possible than trying to establish a coherent coexistence of two equally valid positions. That the distinction is problematic suggests that the two positions are not as distinct as one would wish and that each at times appeals to the defining characteristics of the other. It would seem that the relationship between philosophy and common sense is symbiotic rather than oppositional. This would explain the difficulty that both Stroud and McGinn have in maintaining the distinction.

Section 3 Assessing McGinn

Insofar as Stroud admits the difficulty of clearly defining the internal/external distinction he nevertheless has a strict conception of knowledge to which he appeals. So that while McGinn is correct in her tactic of challenging his conception of knowledge, she is hard pressed to assert the same challenge for the distinction between internal/external spheres of discourse. But both her points regarding Stroud's approach to the sceptic are problematic.

McGinn's claim that tampering with the concepts of knowledge and objectivity will not issue in a solution misfires for two reasons. First, Stroud is not so much tampering with these notions as trying to establish clear criteria that can be used as

standards across the board, whether one is operating in the philosophical or commonsensical sphere. His impulse in doing so is to demonstrate that sceptical concerns are real concerns, and that to attempt to undermine the sceptic by instituting different criteria for philosophical knowledge claims and common-sense ones results in a distorted ambivalence of concepts, which must otherwise remain coherent. To this end he argues that the concept of knowledge we do use in the everyday is the same concept under scrutiny by the disengaged philosopher. It is this homogeneity that renders the sceptical position coherent and insurmountable.

McGinn's contends that Stroud is stacking the deck in favour of the sceptic by thus defining knowledge and objectivity. She can only validate her own position if she herself can articulate a more satisfactory, or accurate, conception of knowledge, which according to her own requirement, is free from tampering. It seems fairly obvious that in appealing to Wittgenstein's genealogy of the phrase `I know', there is some degree of tampering taking place. One does not normally view knowledge as a practical technique, but rather as a static condition. One is said to possess knowledge, not to perform it.

But let us grant McGinn her exposition of knowledge as revealing not the cultural or etymological sediment that obscures the term, but revealing instead the way in which we actually do mean it. So that if McGinn is correct in her definition of knowledge, or `I know', we are not so much tampering with the concept as getting clear on its true meaning. Here, she runs into a greater difficulty. It would be a negligible matter to recant and admit that some tampering, or redefining due to close

questioning of knowledge and objectivity, is required. But by outlining her own version of the concepts over and against those commonly used, she tacitly appeals to distinctions which she condemns in Stroud.

If Stroud is unjustified in assuming some special quality of philosophical inquiry, some external characteristic, then McGinn is placed in a precarious position by looking at knowledge in the way she does. Her claims to use philosophy in the service of common sense are undermined by the fact that philosophical questioning presupposes the suspension of typically common-sense views. This move in itself is consistent within Stroud's conception of the relationship between common sense and philosophy but becomes problematic in McGinn. Since she denies any validity to the distinction she cannot in effect make the shift which she requires in order to substantiate her claims. Philosophical reflections of the order in which she engages are impotent in establishing a more precise articulation of knowledge, an articulation which is essential if she is to provide the proposed dissolution of the problem.

McGinn is caught within a paradoxical situation where to answer the sceptic she must necessarily appeal to an external examination of knowledge which she denies to the sceptic in his own posing of the problem. The fact that she attempts to circumvent the problem by setting parameters for acceptable situations for external inquiries does not alter the fact that the external quality is still appealed to while remaining, as with Stroud, unclear. It seems then that despite all the best attempts to avoid engaging in external-type inquiries such attitudes are impossible to avoid. Unless one, like Moore, simply dispenses with any discussion altogether. McGinn, by engaging the discussion at

the level of generality required for her to make her case, is committed to a bifurcation of philosophy and common sense, at least in the sense that she and Stroud have discussed.

But the greater difficulty, and the one more central to the debate, is the objection that McGinn does not fully grasp the extent of the sceptical problem. She does not appreciate the metaphysical quandary in which one is placed by the sceptic's challenge.

McGinn's blind spot in this regard is due to her own tampering with the conception of knowledge. With Stroud the problem was that his strict conception of knowledge limited drastically the field in which it could be applied. Stroud's conception revolved around the issue of deductive closure and as such was suited to higher level, metaphysical, concerns. That no knowledge was forthcoming was indeed a drawback, but no illegitimate knowledge was granted either. In that exchange, one was not in a position to know anything but, ironically, secure in that fact. McGinn makes a different exchange. Her conception of knowledge permits the possibility of all the usual knowledge claims being made, but undercuts the metaphysical or ontological claims which are essential to providing coherence to the overall system.

By devaluing the strong conception of knowledge with which Stroud operates, McGinn creates a climate in which many things are possible to be known, but in which ontological and metaphysical questions lose not only their intelligibilty but also their validity as proper concerns. By virtue of this, the sceptic is neutralized from posing his threat. Thus, McGinn's answer to the problem is dependent on construing the sceptic's

challenge in purely epistemic terms and providing the justificatory schemata necessary for supporting the mundane knowledge claims of common sense. McGinn does in fact accomplish this if one ignores the technical difficulties listed above. However, by construing the problem in these terms she is guilty of a major oversight and possibly a profound misunderstanding of the issues involved.

McGinn fails to realize that the sceptic is not only, or even primarily, involved in questions about empirical knowledge, but more intractable questions about the nature of reality and the access we can have to it. Her claim that the sceptic's challenge holds no conviction, that while we may possibly accede to sceptical notions while in the throes of philosophical reveries which have no effect on our daily lives, is nearsighted. While it may be true that philosophical scepticism will not prompt one and all to immediately renounce our commonsense knowledge framework, there is a danger that prolonged exposure to such scepticism has a more subtle and profound effect on the kinds of metaphysical substructures that underlie social, moral, personal,- and even, ultimately, empirical concerns. Perhaps the assumption, on the part of McGinn, is that metaphysical concerns are divorced from common-sense concerns and that by excising the metaphysical dimension we excise merely the sceptical threat, and that nothing essential has been lost. Her sense is that sceptical doubts are the result of philosophical obfuscation and that they carry no real weight beyond purely philosophical concerns. Further, the tension between philosophical theories and commonsense claims is consequential only for those who are enmeshed in philosophical inquiries, the common-sense person views such tension as absurd if not non-existent.

McGinn is intent on eliminating this tension not by granting philosophy equal weight with common sense and coming to a resolution of the dilemma but by demonstrating that the philosophical issues at stake are ephemeral. Philosophically, this tactic backfires at the end of her account when she attempts to justify her naturalist assumptions. As a metaphysical stance naturalism cannot be adequately justified in the terms that McGinn has insisted on employing in her account of knowledge and scepticism. If, in order to dissolve the problem as she wishes, she must forego the metaphysical aspect on the grounds that it is either unintelligible or unimportant, how then can she hope to justify her naturalistic assumptions? Ultimately, she cannot, and reverts to question-begging wherein she asserts, like Quine, that since the sceptic raises his doubts in an empirical context it is paradoxical to question that same context by virtue of his conclusions. In a sense she takes refuge in an internalist appeal to the system in question. A position she vitiated implicitly by engaging in a philosophical account of knowledge.

It seems then that, if pushed, one must give a metaphysical account of the underpinnings of any answer to the sceptic. If one fails to do so, either one is committed, like Stroud, to the sceptic's conclusions, or one is caught in inconclusive arguments and philosophical inconsistencies, like McGinn. If one takes the strict view of knowledge, then, technically, it remains elusive, but one does have a philosophically clear conscience. Or, if one softens the concept of knowledge, then the sceptic is, at best, temporarily silenced, at worst profoundly misunderstood.

Section 4 Reappraising Conceptions of Knowledge

For both Stroud and McGinn, their respective responses to the sceptic are determined in large part by their versions of the conception of knowledge. The way knowledge is understood not only determines the scope and strength of the sceptic's argument, but also the response which ensues. Insofar as Stroud defines his terms he is correct in his response, and much the same applies to McGinn. The fact that they both encounter difficulties with problematic distinctions such as internal/external and philosophical/common-sense is due not only to the confusion around the concept of knowledge but to their commitments to the role of philosophy and the nature of philosophical problems as well. On the one hand, Stroud is content with unresolvable problems as long as the rigour of philosophical inquiry is unimpeached. McGinn, however has less patience for irresolvable problems and sees them as a sign of philosophy gone astray. If common sense is the final arbitrator, then philosophy must be either limited or contained in the questions which it can rightfully ask. The relationship between the concept of knowledge and the concept of philosophy's nature and role is central not only to determining the exact significance of the sceptical argument but also to clarifying the problematic distinctions which are at its core.

If one admits the contention that the entire philosophical project as inherited by Stroud and McGinn is in essence Greek, and that the sceptical problem is couched in nomenclature which is also derived from the Greek, one notices that `knowledge' as a term, is out of place. Its roots are old English, not ancient Greek. To use it within a

system based on precise, if obscured by history, Greek words causes some confusion. `Know' is a handy word that can be used in a multitude of ways: I know it will rain by looking at the ominous clouds in the sky; I know my sister, she would not lie; I know that two plus two equals four; I know how to do a handstand; I know that God exists. We use `know' in an offhand way whenever it suits our purposes. Yet all the five examples listed above are markedly different. Despite the fact that Stroud and McGinn go to great pains to define the term some of this confusion creeps in at a basic level causing greater confusion as the debate evolves.

Without trying to defend or appeal to substantive Aristotelian theories, it is possible to borrow some terms which he used in order to articulate a more precise vocabulary when dealing with knowledge issues. Aristotle's theory of the intellectual virtues adequately makes the key distinctions required in order to segregate the various types of knowledge to which we usually appeal. By clarifying knowledge in this way two things will emerge: one, it will become apparent that there are concomitant types of justification for each category, aiding in clarifying the internal/ external distinction; and two, it will help to understand philosophy as a multifaceted rational endeavour, thus shedding light on the philosophical/commonsense distinction.

The Ancient Greeks did not have the concept of knowledge, per s, but they did have an abundance of other useful and precise words. For Aristotle, the intellectual virtues defined rational activity; they were *techne, phronesis, episteme, sophia, and*

nous.[14]

Techne is simply physical technical ability, craftsmanship, old fashioned know-how. Shoemakers, gymnasts, potters, engineers all had an abundance of *techne*.

Phronesis is the ability to put general and abstract principles to specific and concrete use. For Aristotle the term had strong moral connotations and was used primarily in a social and political context. The *phronimos*, one who possessed *phronesis*, had a great deal of moral acumen, could mediate ably, and was an accomplished and wise statesman, arbitrator, or judge.

Episteme is empirical data. Measurements, lists of animal and vegetable species, astronomical charts, all constituted *episteme*.

Sophia is theoretical and logical-deductive skills. Mathematicians, logicians, sophists all required a great deal of *sophia*.

Nous played a difficult and ambivalent role in Aristotle's philosophy, but C.D.C. Reeve defines it as "...a form of intuitive reason that simply enables us to detect indemonstrable first principles in a way that justifies us in believing them to be intrinsically necessary."[15] Thus defined *nous* is pivotal in science, philosophy, and religion.

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[14] Actually, Aristotle had another word which had a strong bearing on rational activity, *logos*. For the purposes of brevity and clarity of argument in this context it may be helpful to render rational activity in terms of the intellectual virtues alone rather than to try to elucidate a notoriously difficult concept such as *logos*.

[15] C.D.C Reeve, Practices of Reason: Aristotle's Nichomachean Ethics. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p.62.

Without getting enmeshed in the myriad intricacies of Aristotelian scholarship, these five categories provide a rough guide for a more detailed description of knowledge, as well as outlining a more coherent pattern for justificatory practices. One would not presume to demand a theoretical justification for a handspring when a simple demonstration of that skill would serve. Or again, one need not demonstrate the first principles involved in a case before the judge if both parties are content with the result. Consensus, performance, axiomatic demonstration, historical and biographical detail, pointing and counting all serve as adequate justification for their respective knowledge categories. Furthermore, it is inappropriate to demand an unsuitable type of justification, to do so is to cross one's wires, as it were. One need not give a logical proof to validate the number of chairs in a room, nor should one. Conversely, consensus is inappropriate when mathematical issues are at stake; no matter how many people agree, two plus two does not equal five.

If one does substitute this grid of intellectual virtues in place of a monolithic conception of knowledge then the sceptical problem can be recast. If the sceptic is asking a purely epistemological, technological, or `phronological' question about our justification for ordinary knowledge claims about the world then McGinn is within the mandate and her dissolution is successful. If the sceptic is asking more profound questions about our access to reality, then Stroud is correct in stating that such justification is unavailable. If it is true that the sceptical problem is multifaceted, that there are epistemological components as well as metaphysical ones, then the problem is, to some extent, heterogenous and several answers on several levels are possible.

To summarize in the Aristotelian vernacular, it is not necessary to provide *nous* and *sophia* type justifications for knowledge claims that are *episteme, techne,* and, *phronesis* in nature. McGinn is correct, on the basis of her conception of knowledge, in dismissing Stroud's requirements of logical closure as too extreme and misplaced. The framework cannot in this way be placed in question. However, *episteme, techne,* and *phronesis* justifications are helpless at resolving the more abstract and general questions of metaphysics and ontology that emerge with Stroud's conception of knowledge. Thus, Stroud is correct in maintaining a sceptical attitude towards strict knowledge of the external world, since *nous* and *sophia* cannot come to a definite conclusion on the matter. First principles are subject to logical closure and many different coherent systems can be formulated that save the phenomena.

The apparent intractability of the sceptical problem is then seen to be the result of a confusion of knowledge and justificatory categories. The problem is partly intractable, reality is ultimately unknowable, and partly, as common sense suggests, absurd and nonsensical, since we operate very successfully in our world. Both Stroud and McGinn are guilty of attempting to provide one overriding answer to what is essentially able to sustain several perspectives. Stroud's answer satisfies one aspect, McGinn's another, but they are both logically contained, and thus the problem apparently persists within their philosophical discourse.

Section 5 Reappraising Conceptions of Philosophy

As the Aristotelian categories of the intellectual virtues enable the clarifying of the metaphysical/epistemological distinction at work within the problem of scepticism, they also point the way to a resolution of the troublesome philosophy/common sense distinction with which Stroud and McGinn have struggled and which is at the root of the paradox or tension inherent in philosophical scepticism. By segregating `knowledge' into different categories each with their own variety of justification, the problem of scepticism is seen to operate on several levels. By extending this genealogy to concerns surrounding philosophy and common sense the apparent adversarial quality of these two attitudes can be construed in a new light.

If philosophy's primary concerns are with external-type justifications, or with explanations of a sufficiently detached and abstract nature, then one can see that the spectrum of knowledge within which it operates is that of *nous* and *sophia*. That is, its explanations are of the order of necessary presuppositions, or first principles, or even intuitions, and the logical coherence of systems. Common sense, on the other hand, operates at the level of consensus, practical application or engagement, and quantification. In short, common sense usually operates at a level of internal justification, appealing to the notions of *phronesis, techne,* and *episteme.* The distinction is not firm, however, as each approach borrows characteristics which by and large define the other. Yet for the purposes of clarity in discussing their apparent opposition, it is useful to draw the schemata boldly.

Furthermore, if rational activity can be cast in the mold provided by the intellectual virtues it can be construed that both philosophy and common sense share a justifiable claim to an intimate connection with reason. Since philosophy's and common sense's defining characteristics are constituent elements of rational activity, they each epitomize a certain aspect of reason. Thus, while apparently in dire opposition on the issue of philosophical scepticism, they are in actual fact merely evoking its various aspects.

The issue of final arbitration can be undercut by avoiding the ordering of the knowledge categories into a firm hierarchy, as, for instance, Aristotle insisted they must be. Instead, it is possible to organize them into an interdependent and coherent system, wherein they operate much as the fingers of the hand do in grasping objects. (Perhaps, in a nod to Aristotle's wisdom and insight, one could give the role of the thumb to *nous*.) Such a model would then provide the following resolution of the paradox of philosophical scepticism: while philosophy grants us the metaphysical insight that scepticism is an intelligible, though possibly regrettable position, we simply cannot make a determination regarding the nature or reality of the external world; common sense teaches us that within the parameters provided there is much that can be determined, and acted upon. Each attitude followed blindly results in only a partial perspective on scepticism, and thus an incomplete solution or dissolution of the problem. But taken together, common-sense explanation gives way to understanding and action and, possibly, philosophical knowledge gives way to a wisdom about scepticism.

That Stroud and McGinn each favour one perspective over the other reveals attitudes they hold towards what philosophy is, the kind of questions it may ask, and the kinds of responses or answers that are acceptable. Stroud, taking philosophy in its strong historical form, is committed to posing and coping with issues at the level of *nous* and *sophia*. As such, he accepts the possibility of eternal and irresolvable questions. Freewill, the existence of God, the nature of the good, philosophical scepticism, and so on, all form the canon on which philosophy has traditionally been based. That the years have not provided definite answers to these problems has not prevented much of great interest being said. And although conclusive answers have not been forthcoming, the discussion has deepened our understanding of the issues involved. The tacit assumption is, however, that philosophy, as a discipline, must provide a strict answer in objective terms of proven presuppositions, and axioms or logical deductions, as opposed to say, subjective terms such as faith, analogy, convergent arguments, or circumstantial evidence. Philosophy in this sense is defined by the quest for clear and solid foundations. If philosophy is taken in this way then the problem of scepticism is not only legitimate but unanswerable as well.

McGinn's understanding is more flexible and more modern in the sense that it subscribes to the disposition made popular by such recent thinkers as Wittgenstein, Quine, and Rorty, namely that the old problems of philosophy are unsolvable and therefore one should dispense with philosophizing about what one cannot know and opt instead for analyzing or conversing about what one can know. Philosophy's parameters are then reset to exclude the traditional problems. One difficulty that ensues is that

while such an attitude may be tenable at a scholarly level it is doubtful whether or not it carries any weight at the personal level. Once metaphysical doubts of the sort that philosophical scepticism raises are recognized, merely stating that they are not part of what one should wonder about philosophically, and then showing why on the basis of how philosophy is defined, does not seem to help. The academic excision of concerns from rational consideration and their consignment to religion or faith does not deter those who are so minded from trying to reason about them.

Be that as it may, McGinn's approach does have the advantage of bringing into relief the division between the soluble and the insoluble, and also, of suggesting how and to what extent we can be definite. On such a view of philosophy the problem of scepticism is nullified by virtue of the terms in which it is posed, and sceptical doubts are thus seen to be profoundly unphilosophical.

However, as when one takes knowledge to be a monolithic concept, when one takes philosophy in the same way one comes to a similar distortion. If philosophy must be either analysis, therapy, or coherent system, then full justice is not done to the multiplicity and intricacies of philosophical problems in general. Merely analyzing that which admits of logical articulation, or merely offering therapeutic panaceas, or merely erecting large scale explanatory systems does not seem to suffice. An integration of all these impulses is required if one is to understand philosophy not only as a broad and multifaceted academic discipline, but as a human impulse. There is contained in philosophy the impulse to understand what is going on, so one analyzes; there is the need to cope with the irresolvable mysteries, so one needs philosophical therapy, and

there is the need to come to a deeper understanding of the way all things cohere, so there is system of belief.

Stroud and McGinn, in tying themselves to restricted notions of knowledge and philosophy, create a climate wherein scepticism is predetermined to be a problem or not, to have a solution or not. Whereas the issue of the conception of knowledge may be resolvable, the question of the nature of philosophy seems to be ultimately a question of temperament or disposition. However, if one insists on defining philosophy as an essentially rational activity, and if knowledge is intimately related to reason, or the activities of reason, then it may well turn out that investigations into knowledge would lead many to reassess their stance regarding philosophy.

CONCLUSION

Delving into the etymologies of key words often provides one with a deeper insight into the surrounding problems. *Skepticos* originally meant, simply, inquiring and thoughtful. If philosophical scepticism is truly unanswerable it may suggest that at its core it is not a problem to be solved but a course to be followed. In attempting to eliminate the problem by solving it, two things occur: One, the human relationship to the external world is falsified, and two, philosophy as a naturally curious impulse is curtailed.

Descartes's cogito in effect pointed out at least this much: we, as individuals, are not only cut off from the world and its inhabitants, but from the universe as a whole. Not to put too fine a point on it, or paint a dramatically dreary picture, the veil of perception and consciousness which separates us from our surroundings is ineradicable. We may surmise, we may believe strongly in the face of overwhelming circumstantial evidence, but direct and logically closed knowledge eludes us. This is what philosophical scepticism shows. Stroud has the final word in the sense that the gulf which separates us from the rest of the universe is unbridgeable. To perceive this as a `problem' in need of a solution, or even dissolution, is to perpetuate a denial of the human condition vis-a-vis the external world. It is perhaps more simply a statement of the way things are. In recognizing and understanding such limits, one not only comes to terms with what we can, or cannot claim to know with dogmatic certainty, but also positions us more clearly within the philosophical project.

If philosophy is born out of a sense of wonder and curiosity about the universe, if it constantly seeks to investigate not only the `how' of the way things are but the `why', then to eliminate philosophical scepticism effectively clips the wings of the impulse which lies at the core of philosophy, namely, the impulse to call into question that which seems obvious or certain. For every territory gained by certainty is lost to philosophy. If thoughtful inquiry is propelled by the vast expanse of the unknowable which philosophical scepticism guarantees, then scepticism is more of an engine which drives philosophy rather than a problem which restrains its advancement.

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