

Betwixt a false reason and none at all

Pyrrhonian lessons on common sense and natural
commitments

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ABSTRACT

Between a false reason and none at all

This dissertation argues that if we are to respect the common sense perspective then Pyrrhonian scepticism can be neither avoided nor defeated. While Pyrrhonian scepticism can be diagnosed it cannot be cured, at least, so long as we take a non-revisionary attitude towards common sense. The fundamental reason for this is that Pyrrhonian scepticism derives from the application of norms of inquiry that constitute part of the content of common sense in unusual but not fanciful or impossible situations.

Implicit in this dissertation is a distinction between Cartesian and Pyrrhonian scepticisms, and for present purposes these two scepticisms can be distinguished on two criteria. First, unlike Cartesian scepticism, Pyrrhonian scepticism is not global in its doubts. It is not global because it does not attempt to question our entitlement to entire domains of commitment, for instance commitments to anything beyond the content of our perceptions, all at once. Nor does Pyrrhonism attempt to deny the possibility of knowledge. Rather, Pyrrhonian scepticism questions our entitlement to one commitment at a time and is hence iterative rather than global. This leads to the second far more interesting criterion in that unlike its Cartesian cousin Pyrrhonian scepticism claims not to be revisionary of the common sense perspective. In fact Pyrrhonian scepticism represents itself as the common sense perspective under special conditions. On this reading Pyrrhonian scepticism is a form of common sense scepticism.

The claim that Pyrrhonian scepticism is commonsensical calls for a clarification of in what exactly the common sense perspective consists, and its relationship to scepticism. Of particular interest in this regard is a position that has been called Common Sense Naturalism (CSN). CSN consists, in part, in three important claims. First, that we are constrained, both logically and psychologically, to take ourselves to have an entitlement to common sense. Second, that because we are thus constrained, we have an entitlement to those commitments that constitute the content of common sense. Third, that the content of common sense is inherently anti-sceptical. These three claims jointly warrant

the conclusion that appeals to commitments to which we are commonsensically entitled can feature prominently in refutations of scepticism.

I argue that CSN is incorrect in that even if we have an entitlement to our common sense commitments we have an equally valid entitlement to Pyrrhonian scepticism, as Pyrrhonian scepticism can be derived from the common sense perspective itself. I also argue that CSN is correct but misleading in suggesting that we are constrained, both logically and psychologically, to take ourselves to have an entitlement to the content of common sense. CSN is correct in that we are always forced to take ourselves to be entitled to some commonsensical commitments but overlooks the fact that the content of these commitments varies, becoming at times amenable to Pyrrhonian scepticism. In fact what we take to be commonsensical is sensitive to our mood at the time. This can be used to explain that feature of the phenomenology of scepticism according to which Pyrrhonian scepticism is a recurrent but not a constant problem. Presenting these arguments requires both that the nature of CSN be clarified (chapter 1), that the relationship between common sense and Pyrrhonian scepticism be established (Chapter 2). Finally, we must also provide an account of the content of common sense be given (Chapter 3) which provides warrant for continued inquisitive activities even after the emergence of Pyrrhonian scepticism from within common sense.

PREFACE

Outlining the Pyrrhonian project

Hume's insight

As the title of this dissertation suggests, what is offered here are several lessons that can be drawn from the tradition of Pyrrhonian scepticism on the topics of common sense and our natural commitments. In one sense these lessons could be taken separately, as each deals with a different aspect of the nature of and relationships between common sense and natural commitment. However, there is also a broader strategy at work directed towards an overall point. This overall conclusion is that respecting common sense presents us with a dilemma, specifically, a dilemma regarding our entitlement to that which we take to be commonsensical. In fact respecting common sense eventually leads us to that same conclusion Hume found himself drawing when he wrote in the *Treatise of Human Nature* that “[w]e have therefore no choice left, but betwixt a false reason and none at all”. The guiding principle of this dissertation is that Hume was on to something.

The primary claim of this dissertation is that taking ourselves to have an entitlement to certain common sense ideas and an entitlement to respect certain common sense norms can lead us, seemingly inevitably, to the denial that we have any such entitlement. This leads to the secondary claim that the anti-sceptical adherent of common sense faces a dilemma. This dilemma runs as follows. Either we have an entitlement to common sense or we do not. If we do not have such an entitlement then we cannot appeal to common sense to refute scepticism. If we do have such an entitlement then this entitlement also entitles us to scepticism. So again, we cannot appeal to common sense to refute scepticism. So we cannot appeal to common sense as the basis for a refutation of scepticism.

What then makes these claims distinctly Pyrrhonian in character? In one sense they are not Pyrrhonian as such, as one can draw lessons from a position without adhering to that position itself. As it turns out two aspects of Pyrrhonism are particularly relevant to drawing the lessons that follow. First, as conceived of here Pyrrhonism is common

sense scepticism and I take it that there is good historical warrant for making such a claim. Hence the scepticism to which our entitlement to common sense gives us a further entitlement is Pyrrhonian scepticism. Second, and more importantly, is the response that Pyrrhonism would have us make to this dilemma. Pyrrhonism would have this dilemma stand unresolved but avoid the force of the resulting paradox by refusing to continue to inquire into the structure of our everyday, commonsensical, commitments. There is in Pyrrhonism a deep suspicion towards the sense of continuing to engage in philosophical reflection, or indeed reflection of any kind. While refusing to engage in reflection is an effective way of dodging the paradox of having an entitlement to common sense I suggest that its consequences are worse than those of embracing the paradoxical character of common sense. While suspicion towards reflection is not wholly unwarranted I suggest that it is over-emphasised in Pyrrhonism. Granted, Pyrrhonism is *false* (in Hume's sense) in that following its rules sometimes leads us onto the path to scepticism, just as Hume said. However these rules are genuinely rational and we have no choice but to follow them. Thus without these rules we would have no reason at all. Scepticism cannot be done away with for exactly the same reason that reason cannot be done away with.

Preliminary definitions¹

At its most fundamental, scepticism questions our entitlement to a given commitment (where 'commitment' is understood to be a generic term for a range of propositional attitudes including belief, knowledge, fear, suspicion, trust etc) or to a domain of commitments. It is of course possible to further specify scepticism both in terms of what *type* of commitment it targets (where knowledge and belief are the most common alternatives but not the only alternatives) or what *domain* of commitment it targets (all commitments derived from the senses for instance, or all commitments regarding climate change, or only the commitment that the climate is actually changing). Related to distinguishing varieties of scepticism relative to the domain they target is

¹ An important *caveat* must be introduced at this stage, for these definitions are strictly preliminary and shall be extended early in chapter 2. While nothing said in these preliminary definition is strictly speaking false what is said is undoubtedly incomplete, especially as regards whether Pyrrhonian scepticism targets knowledge or belief. While it is here described as knowledge scepticism, and while Pyrrhonian scepticism does target knowledge, it will be shown in chapter 2 that there is a tendency in Pyrrhonian scepticism to extend this scope to include at least reasonable belief and possibly much else besides. Thus these preliminary definitions capture Pyrrhonism only in its most conservative guise.

distinguishing scepticism by how fundamental its targets are. *Abstracted* scepticism will target commitments that serve to provide the grounds for a very large number of further commitments. Were it to turn out that we have no entitlement to these abstract commitments then we would also lack entitlement to a whole host of other commitments. Abstract scepticism is of greatest interest to the foundationalist as foundationalism is at its strongest taken to be a refutation of this sort of scepticism. *Particular* scepticism will target commitments that do not carry such wide-ranging implications for other commitments were they to turn out to be false. For instance, were we to lack any entitlement to the abstract commitment that the senses are generally reliable we would also lack an entitlement to take any particular commitment relying on the senses as its ground. However lacking entitlement to believe on the basis of my senses that it is my car parked in the driveway rather than another car which is similar to mine does not imply that I am unentitled to believe on the basis of my senses that my computer is sitting on the desk in front of me.

To add a further complication, scepticism is often conflated with negative dogmatism, which is the claim that we definitely do not have an entitlement to a given (domain of and type of) commitment. Properly understood, scepticism is a challenge to an entitlement to some commitment(s) x , not the negative claim that we have no entitlement to x . Finally, we can identify scepticism according to the range of commitment to which it questions our entitlement. We can signify the extent to which this range has been expanded or restricted by referring to the *generality* of a form of scepticism. Of course this criterion is a matter of degree, and hence we can call scepticism *fully general* if it challenges our entitlement to *all* of our commitments, and *highly generalised* if it challenges our entitlement to a very large proportion of our commitments. The scepticism Descartes develops in the *Meditations* (particularly the first two meditations) is on this reading highly generalised but not fully general as Descartes does not question his entitlement to first-person present tense judgment about the contents of his own mind. Given that most contemporary versions of scepticism make the same concessions as did Descartes regarding what we know, most contemporary versions of scepticism would have to be called highly generalised but not fully general.

Before applying this basic framework to classify the version of scepticism of importance here it must be emphasised that we must be careful not to conflate abstractness with generality. While a direct means to developing a fully general or at least highly generalised scepticism might well be through a sustained attack on abstract principles thought to ground all other commitments this does not imply that abstractness is the only means to develop general or at least highly generalised scepticism. Just as it could turn out that, upon reflection, we have no entitlement to any one of our commitments so it could also turn out that upon reflecting upon all of our commitments iteratively we are actually unentitled to any of our commitments. Granted, there are significant practical difficulties associated with examining each of our commitments one at a time but we should not confuse a practical difficulty with a conceptual one.² There is no conceptual difficulty with developing general (or at least highly generalised) yet particular scepticism.

With this established, it can be said that the scepticism which is of concern in this dissertation is *generalised particular* scepticism which challenges our *entitlement* to those items of supposed *knowledge* (or belief, although knowledge shall be our immediate concern) that constitute the content of common sense. When scepticism is mentioned without clarification it will be to this form of scepticism that I refer. The term Pyrrhonian scepticism will stand for generalised particular entitlement knowledge scepticism.³ The most obvious contrasts between this Pyrrhonian scepticism and Cartesian scepticism are over abstractness vs. particularity. Cartesian scepticism, as it appears in contemporary epistemology is *abstract, knowledge* scepticism.⁴

² Descartes stated reason for not verifying his entitlement to his beliefs by simply examining each in turn is to avoid precisely these practical problems. See Rene Descartes et al., *Descartes: Selected Philosophical Writings* (New York: Cambridge Univ Pr, 1988) AT VII 18. However whether these practical problems can legitimately be avoided remains unclear. Williams has argued that they cannot be. See his analysis of what he calls the 'Best-Case Argument' in Michael Williams, *Unnatural Doubts: Epistemological Realism and the Basis of Scepticism, Philosophical Theory*. (Oxford, UK; Cambridge, USA: B. Blackwell, 1991) pp.135-139.

³ In the ancient world Pyrrhonian scepticism was belief scepticism, with questions over exactly what kind or range of belief was included. Part of the problem is that the Greek term for belief (*dogma*) does not always map directly onto the English term.

⁴ There is an interesting debate over the radicalness of Pyrrhonian scepticism relative to Descartes' scepticism both in terms of whether these scepticisms question both beliefs and knowledge and also which of the scepticism is more radical. An important contributor to these debates has been Gail Fine, and her views deserve special mention due to both the cogency of her arguments and the extent to which they disagree with mine. Fine has argued that Descartes' scepticism is in fact both knowledge and belief scepticism in Gail Fine, "Descartes and Ancient Skepticism: Reheated Cabbage?," *Philosophical Review* 109, no. 2 (2000): pp.228-234. In this paper Fine has particularly in mind the distinction between Pyrrhonian scepticism and that of Descartes that is drawn in Myles Burnyeat, "Idealism and Greek

However, this clarification is insufficient by itself to make sense of why Pyrrhonian scepticism features so prominently in the central claim of this dissertation. Recall that the central claim of this dissertation is that an appeal to our entitlement to common sense cannot feature in a refutation of Pyrrhonian scepticism. That Pyrrhonian scepticism is generalised, particular, entitlement, knowledge scepticism does not shed any light on why appeals to entitlement to common sense would be powerless against Pyrrhonian scepticism. The key to understanding why Pyrrhonian scepticism does feature so heavily here is grasping that Pyrrhonian scepticism is here being taken as derivable from common sense itself. Common sense cannot refute Pyrrhonian scepticism because common sense is inherently Pyrrhonian, and is so in a way that Cartesian scepticism is not. This places the reading of Pyrrhonism provided here in direct conflict with the important exposition of both Cartesian and Pyrrhonian scepticism given by Janet Broughton. We shall shortly have occasion to return to Broughton's analysis. However before we can fully comprehend the sense in which Pyrrhonism is commonsensical and common sense is Pyrrhonian we need to first

Philosophy: What Descartes Saw and Berkeley Missed," *Philosophical Review* 90 (1982). So far as a strict interpretation of Descartes goes I take Fine to have comprehensively shown that Burnyeat gets things wrong. However, despite first appearances this carries few implications for the present analysis for we must distinguish between the scepticism of Descartes and Cartesian scepticism. As used here, 'Cartesian' scepticism refers to what goes under that name in contemporary epistemological investigation and does not need to accurately reflect what Descartes actually thought. In contemporary epistemology, Cartesian scepticism surely is knowledge scepticism. Regarding the radicalness of Descartes' scepticism compared to Pyrrhonism, again Fine has made a controversial claim that could be taken to contradict the thrust of the above preliminary classifications. Fine has claimed that Descartes may not have introduced external world scepticism but that Sextus may have. See Gail Fine, "Sextus and External World Scepticism," in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy, Volume XXIV, Summer 2003*, Sedley, David (Ed), 341- 385 (Oxford: Oxford Univ Pr, 2003). In one sense I have no quibble with the claim that Descartes may not have intended to develop external world scepticism, for surely Cartesian scepticism, as that exists in contemporary epistemology, does so. However, Fine's claim could create difficulties for my preferred interpretation of Pyrrhonism if Fine can successfully show that Sextus' scepticism is *abstract*. Where I do not disagree with Fine is in the idea, also presented in this paper, that Sextus' scepticism could be more radical than that of Descartes even if it does not amount to external world scepticism by being sceptical about subjective states. This view on whether the Pyrrhonian has beliefs (one version of what Fine calls the No Belief view according to which one cannot privilege first person claims) is the one I take, and if given this reading Sextus is not an external world sceptic but is extremely radical. Thus this issue of the radicalness of Pyrrhonism hangs on what beliefs the Pyrrhonian has, which is discussed further below. For the two most important papers directed solely towards the way subjective states in ancient philosophy see Stephen Everson, "The Objective Appearance of Pyrrhonism," in *Psychology*, ed. Stephen Everson, *Companions to Ancient Thought* (New York: Cambridge Univ Pr, 1991), Gail Fine, "Subjectivity, Ancient and Modern: The Cyrenaics, Sextus, and Descartes," in *Hellenistic and Early Modern Philosophy*, Miller, Jon (Ed), 192-231 (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ Pr, 2003). There is also an interesting discussion of Sextus' use of Cyrenaic ways of understanding subjective states in Voula Tsouna-McKirahan, *The Epistemology of the Cyrenaic School* (Cambridge, U.K. ; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1998). This discussion is useful because Sextus' phrasing in PH 1.13 has a distinctly Cyrenaic cast to it.

clarify the way in which Pyrrhonian scepticism goes about challenging an appeal to our entitlement to common sense. This challenge comes in the form of a dilemma.

The basic strategy of Pyrrhonian scepticism is to argue that common sense is inherently sceptical in the sense that reflection on common sense is prone to lead us, paradoxically, into scepticism about not just about what we might commonsensically take ourselves to know but to any reputed article of knowledge. Even without the presence of *general* scepticism, if an appeal to our entitlement to common sense leads us to *Pyrrhonian* scepticism then the original appeal to common sense as an anti-sceptical strategy turns out to be ultimately self-defeating. This presents a dilemma for anyone supposing that an appeal to common sense can be deployed anti-sceptically on the basis of our entitlement to common sense. Either we have an entitlement to common sense or we do not. If we do not have such an entitlement then we cannot appeal to common sense to refute scepticism. If we do have such an entitlement then this entitlement also entitles us to Pyrrhonian scepticism. So again, we cannot appeal to common sense to refute scepticism. So we cannot appeal to common sense as the basis for a refutation of scepticism.

Why ought we care about commonsensical scepticism?

By itself the claim that we cannot appeal to our entitlement to common sense as a foundation for a refutation of scepticism is not a uniquely Pyrrhonian point. Indeed, it could even be incorporated into a non-sceptical framework. For instance one may well be sceptical of the fitness of common sense to form the foundation for a refutation of scepticism but still hold the view that accurate, settled and wide-ranging knowledge of the world is still possible. Such could be the result of taking a revisionary attitude towards common sense itself. According to such an attitude common sense does not accurately represent the real world, and hence it would be on no great concern that taking ourselves to have an entitlement to common sense would lead us to scepticism.

Why then ought we care about the claim that common sense cannot be used as the basis for a refutation of scepticism? Of course there is no reason that *everyone* ought to care about the relationship between common sense and scepticism, as taking a revisionary attitude towards common sense is a perfectly legitimate attitude to take. However, not

everyone does take a revisionary attitude towards common sense, and anyone who does take a non-revisionary attitude to common sense must be concerned with the outcome of an analysis into the relationship between common sense and scepticism.

In fact there are among contemporary epistemologists those who take it that scepticism can be refuted by showing that it conflicts with common sense. Clearly such a way of dealing with scepticism presupposes that we are entitled to common sense, and further that we are under no requirement to demonstrate that we have such an entitlement. We could well call our entitlement to common sense, according to this method, a default entitlement. I have in mind here John Greco, although with the recent growth in interest in Thomas Reid I expect that this approach to attempting to refute scepticism will grow in popularity.

Greco employs an epistemological method he calls strong particularism, which is an extension of the particularism originally developed by Chisholm. This method can be summarised as an adherence to the following three principles:

- 1) *Theories of knowledge ought to be tested against what we commonsensically know and against our best empirical knowledge*
- 2) *Theories of knowledge that conflict with either what we commonsensically know or our best empirical knowledge ought to be given up*
- 3) *Sceptical arguments should be used to bring out the counter-intuitive results of theories of knowledge*⁵

Greco is unashamed by the fact these principles will strike many as hopelessly question-begging especially in relation to scepticism. To this Greco has a two pronged response. First, he insists that in fact there really are no sceptics and so no one against whom he can beg any questions. He states that

‘[i]f we think of skeptical arguments as coming from real people whom we are to engage as opponents in a debate, then the use of our own intuitions will be contested and the use of empirical psychology will

⁵ See John Greco, *Putting Sceptics in Their Place : The Nature of Skeptical Arguments and Their Role in Philosophical Inquiry*, *Cambridge Studies in Philosophy*. (Cambridge [England] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000) p.20-21.

seem question begging. So will the use of these seem pointless if we think that our project is to persuade someone out of her skepticism by mounting a convincing argument... There are no real skeptics, either to be debated or persuaded out of their skepticism. In other words, there is no one who actually lives out the skeptical position, or even believes it outside the study or the classroom.⁶

This is fortunate, as he concedes that a debate with a consistent sceptic could not be won as the sceptic will not accept any of the first principles necessary to carry this argument to its conclusion.⁷ However, Greco also notes that even if there were real sceptics then strong particularism would still be acceptable because the epistemological project is not to answer the sceptic but to construct the 'most plausible account of knowledge and evidence by our own lights'.⁸

So far as it goes this sounds like it could be acceptable. The point of examining sceptical arguments is indeed to account for our pre-philosophical commonsensical views, and there really is no such thing as a *consistent* sceptic in the modern sense. However I would contend that there are *inconsistent* sceptics even in the modern sense, and further that when pressed our pre-philosophical commonsensical views can incline us to scepticism. Indeed establishing these contentions provides the primary focus of much of this dissertation.

If I am right then Greco's strong particularism is not so much question-begging as it is hopelessly parochial and dogmatic. Yes, we must account for our commonsensical views, but we must take into account *all* our commonsensical views and not just the comfortably anti-sceptical views. From the perspective of our more sceptical intuitions, choosing only to attend to our anti-sceptical intuitions is hopelessly parochial. More generally, even if our commonsensical views were consistently anti-sceptical (which they are not) then strong particularism would still be unacceptable because it flatly refuses to answer a legitimate question about our entitlement to any particular article of common sense. That is, it is always legitimate to ask ourselves whether we are in fact entitled to any article of common sense, and when we do ask ourselves this question the only proper response is to present some reason, some justification, for our supposed entitlement. While it may be acceptable to default to our supposed entitlement before

⁶ Ibid. p.22.

⁷ Ibid. p.23

⁸ Ibid. p.22-23.

any questions are raised, to continue to insist on this entitlement after questions over this entitlement have been raised is dogmatism unworthy of a philosopher. While making this point does not require that common sense can push us towards scepticism, if it can then the sense that Greco's strong particularism is hopelessly dogmatic can only be heightened.

Thus we have an answer to the question of why we ought to care about the claim that common sense cannot be used as a basis for the refutation of scepticism. This answer is that taking ourselves to have a default entitlement to common sense can very quickly degenerate into parochialism and dogmatism unless we provide some justification for this entitlement to common sense when so required. Considering the possibility of common sense scepticism provides one such occasion to provide such justifications, and providing such justifications requires that we refute, answer, diagnose or in some other way explain why scepticism does not after all challenge our common sense views. Obviously, we cannot just appeal to our entitlement to common sense to provide this explanation, and this is the mistake that Greco makes.

Common Sense Naturalism and dialogue with scepticism

So then, if we are to salvage anything of Greco's strong particularism then we must include in it some explanation of why we are in fact entitled to common sense. Making these changes leads us to the development of a position which shall be called Common Sense Naturalism (abbreviated as CSN). Like what we see in Greco's application of strong particularism, CSN also takes us to have an entitlement to our common sense views. Like strong particularism, CSN takes this entitlement to be a default entitlement. *Unlike* Greco's position, CSN recognises a requirement to provide justifications for this entitlement on the appropriate occasion, and further recognises that the possibility that scepticism could be developed from these same common sense views as an occasion on which the presentation of such justifications is required. Thus before using an appeal to common sense to refute or in some other way answer (or explain why we do not need to answer) the sceptical challenge CSN first explains why we are in fact entitled to common sense in the first place.

Before moving on to very briefly outline how CSN goes about explaining that we are entitled to common sense it must be emphasised that CSN as introduced above is in fact quite misguided. Common sense cannot provide the basis for a refutation of scepticism for the simple reason that common sense is inherently sceptical. By this I mean that reflecting on common sense in commonsensical ways is prone, paradoxically, to undermine our entitlement to common sense. However, CSN as introduced above is not nearly as hopelessly flawed as the position Greco defends, for while CSN misidentifies the relationship between common sense and scepticism it at least avoids indefensible dogmatism.

Continuing with the analysis of CSN itself, we quickly see that CSN quite rightly separates issues of entitlement from issues concerning rational justification. Hence CSN refuses to conclude merely from the fact that no rational justification exists for some commitment that this commitment is unjustified *simpliciter* and hence is unwarranted. Instead CSN raises the possibility that we can have an entitlement to some commitment even where we cannot provide any rational justification for this commitment. To the extent that any form of scepticism focuses purely on the notion of rational justification whilst merely assuming that such a focus is sufficient to end any debate over entitlement it is an impoverished form of scepticism. An appropriately developed scepticism needs to retain a focus on claims to *entitlement*. The importance of rational justification is that it is entitlement conferring, but there may be other paths to entitlement beyond this. At least such shall be the supposition upon which this dissertation proceeds.

How then can we have an entitlement to a commitment if it is not rationally justified? The basic answer given by CSN to this question is that we are entitled to our *natural* commitments, where two distinctly different ways of cashing out what it is for something to be natural are provided. On one account a commitment is natural if it is forced on us as a consequence of our natural (read *psychological*) constitution. On the other account, a commitment is natural if it is a condition for the possibility of engaging in those (uniquely human) activities (especially social and rational activities) through which we fully express the essence of what it is to be human. In neither account of what it is to be natural is it possible to simply provide reasons for natural commitments. In fact the general thrust of the response of CSN to questions of our entitlement to

common sense it to point out that it is a mistake to think that we need to provide reasons for this entitlement. That is, CSN attempts to point out that while questions of entitlement to common sense do not seem to be obviously unreasonable they are subtly misguided in that they misidentify the special status held by common sense. Thus while CSN does not provide us with rational justifications for our entitlement to common sense it does at least provide us with an account of how we can hold this entitlement regardless. Thus CSN does engage appropriately with the question of entitlement the sceptic asks (or ought to ask). However I shall leave any further clarification of what each of these readings of the natural mean when the details are fully spelled out in chapter 1.

We see then that CSN avoids the unwarranted dogmatism which emerged as being an essential feature of Greco's application of strong particularism, and does so by providing an account of how we come to have entitlement to common sense. In this respect CSN provides a serious response to a sceptical challenge to our entitlement to common sense in the way that strong particularism does not. As such, CSN is a position which is worthy of analysis as it may provide a means of answering the sceptical challenge to our entitlement to common sense. Further, if common sense is inherently anti-sceptical as CSN (quite incorrectly) assumes then a defender of CSN might be in a position to enter a refutation of scepticism more generally by appealing to common sense. As such, CSN then is directly opposed to the central claim of this dissertation.

Reading Sextus: the *apraxia* challenge and debates over *dogmata*

As has been indicated above, Pyrrhonism plays an important part in the development of the argument of this thesis. Thus something must be said about how Pyrrhonism is being understood here, with special reference to the historical sources from which Pyrrhonism derives. The reading of Pyrrhonism adopted in this thesis takes the *apraxia* challenge to be the primary concern of the Pyrrhonian. According to this challenge the Pyrrhonians apparently make life impossible by suggesting that we abandon all our beliefs and meeting this challenge provides the criterion against which his broader philosophical efforts are to be judged. The idea behind the *apraxia* challenge is that it seems that to act coherently requires that we have at least some beliefs. This challenge is of course only effective if we suppose that the only way of making action possible is

by holding beliefs, where the concept of a belief used in this argument is a ‘thick’ concept.⁹ Naturally enough, it is to the concept of belief that the Pyrrhonians turned their attention. In particular, it was important to the Pyrrhonians that they establish the minimum conditions required for action to be possible. The essence of the Pyrrhonian argument is that their opponents misunderstand the structure of our actual commitments and so misunderstand the Pyrrhonian when he says something like ‘I have no beliefs’.¹⁰ Hence what the Pyrrhonians try to demonstrate is that there is more than one plausible way of understanding the concept of belief, which is why reading Sextus is still of value even though contemporary epistemology does not share all of Sextus’ more practical concerns. In fact Sextus is of particular importance in this dissertation as the immediate concern here is to explain how it comes about that scepticism can be derived from our actual, everyday, commitments. Unsurprisingly, this is an issue to which Sextus gave considerable attention. While I think that Sextus’ final position on this is not quite right I do take him to have pointed us in the direction in which this discussion must be developed.

The Pyrrhonian approach to the *apraxia* challenge results in a distinction between two ways of understanding what a belief is. The important distinction is found most clearly in those passages in which Sextus clarifies whether or not the Pyrrhonian holds beliefs (*dogmata*), especially in PH 1.13-15 and 19-20.¹¹ Hence we find the Pyrrhonian drawing the relevant distinction in the following way.

‘When we say that the Skeptic does not dogmatize [i.e., hold *dogmata*] we are not using the term “*dogma*” as some do, in its more common meaning, “something that one merely agrees to”, for the Skeptic does give assent to the *pathē* forced upon him by his *phantasia*...But when we assert that he does

⁹ Note for instance that defining a belief merely as a ‘taking-as-true’ does not of itself provide any clear answer to why adopting a particular belief and acting in a particular way should have any specific relationship.

¹⁰ Or so Sextus supposes. Many have noted the oddly ahistorical character of Sextus’ work and hence there must be some doubt as to whether any philosophers of Sextus’ own time (whatever that may have been) actually thought this. See Everard Flintoff, “Pyrrho and India,” *Phronesis* 25 (1980), Tsouna-McKirahan, *The Epistemology of the Cyrenaic School*.

¹¹ ‘*dogma*’ (pl. *dogmata*) is conventionally translated as ‘belief’, although this can be misleading as it is not entirely obvious that Sextus means by *dogma* what we mean by belief. That these two terms can at times come apart is in fact indicated in PH 1.13 itself, for where Sextus distinguishes two senses, in the process indicating that by the Hellenistic era the terms had become semi-technical. Hence I will leave ‘*dogma*’ untranslated until after Sextus arguments have been examined in greater detail.

not dogmatize, we use “*dogma*” in the sense, which others give it, of assent to one of the non-evident matters investigated by the sciences.’¹²

The import of Sextus’ statement is that he does not accept the application of an everyday sense to Pyrrhonian claims regarding *dogmata* but does accept the Pyrrhonians being understood in accordance with the dominant philosophical theory of the day. Hence when he says that the Pyrrhonian ‘has no beliefs’ (*dogmata*) he must be understood as meaning that he has no beliefs in the sense in which his opponents understand that term. This is exactly what we should expect, for it is a special case of Sextus’ more general adherence to common practice, including linguistic practice.¹³

While Sextus is in general keen to avoid using terms in a special sense, it turns out that the unusual dialectical context of the *apraxia* argument mandates that he temporarily engage in distinctly philosophical language in order to explain that he actually adheres to everyday practice. The special feature of Sextus’ context is that he is being accused of abandoning everyday practice in saying that he has no *dogmata*. However Sextus has originally made the claim that he has no *dogmata* in the context of a philosophical debate. The point of his engagement in this ongoing debate at this particular time is, paradoxically perhaps, to point out that Sextus wants no part of such debates.¹⁴ He makes this quite clear just a few paragraphs after the topic of how to deal with Pyrrhonian *dogmata* is first raised, when Sextus provides a statement on whether the

¹² The following passage is found in Mates’ excellent translation, which makes up significant of Benson Mates, *The Skeptic Way: Sextus Empiricus’s Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996) p.127. Hereafter I shall use the abbreviation PH for the *Outlines* and include references to Book and paragraph numbers, placing the reference in the main body of the text. Hence this reference would appear as [PH 1.13]. While Mates’ translation is very good, unless otherwise stated reference will be made to the more recent and more widely used translation found in Sextus, Julia Annas, and Jonathan Barnes, *Outlines of Scepticism, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy*. (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

¹³ Sextus has at this stage already explained that the Pyrrhonians does not use the term ‘ability’ in a technical or special sense but rather in its common everyday sense (PH 1. 9). The same looseness of usage applies also to the sceptical sayings (‘no more’, ‘everything is indeterminate’, ‘I have no apprehension’ etc). As Sextus says:

Also, we do not put [sceptical sayings] forward as sharply expressing the points with which they have to do, but employ them imprecisely and, if you like, not strictly correctly, for it does not befit the Skeptic to fight about slogans, and besides it works in our favour that not even these slogans are said to have significance absolutely, but only relatively, that is, relative to the Sceptics. [PH 1. 207-208 Mates trans.]

¹⁴ I suppose that this is roughly equivalent to walking into a casino only to announce that one opposes gambling.

Pyrrhonian adheres to any philosophical (or scientific) theories. Here he notes the possibility that

‘...if the theory is so deceptive as to all but snatch away the appearances from our very eyes, should we not distrust it in regard to the non-evident, and thus avoid being led by it into precipitate judgements?’
[PH I.20 Mates trans.]

However to be taken seriously in the context of such a debate one must use the language appropriate to this debate.¹⁵ Yet we must always keep in mind that Sextus has nothing particularly invested in this debate, and we must be careful to properly interpret his comments when taken out of their original context.

Returning now to the point at hand, and with Sextus’ statements now placed in their proper context, we are well placed to consider more closely why Sextus accepts some *dogmata* and not others. On the one hand this debate could be reduced to the issue of whether there actually is a conception of belief other than that proposed by the opponents of the Pyrrhonians. If there is, and if it is as the Pyrrhonians claim, then the Pyrrhonians have a coherent response to the *apraxia* challenge.

This debate quickly becomes both complicated and intractable, and as a result the passages in Sextus relevant to this discussion are the most contested in his entire *oeuvre*. Much of this debate concerns whether or not Sextus incorporates some sort of insulating device into Pyrrhonian scepticism that would remove some beliefs from the range of his scepticism. If insulation is possible then this would show that there is a coherent conception of belief separate from the theoretically-laden conception favoured by the Pyrrhonian’s opponents. For instance some have argued that Sextus limits his sceptical attacks to a specific kind of belief and hence holds some beliefs that do not

¹⁵ That Sextus must use this language has been turned into an argument against the coherence of Pyrrhonism by Cahoon. See Lawrence E. Cahoon, “The Consolation of Antiphilosophy: Scepticism, Common Sense Pragmatism, and Rorty,” *Philosophy Today* 38, no. 2 (1994). Cahoon suggestion is that to use this language as the philosopher uses it requires that some substantive beliefs are held, which thereby commits the Pyrrhonian to an unacceptable dogmatism. I think this is wrong, in that the Pyrrhonian can temporarily occupy the mental space of a dogmatist to make a point that the dogmatist without thereby committing himself to the dogmatism implicit in the mental space he occupies at the time. To suppose otherwise would be to suppose that an actor playing the role of a murderer should be thrown in gaol.

fall into this category.¹⁶ Others have argued that Sextus leaves no room for any such insulating device given his description of Pyrrhonian arguments themselves.¹⁷

My concern here is what Sextus' response to the *apraxia* challenge teaches us about our natural commitments, and working out the full details of Sextus own solution is not of immediate relevance. Thus, I turn now to Sextus' general treatment of the *apraxia* challenge itself, where this challenge seems to be particularly in view when Sextus describes the overall structure of the Pyrrhonian's life.

‘And this ordinary regimen of life is fourfold: one part has to do with the guidance of nature, another with the compulsion of the *pathē*, another with the handing down of laws and customs, and a fourth with instruction in the arts and crafts. Nature's guidance is that by which we are naturally capable of sensation and thought; compulsion of the *pathē* is that by which hunger drives us to food and thirst makes us drink; the handing down of customs and laws is that by which we accept that piety in the conduct of life is good

¹⁶ See Gail Fine, “Sceptical Dogmata; Outlines of Pyrrhonism 1.13,” *Methexis* 13 (2000), Michael Frede, “The Skeptic's Beliefs,” in *Essays in Ancient Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Pr, 1987), Michael Frede, “The Skeptic's Two Kinds of Assent and the Question of the Possibility of Knowledge,” in *Essays on Ancient Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Pr, 1987). Note however that Frede and Fine agree neither about which beliefs Sextus exempts from the range of his sceptical arguments nor about what constitutes a belief. Striker also concedes that Sextus allows for the Pyrrhonian to have beliefs of some sort, although she differs again on what beliefs these might be. See Gisela Striker, *Essays on Hellenistic Epistemology and Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) ch.4, Gisela Striker, “Historical Reflections on Classical Pyrrhonism and Neo-Pyrrhonism,” in *Pyrrhonian Skepticism, Sinnott Armstrong, Walter (Ed)* (Oxford: Oxford Univ Pr, 2004), pp.16-20. Although all these authors concede that Sextus can sensibly be read as allowing the Pyrrhonian to have some ‘beliefs’ (or similar commitments that may not be properly be called a belief) few are willing to argue that the resultant mental state would be a good state in which to exist. In fact the perceived unattractiveness or incoherence of following Frede's interpretation has been a reason to reject Frede's interpretation. However, some have argued that even if it is not the best way of behaving the Pyrrhonian mental state (as represented by Frede) is at least achievable. See R. J. Hankinson, *The Sceptics, Arguments of the Philosophers*. (London; New York: Routledge, 1995) pp.280-292, Mark L. McPherran, ““Ataraxia” And “Eudaimonia” In Ancient Pyrrhonism: Is the Skeptic Really Happy?,” *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 5 (1989). A slightly different tack has been taken by Ribeiro in arguing that while the Pyrrhonian's goal is not psychologically achievable this does not amount to any general criticism of Sextus' position as his goal out to be taken as aspirational. See Brian Ribeiro, “Is Pyrrhonism Psychologically Possible?,” *Ancient Philosophy* 22, no. 2 (2002). I take it that Frede comes closest to capturing the point that Sextus is trying to make, as should be obvious from the exposition that follows. However, like many other readers of Sextus I have significant doubts as to the ultimate coherence of the position Sextus favours. However the final coherence of Sextus response to the *apraxia* challenge is less important than what that response teaches us about our natural commitments.

¹⁷ Myles Burnyeat, “Can the Skeptic Live His Scepticism?,” in *The Skepical Tradition*, ed. M. F. Burnyeat (London: University of California Press, 1983), Myles Burnyeat, “The Sceptic in His Place and Time,” in *Philosophy in History*, ed. Richard Rorty and et al. (Cambridge Univ Pr : New York, 1984). Burnyeat's argument is that Sextus' position when taken on its own terms logically implies that all beliefs must be abandoned. For Sextus to claim otherwise must then be interpreted as an instance of self-contradiction on Sextus' part. Interestingly, Burnyeat's interpretation allows for the possibility of allowing that Frede et al are right to interpret Sextus as intending to exclude some beliefs from the scope of his sceptical arguments but fail to recognise that Sextus' system is incoherent if read in this way. In an attempt to avoid imputing a logical incoherence to Sextus, Burnyeat must read him as having no beliefs at all, which creates practical problems for Sextus but not logical problems.

and impiety bad; and instruction in the arts and crafts is that by which we are not inactive in whichever of these we acquire. And we say all these things without beliefs (*adoxastōs*).’ [PH 1.23-24 Mates trans.]

First, we must assume that when Sextus says he is here speaking ‘without beliefs (*adoxastōs*)’ he is intending to speak in the special, philosophical, sense that he clarified at PH I.13.¹⁸ Further, we can also safely suggest that the commitments Sextus does accept must be capable of guiding action, else he will have no answer to the *apraxia* challenge. In addition to the minimum requirement that these commitments be action-guiding Sextus also needs to establish that these are different from what his opponents suppose. I suggest that the distinguishing feature of the commitments that Sextus does adopt is that they are acquired and acted upon entirely unreflectively. Moreover, I also suggest that on Sextus’ account were we to begin to reflect on these commitments we would not be able to act on them. That is, for an as yet unknown reason the commitments that Sextus is happy to characterise the Pyrrhonian as holding are hostile to reflection. In Sextus’ mind the reason for this seems to be that as soon as we begin to reflect on these commitments we place ourselves in a position of being able to ask questions such as ‘why do I hold this commitment?’, ‘what is the justification for this commitment?’, ‘is this commitment true or false?’ and it may well emerge that these questions do not have answers. Yet according to Sextus we cannot responsibly continue to act on a commitment until answers to such legitimate questions have been given.

Frede expended considerable effort deriving a similar thesis from Sextus’ work, and it is difficult to improve on his discussion, so far as it goes. Those familiar with Frede’s work will recognise my obvious indebtedness to him when the topic turns to the interpretation of Sextus. Nonetheless I will ultimately need to diverge from Frede over the place of reflection in Sextus’ Pyrrhonian scepticism. At the centre of Frede’s exposition is the distinction between having a view and taking a position, between ‘just going by an impression and going by an impression because one takes it to be true.’¹⁹ On this account having a view involves having a propositional attitude that does not amount to taking the propositional content towards which this attitude is directed to be true. Having a view does not even require that we bring the content of this view into

¹⁸ Note that the term *adoxastōs* derives from *dogma*, being a negated adverbial form of that term.

¹⁹ Frede 137-138

explicit consideration. In particular, Frede is at pains to point out that views are sufficient to account for our actions, and that having a view does not require that we reflect on that view in any way. He says that

‘[i]t might be the case that action does not, in addition to the impression that *p*, require a positive act of assent or the further thought that it is true that *p*. All that may be needed is one’s acquiescence in the impression, and all this may amount to is that in the series of impressions one has reached an impression which produces an action rather than the kind of disquiet which would make one go on to consider the matter further till one reached an impression which one no longer resists and which produces an action. Indeed, one may have the view that *p* without even entertaining the thought that *p*, let alone the further thought that *p* is true... An expert craftsman is still acting on his expert beliefs, even though he is not actually thinking of what he is doing when he is acting on them. Indeed, thinking of them might interfere with his activity. But having finished his work he might well explain to us which views guided his activity. And for some of these views it might be true that this is the first time he ever formulated them, either to himself or to somebody else.’²⁰

The difficulty with which Frede’s account presents us centres on the relationship between holding views and reflection. The moment the expert craftsman in the above example begins to reflect on the views he held when exercising his craft he must inevitably transmute those views into positions. For, as has been said above, the moment we make a commitment explicit in reflection we can reasonably be asked to provide justification for that commitment. All of a sudden we are required to state whether we take this commitment to be true or false, justified or unjustified. However if we are answering these questions then the commitment in question cannot be a view. Frede’s account complicates matters by allowing that views can be reflected upon without doing any fundamental damage to their status as views. This does not seem plausible. We would do better to avoid this complication by *not* assuming that reflection is innocuous when applied to views.

In addition, Frede’s account takes us only a little way towards addressing the *apraxia* challenge. Suggesting that the impression that *p* is sufficient to account for action does not help if we define having the impression that *p* as acquiescing in the impression where acquiescing is explained as having an impression that produces an action. Taking this together, Frede has said no more than that having a view is sufficient to account for

²⁰ Frede 135

an action because having a view is to have an impression that produces an action. However, saying that having an impression that produces an action is sufficient to account for that action tells us only that the propositional attitude involved in having a view is inherently motivating for action. Yet even if this is the case we have no way of understanding why it is the case, in that Sextus has not on this account told us why the propositional attitude involved in having a view is inherently motivating. As a response to the *apraxia* problem, Frede's reading of Sextus is inadequate. What the *apraxia* argument requires is that Sextus explain why the taking of a position is not required to account for action. It is not enough to suggest that this may possibly be the case. In fact what Sextus requires, and never adequately supplies, is a more developed account of the structure of our commitments.

The closest that Sextus comes to dealing with this inadequacy is in his discussion of what has come to be called the commemorative or recollective sign. In this discussion Sextus distinguishes between two kinds of sign, the indicative which he rejects and the recollective which he accepts. The indicative sign directs us from an observed phenomena to one which has never been observed, either because it cannot even in theory be observed or because of some contingent circumstance.²¹ The recollective sign differs in that it directs us from an observed phenomena to another phenomena which could be observed and has in the past been observed but which due to some contingent circumstance is not currently being observed. It is important in Sextus' discussion of the recollective sign that the unobserved phenomena has always or almost always been observed to appear whenever the observed phenomena does.²²

Sextus takes it that all normal people (i.e., non-philosophers) require in their everyday life is the recollective sign, and that the indicative sign is at best an unnecessary philosophical invention, and at worst a distracting fiction. The important point for present purposes is that those commitments that structure our everyday activities are not derived through hypothesising unobserved phenomena to explain our observations. As we shall see, this is a consequence of the idea that the commitments that guide our everyday activities are not derived through a process of reflection at all. He notes that

²¹ For instance, the existence of sweat on the skin is taken to be an indicative sign of the existence of invisible pores in the skin through which sweat is secreted.

²² For instance, the existence of smoke is a recollective sign for the existence of a fire, given that whenever smoke is observed fire has also been observed.

‘[t]here being two different kinds of signs, as we have said, we argue not against all signs but only against indicative signs, which seem to be a fiction of the Dogmatists. For recollective signs are found convincing by everyday life: seeing smoke, someone diagnoses fire; having observed a scar, he says that a wound was inflicted. Hence not only do we not conflict with everyday life, but we actually join the struggle on its side, assenting without opinion to what has been found convincing and taking a stand against the private fictions of the Dogmatists.’ (PH II.102 Annas and Barnes trans.)

‘Hence we are not in conflict with the common preconceptions of humanity, nor are we throwing life into confusion, saying that nothing is a sign, as some people falsely accuse us of doing. For if we were doing away with every sign, perhaps we would be in conflict with life and with all humanity. But in fact we ourselves judge this way, assuming fire from smoke, a previous wound from a scar, death from previous trauma to the heart, and oil from a previous headband. Since, then, we do in fact posit the recollective sign, which is used in everyday life, but do away with the one falsely believed by the dogmatists, in addition to our not being in conflict with everyday life we actually even speak on its side...’ (M 8.157-158 Bett trans.)

It should be fairly clear from the comments above that being led by a recollective sign to form a given commitment, for instance the commitment that there is a fire, does not require that the person so committed engage in the construction of any theoretical apparatus to explain this commitment. Indeed, reflective activity of any sort seems to be quite unnecessary. Commitments formed under the guidance of the recollective sign are most akin to conditioned responses, and note that while we might be able to provide a causal account of how we come to have such-and-such a conditioned response we do not think of conditioned responses as the kinds of things for which we could have reasons. In fact it is not at all obvious that reasons of any sort are relevant when we form commitments under the guidance of the recollective sign, at least as Sextus understands that process.

It is also of relevance that, strictly speaking, the process that Sextus envisages as occurring when someone operates under the guidance of a recollective sign is not one of induction. It is not as if upon seeing smoke we recall that on previous occasions when smoke has been observed a fire has been present and hence appeal to the principle of induction to warrant the conclusion that a fire exists in the vicinity of the perceived smoke. No such recollection and appeal occur. Rather, upon perceiving smoke we immediately think that there is a fire. That is, according to Sextus the mental process

that occurs when we encounter smoke and conclude that there is a fire is the same process that would have occurred if we had encountered an actual fire. But this is not a process of induction. It is better thought of as a process of perception.²³

In fact being guided by a recollective sign does not require that we reflect at all, and as with Frede's exposition of what distinguishes a view from a position, reflection may even interfere with being guided by the recollective sign. This all adds up to the suggestion that the Pyrrhonians take the commitments they are happy to adopt as coming upon them passively. They also suppose that reflection upon these commitments is unnecessary, and leave open the possibility that reflection in this context may even be hostile to these commitments playing their normal action-guiding role. As a result we would also expect to find that the Pyrrhonians deny any responsibility for these commitments and have nothing particularly invested in the holding of them.²⁴

Having grasped Sextus' point in introducing the recollective sign we can say that even animals can be guided by a recollective sign. For instance, after experiencing the same feeding routine over a long period of time a dog will commonly begin salivating when they hear their owner place a food bowl on the ground. While we should not say that the dog has any beliefs as such, in the sense of having reason-sensitive propositional attitudes, we can say that for the dog the rattle of the food bowl functions as a recollective sign for the presence of food. Reserving the term 'belief' for humans, we must conclude that commitments other than belief are those to which we should appeal in order to account for the efficacy of the recollective sign. Thus we can at least conclude that the commitments with which Sextus is most directly concerned in his answer to the *apraxia* challenge, and the commitments he thinks the Pyrrhonians are free to hold, are not beliefs in the sense we would understand that term. This is an idea

²³ Bailey reads the Pyrrhonian use of the recollective sign in much the same way, although note that he uses the terms 'commemorative' instead of 'recollective' in his discussion. One reservation one might have about Bailey's discussion is the frequent use of the term 'inference', which can be unhelpful by leading to an unhelpfully intellectualised reading of the function of the recollective sign. See Alan Bailey, *Sextus Empiricus and Pyrrhonian Scepticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002) pp.276-279.

²⁴ This does not mean that they will simply be abandoned of course. As these commitments are acquired as a direct consequence of the natural operation of the Pyrrhonians rational faculties and without any active input on behalf of the Pyrrhonians it may be beyond their power to abandon them, or at least to abandon them permanently. For instance, the Pyrrhonian may be able to abandon the commitment that a fire exists only to find that a similar commitment appears the next time the Pyrrhonian encounters smoke.

that shall be explored throughout this dissertation, although not always with direct reference to Sextus. Reflection on this topic will eventually lead to the conclusion that common sense is partially composed of norms, although this conclusion will not be introduced until the end of chapter 2 and not fully explained until the end of chapter 3.

Pyrrhonism and common sense: against Broughton

Why then can't it be the case that common sense is inherently anti-sceptical? Answering this question actually takes a considerable amount of argumentation, much of which is provided in chapter 2. However, the basic reason is that Pyrrhonism is commonsensical. Now, this claim requires defence in at least two different ways. First, it must of course be explained in detail how Pyrrhonism develops from common sense. Second, the view that Pyrrhonism, at least historically, is not commonsensical must also be addressed. That is, Broughton's analysis must be addressed, for what is said in this dissertation regarding the relationship between common sense and Pyrrhonism is diametrically opposed to what Broughton has argued.

Broughton's position is that we must attribute to Descartes the philosophically important move of attributing to common sense a *prima facie* authority and then explicitly developing his Cartesian form of scepticism on that basis.²⁵ In this respect Broughton sees a sharp distinction between Descartes and his Greek forbears over the authority of common sense, in that according to her reading neither school of Ancient scepticism (Academic and Pyrrhonian) showed any real interest in arguing that scepticism could draw some authority from common sense.²⁶ Regarding ancient Academic scepticism I do not wish to contest Broughton's conclusions. The Academics

²⁵ At least, that is what Broughton argues that Descartes is attempting to do, although she also argues that Descartes is importantly mistaken in his characterisation of common sense. In particular Broughton argues that Descartes needs to attribute to his imagined man of common sense a philosophically loaded conception of our cognitive development that undermines our sense that we are in fact entitled to those commitments we come to hold in childhood. Broughton points out that the man of common sense need not adopt this conception, and that the dispensability of this conception undermines Descartes attempt to draw the man of common sense to his side. See Janet Broughton, *Descartes's Method of Doubt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002) pp.22-32.

²⁶ Broughton also draws an interesting but not immediately relevant distinction between Descartes and modern philosophers in that Descartes only wants to attribute a *prima facie* authority to common so that he can ultimately undermine that authority and convert the man of common sense to his own philosophical position that is itself highly revisionary of common sense. Thus for Descartes, and unlike what we often find with modern philosophers, the *prima facie* authority of common sense actually evaporates under the pressure of philosophical reflection. See *Ibid.* pp.82-89.

were solely concerned to arguing against a particular Stoic conception of the criteria for knowledge which is not itself commonsensical.²⁷ Yet in regarding ancient Pyrrhonians as having no real interest in common sense I believe that Broughton errs. Making this claim stick requires some support in the form of a lengthy engagement in the correct interpretation of Ancient Pyrrhonian scepticism.

i) Sextus' perception of his reader.

Many important details of the relationship between common sense can be clarified by determining who the implied reader of Sextus works might be, and where Sextus wants to take this reader. Thus, we ought to apply the same method of analysis to Sextus that Broughton has applied to the analysis of Descartes. I will argue that Sextus' implied reader is someone who is deeply concerned with the notion of entitlement and takes it that entitlement to a commitment only comes through showing that a commitment is clearly superior to any alternatives. The implied reader is further specified as someone in search of some distinctly philosophical position to which he feels entitled. The implied reader is also pictured as being still uncommitted to any particular philosophical position, despite all his inquisitive activity. This means that while the implied reader is clearly on the path to what Sextus would call dogmatism he is not as yet a dogmatist.²⁸ Sextus' lesson to such a reader is that they need to rediscover their original more commonsensical views if they are to ever find satisfaction. However, that Sextus envisages a return to common sense implies that he must not be as disconnected from common sense as Broughton supposes. In the process of demonstrating this we shall also have opportunity to shed some further light on the character of Pyrrhonism itself.

However, before beginning even a moderately detailed analysis of Sextus' Pyrrhonism it would be best to acknowledge a word of warning about our main source. Sextus' work on Pyrrhonian scepticism has come to us in two main sources, neither of which

²⁷ Ibid. pp.34-37, 81-82.

²⁸ Sextus has a rather stricter understanding of what makes someone a dogmatist than exists in current usage and so this requires some further thought. For Sextus to count as a dogmatist all one need do is take oneself to have a justified belief about anything at all. It need not matter that the justification involved be a good one, or that one has given due time to refuting all conflicting view to one's own. As such dogmatism, for Sextus, does not require certainty or an unwillingness to revise one's views. It requires only commitment to the justification of one's beliefs.

contains any great marks indicating when or where it was written.²⁹ The first, more accessible, better known and arguably more important, is the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (often referred to by its abbreviated Latin title PH).³⁰ The second, less well known and only recently available in a good modern translation is generally known as *Against the Professors VII-XI*, referred to by its abbreviated Latin title M VII-XI.³¹ In general these texts are used interchangeably in the literature, although there is a preference for PH.³²

Returning to Sextus' implied reader, we can go about determining who this might be by determining what questions the implied reader is asking, where this will track the questions that the text can most reasonably be taken as answering. It should be reasonably clear that one of the key questions the text answers is whether any of the available philosophical positions is able to gain an acceptably wide range of agreement over key areas of philosophical debate. Again and again and almost *ad nauseam* Sextus summarises the details of the competing positions so as to place the claims of some

²⁹ Dennis K House, "The Life of Sextus Empiricus," *The Classical Quarterly* 30, no. 1 (1980). This paper ought to be read by anyone who foolishly believes they can be certain of anything about the life of Sextus. In reality we know next to nothing beyond that Sextus was a doctor of the Empiric school, and even his allegiance has been questioned based on what Sextus has to say at PH 1.236-241.

³⁰ This work now exists in two good modern translations. Mates, *The Skeptic Way: Sextus Empiricus's Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, Sextus, Annas, and Barnes, *Outlines of Scepticism*. I shall use both translations throughout the dissertation as each has its own strengths and weaknesses.

³¹ The first two chapters of this work, titled *Against the Logicians (M VII-VIII)* is now available in Sextus and Richard Bett, *Sextus Empiricus: Against the Logicians*, trans. Richard Bett (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ Pr, 2005). The final chapter, *Against the Ethicists (M XI)* now exists in a good translation in Sextus and Richard Bett, *Against the Ethicists: (Adversus Mathematicos XI)*, *Clarendon Later Ancient Philosophers*. (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1997). The final section of this work, *Against the Physicists*, is currently only available in English in the Loeb translation Sextus and Robert Gregg Bury, *Sextus Empiricus, Loeb Classical Library*. (Cambridge, Mass. London: Harvard University Press; William Heinemann, 1933).

³² Until recently it was taken that PH was the earlier work and that M represented the later more fully developed views of Sextus. However Bett has recently challenged this orthodox approach by arguing that the final chapter of *Against the Professors*, titled *Against the Ethicists*, represents an earlier and less rigorously sceptical form of scepticism than that found in PH and the earlier chapters of M. I side with Bett regarding the order in which Sextus' surviving works were written. While Bett's arguments are not conclusive they are worth taking seriously, with the result that one must be careful in using statements found in *Against the Ethicists* in support of interpretations of PH. See Richard Bett, *Pyrrho, His Antecedents, and His Legacy* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), Richard Bett, "Sextus' against the Ethicists: Scepticism, Relativism or Both?," *Apeiron* 27 (1994). One notable point which is lacking in Bett's argument is a fully developed explanation of why the differences between PH and M are only visible in *Against the Ethicists* but not in the earlier chapters of M, as Bett is aware, see Bett, "Sextus' against the Ethicists: Scepticism, Relativism or Both?," n 63. Appealing to numerous sources and historical development can conveniently explain this, although evidence itself is scarce in this particular debate.

former group against the contradictory claims of some latter group as evidence to show that neither group can present a view that is clearly superior to its alternatives.³³

Of course, considered in itself the lack of a clearly superior philosophical position does not reveal anything of interest to someone inquiring into philosophical positions. Yet all we need do to convert the observation that no philosophical position is clearly superior into something of great interest is to connect superiority with entitlement. This is not terribly difficult as it is in fact as widely accepted a view now and as it was in antiquity. To see this we can recall the story of the Senator Cato and the philosopher Carneades.

It is said that the sceptical philosopher Carneades was with two other philosophers sent to Rome from Athens as an ambassador. While in Rome he powerfully argued, on successive days, both for justice and for injustice. This reportedly created such a commotion that the moralist Senator Cato took the extraordinary step of sending the ambassadors home. Why would Carneades arguments generate such a commotion and result in such an impolitic response on the part of Cato? The answer is that the moralist Cato wished always to argue in favour of justice, and was unable to so long as he was unable to defeat the arguments of Carneades in favour of injustice. Note that this does not provide a connection between the demonstration of superiority and mere belief. Cato would still have been free to *merely believe* that justice is better than injustice. What he would not have been able to do in this context is pretend that anyone else had to so believe. That is, Cato's belief is robbed of normativity so long as anyone with whom Cato might wish to debate can help themselves to arguments which Cato cannot show to be inferior to his own. Put another way, Cato has no entitlement to the idea that justice is superior to injustice for entitlement requires at least the possibility of being able to present justification for this entitlement when so required. Carneades robbed Cato of the ability to do precisely this. Superiority creates entitlement, its absence removes entitlement; at least that is what the implied reader must be taken to believe. From this we can conclude that the implied reader ask of Sextus 'To which is the

³³ Superiority is understood in familiar terms of explanatory power, coherence, consistency, plausibility of foundational premises etc. Whether or not Pyrrhonism is contingent upon a particular *dispensable* view of rational superiority is an interesting point. It could be shown that it is so by providing a plausible alternate account of rationality which can ground judgements of rational superiority without generating Pyrrhonism.

available philosophical positions am I entitled on the basis of superiority?’ to which Sextus replies ‘None, as none can be shown to be superior to any others.’

Interestingly the notion of ‘availability’ must sometimes be understood to be surprisingly broad. While Sextus usually restricts his attention to the major Hellenistic schools (Stoics, Peripatetics, Epicureans and Platonists) at times he expands this view in quite unusual ways, bordering on anachronism in fact, and this tells us something else about our implied reader. For instance, by the Hellenistic era Cyrenaicism was surely a spent force and yet it still draws the attention of Sextus at the end of *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*.¹ This is also true of Heracliteanism (PH 1. 210-212), Democriteanism (PH 1.213-214), Protagoreanism (PH 1.216-219), all of which also draw Sextus attention. While part of the reason Sextus would bother with such expositions is that these positions display some affinity with Pyrrhonism this cannot be the total explanation. It must also be assumed either that Sextus’ implied reader is searching for plausible positions from the history of philosophy or that he has some passing familiarity with these historical positions.³⁴ Either way, Sextus’ implied reader cannot be taken to be committed to any one philosophical position or even any one kind of position, either contemporary or historical.

So far then, we know that the implied reader is an inquisitive but philosophically uncommitted person who takes himself to be unentitled to any position which cannot be demonstrated to be superior to its alternatives. The implied reader is not one of Pyrrhonism’s dogmatic opponents, at least not yet. This is important to note, because if we were to read Sextus as attempting to argue such an opponent out of his dogmatism his arguments would have to be taken to be unconvincing and historically ineffectual.

Yet while Sextus’ implied reader is not what Sextus would call a philosophical dogmatist nor is the implied reader at this stage being understood to be Everyman, the representative of the common sense perspective. While this tells us something valuable about Sextus’ implied reader this characterisation is not yet sufficient. We still need to determine the precise relationship between Sextus’ implied reader and Everyman. Fortunately, further headway in this regard can be made by considering what Sextus

³⁴ Another possible reason is that at least some of these historical positions provide the inspiration for later positions, much as Democritean atomism did for Epicureanism for instance.

has to say about the proto-Pyrrhonian. If Sextus intends to gain converts to Pyrrhonism then Sextus would presumably cast the proto-Pyrrhonian as his implied reader. Else the implied reader would rightly wonder how he might ever become a Pyrrhonian. Sextus begins his characterisation in the early passages of the *Outlines*, where he gives the following description.

‘Men of talent (*megalophueis*), troubled by the anomaly in things and puzzled as to which of them they should rather assent to, came to investigate what in things are true and what false, thinking that by deciding these issues they would become tranquil.’ (PH 1.12. Annas and Barnes trans.)

The question here is whether the qualifier *megalophueis* (*megalophuēs*) indicates some initial opposition to common sense uncharacteristic of Everyman. Certainly most people do not become particularly bothered by ‘the anomaly in things’ and it may well be suspected that we are here dealing with someone who has already lost their connection with common-sense. According to the LSJ the term *megalophuēs* often means ‘of a noble nature’ or ‘having a great genius’ which is not immediately helpful. More useful is that Epictetus uses the term, and while Sextus never references Epictetus he is concerned to engage with Stoic ideas. It may well be that Sextus’ usage is informed by that of Epictetus, or that they have a common source. Given the absence of any other help let us proceed on this supposition.³⁵

Epictetus does not attribute the characteristic of *megalophuēs* to the Stoic sage, which is itself illuminating, in that we should not assume that being a ‘man of talent’ makes one a philosopher, let alone a philosopher of the Stoic persuasion. In one instance it is applied (adverbially) to Medea’s acts of homicide.³⁶ In another it is applied (ironically) to those of who love to listen to fine oratory but have no concern for living well.³⁷ Let us consider Medea case first, and ask whether it must be conceived of as being totally opposed to common sense. I believe that it need not. Medea’s extraordinary activity is

³⁵ Although we can be unsure of the exact date of Sextus’ life, it is possible that Sextus and Epictetus may have been near-contemporaries. Of course two things need to be kept in mind here. One is that Epictetus did not write the work we have in his name. Like Socrates and Pyrrho he wrote nothing but was represented in a written form by a disciple, in this case a pupil by the name of Arrian. So we may not have Epictetus’ usage here at all. Further, it seems that *megalophuēs* is not itself a technical term, and so there may be no ‘Stoic’ usage to speak of as such. However in this case Epictetus’ (reported) usage would at least be a guide to general usage and should not be discarded.

³⁶ Epictetus, *Discourses of Epictetus; with the Encheiridion and Fragments / Translated with Notes, a Life of Epictetus, and a View of His Philosophy*, by George Long (London: George Bell and sons, 1887).

³⁷ *Ibid.* 3.23, p.266.

explained as flowing directly from a keen appreciation of the tragedy of her situation. Medea may have seen further or more clearly into the nature of tragedy than most in that situation, but she did not see something a normal person would not see if guided appropriately. After all, Medea's situation was genuinely tragic and that is why her story has the enduring power that it does. With this in mind let us consider the ironic usage, and observe that just because it is an *ironic* usage there must be an implicit respect for the *real* men of talent. How then must we understand the real mean of talent? If the false version craves reputation then the genuine article must crave truth. I think that what separates the men of talent from their more ordinary cousins is that they care *very deeply* about truth, whereas ordinary people only *care* about truth.

If these 'men of talent' seem to be directing their talents towards the truth this would explain why they are concerned to discover the superior philosophical position. Indeed the attribute of being *megalophuēs* can most sensibly be read as attributing to Sextus' implied reader a greater than normal sensitivity to the demands of superiority in philosophical theory. That is, if two theories have equal plausibility then it is not good enough just to pick one for the sake of having a position. Only a position which can be taken to be genuinely superior will do. That explains why these 'men of talent' ultimately became puzzled regarding the unending debates about the 'anomaly in things'.

Note that these puzzling anomalies are not restricted to distinctly philosophical topics. While Sextus does engage in such philosophical topics these are not the only things he addressed.³⁸ What does this tell us about the relationship between Sextus' implied reader and common sense? Is Sextus' implied reader Everyman? Does Sextus take his implied reader to be Everyman? The second question is of greater immediate relevance. I believe he does not, in that Sextus does not take it that Everyman does become troubled by the 'anomaly in things'. At least, Everyman does not make this trouble the defining feature of his existence and organise his life around its resolution as does Sextus' implied reader. Interestingly, neither does the Pyrrhonian become troubled by the anomaly in things and in this the Pyrrhonians and Everyman have something

³⁸ Instances of such debated philosophical topics include the existence of a criterion of truth (M 7.25-442), the nature of proof (M 8.300-478), and the reality of place (PH 3.119-134) and motion (PH 3.63-81). Note however that Sextus penned an entire book about debates in non-philosophical professions (M. I-VI).

important in common. In fact I believe that Sextus pictures the Pyrrhonians as the reformed Everyman, an Everyman who has returned from the edges of philosophical commitment to a more commonsensical perspective. From here he is well able to defend the common sense perspective against the claims of philosophical dogmatism. This can be demonstrated by considering the ways in which Sextus' (self-)description of the Pyrrhonians differs from his description of the proto-Pyrrhonians and the implied reader.

ii) Sextus' perception of his own project regarding common sense

There are two main points to be made here. First are Sextus' explicit statements describing how the Pyrrhonian regards common sense. Second is Sextus' account of inquiry, which differs markedly from that attributed to the implied reader and presents a serious problem with his project.

a) Sextus' explicit statements on common sense.

Sextus refers to *bios*, roughly translated as common sense, common life (in the sense of conventional procedure or custom), ordinary life or even Everyman, throughout the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* and *Against the Mathematicians*. My focus here will be on the references from the former work. These references fall into three broad categories. First are the references in which Sextus claims that the Pyrrhonians follow *bios* without any explicit contrast being drawn to what the Pyrrhonians by contrast do not follow (PH 1.17, 21-24, 226, 237, 2.15, 246). Second are those references in which Sextus does provide a contrast (PH 2.102, 229, 244, 254, 257, 3.2, 151, 235). In each case the contrast is to the claims of philosophy, and in the section on sophisms in Book 2 of the *Outlines* Sextus is particularly scathing of such claims. The final category, which is quite small, represents those cases in which *bios* is grouped with the claims of philosophy rather than being contrasted with these claims (PH 1.165, 211, 3.65, 219).³⁹

³⁹ However beyond this small number of references one must remember that the Aenesideman Modes repeatedly treat what are essentially common sense observations in the same way that philosophical claims are treated.

The first and second categories lead to the conclusion that Sextus views the Pyrrhonian as being a defender of common sense against the ridiculous claims of the dogmatists. And indeed this is exactly what Sextus says.

‘Hence, not only do we not fight against the normal course of life, but we are allied with it in that we assent undogmatically to what it relies on, while opposing the peculiar creations of the Dogmatists.’
(PH 2.102. Mates trans.)⁴⁰

As a result of this claim and others like it, in addition to the frequent distinction Sextus draws between philosophy and common sense, I take it that we must interpret Sextus as genuinely meaning his claim to be a defender of common sense (*bios*). The only other way of reading Sextus would be as intentionally deceptive, and that is unacceptable.

However if Sextus is genuine about being a defender of common sense this raises difficulties about how to understand the third category of statements concerning common sense. In these statements Sextus treats common sense in the same way in which he treats the claims of philosophy. In particular he is concerned to demonstrate that both common sense and philosophy are subject to internal contradiction and lead to irresolvable difficulties as they stand. Introducing the Mode of Dispute (one of the Modes of Agrippa which seems to draw upon observations from the Modes of Anesidmus) Sextus says the following.

‘According to the mode deriving from dispute, we find that undecidable dissension about the matter proposed has come about *both in ordinary life and among philosophers*. Because of this we are not able to choose or to rule out anything, and we end up with suspension of judgement.’ (PH 1.165. Annas and Barnes trans., emphasis mine)

The difficulty is that we already know that Sextus has placed a primacy on the achievement of tranquillity (*ataraxia*), and it is difficult to see how he could truly be supportive of common sense if it is subject to precisely the kinds of difficulties the Pyrrhonian explicitly tries to avoid. Indeed, Bailey is quite right to observe that while the common sense perspective is devoid of trouble and debate over the theoretical issues with which philosophers are concerned it is still riddled with troubles of a more

⁴⁰ See also PH 2.246 and M 8.158 for similar statements.

practical kind. As a result the common sense perspective can hardly be considered to be a tranquil one.⁴¹ Why then would Sextus cast himself as a defender of a perspective that lacks that criterion that he finds most important?

If the Pyrrhonian really means his claim to be supporting common sense then this claim can only be taken as saying more than it seems. I suggest that there are two plausible ways of reading Sextus at this point. First, Sextus' intention could be understood as defending some reconstructed and corrected form of common sense. Second, Sextus could understand common sense (*bios*) as only rarely existing in a pure form. This view would then be that in practice common sense exists in a form that is sullied by philosophical commitments that go well beyond what is required for everyday life. It is this second view that I will defend. That Sextus takes such a view of common sense can be shown by examining closely those places in which he is most clearly supportive of common sense and placing them against those (few) passages in which Sextus takes a more critical stance towards common sense. The question will be to determine what feature is evident in the former set and lacking in the latter set. Here I limit my comments to those passages in which Sextus explicitly discusses common sense (*bios*), although I believe that the same conclusion would be reached through an extended analysis.

Those passages in which Sextus is most clearly positive of common sense are: PH 2.102, 244, 254 and 3.235. In each passage Sextus recommends adherence to common sense (*bios*) in unambiguous terms and claims that the Pyrrhonian himself follows this recommendation. In each case a sharp contrast to what Sextus in one place calls the 'fictions of the dogmatists' is made. By 'fictions of the dogmatists' Sextus seems to mean concepts invented by philosophers purely to resolve problems created by their own theories but are unnecessary to the concerns of those that don't accept (or are even aware of) these theories. That is, the fictions with which Sextus are concerned are distinctions purely internal to philosophical theory. Noting this allows us to say that the feature of common sense (*bios*) of which Sextus is most approving is that it is free of

⁴¹ Bailey, *Sextus Empiricus and Pyrrhonian Scepticism* p.212.

distinctions that are internal to philosophy, which is to say that it is free of philosophical theory itself.⁴²

Keeping this in mind, if we look to passages at which Sextus unambiguously opposes common sense we only find two instances, one of which is in fact difficult to understand. Turning first to the clearer passage we find Sextus noting that common sense (*bios*) involves the acceptance of all manner of religious superstitions, with special reference made to the religious opinions of Egypt (PH 3.219). How are we to understand this? I suggest that we understand this as common sense falling prey to an essentially philosophical (or in this case religious – which for Sextus is cut from the same cloth) set of ideas. A few further points are also relevant here. The broader section in which Sextus appeals to common life is devoted to variety in broadly religious views and here we see the whole idea of a ‘common’ sense begins to break down such is the incredible variety of positions that normal people actually hold under the influence to particular religious ideologies. It is reasonable to suppose from this that Sextus supposed that philosophical imposition on common sense is destructive to common sense by undermining its universality.

The only other passage in which Sextus takes an explicitly critical attitude to common sense is PH 3.65. Here Sextus is critical of common sense because he perceives it to be too dogmatic in granting that motion exists despite (apparently) strong philosophical arguments against the possibility of motion. First, this seems a very forced statement from Sextus, and is inconsistent with other statements he makes. At PH 2.244 for instance Sextus is scathing of those philosophers who would deny motion and seemingly supportive of more commonsensical views that accept motion to be real. Second, at PH 3.151 Sextus is not critical of common sense regarding the existence of numbers despite the philosophical and dialectic context being virtually identical to that of PH 3.65. For these reasons I believe that PH 3.65 can be disregarded as an anomaly.

Thus the conclusion we must reach is that Sextus defends common sense where it is devoid of philosophical commitment and critical of it where it breaks down into a disguised form of philosophical commitment. This suggests that common sense cannot

⁴² Note that the one passage in which the place of distinctions in common sense attains a prominent place (PH 2.257) is where these distinctions are of significant practical value, even practical necessity.

for Sextus be defined as what any one normal person adheres to, for especially in religious (and also ethical) matters this will include large sections of philosophical commitment. Common sense, to be truly commonsensical, must be truly *common* and so for Sextus, given the dizzying variety of available philosophical positions, must be truly free of philosophical commitment. What counts as common sense for Sextus then is only that which is strictly necessary for everyday life, which he supposes does not include any philosophical theory. Thus Sextus trades on a sharp commonsensical/philosophical distinction that the implied reader is in danger of violating, and this must be considered to be a central distinction between the implied reader and the Pyrrhonian. Thus for the implied reader to become a Pyrrhonian he must presumably come to recognise, or perhaps remember, a sharp commonsensical/philosophical distinction.

b) Sextus' account of inquiry

The second important distinction between the Pyrrhonian and Sextus' implied reader concerns the motivation of inquiry. We have already established that the implied reader inquires because he wishes to discover the superior philosophical position, where this can only be understood as being a pursuit after the truth. Yet this motivation must be unacceptable for the Pyrrhonian as it implies an unacceptable dogmatism regarding the place held by true beliefs. In fact Sextus goes so far in his avoidance of being committed to any theories that he seems to make any form of inquiry genuinely impossible. For instance we have the following odd passage.

'For example, when someone propounds to us an argument we cannot refute, we say to him: 'Before the founder of the school to which you adhere was born, the argument of the school, which is no doubt sound, was not yet apparent, although it is really there in nature. In the same way, it is possible that the argument opposing the one you have just propounded is really there in nature but is not yet apparent to us; so we should not yet assent to what is now thought to be a powerful argument?.' (PH 1.33-34, Annas and Barnes trans.)⁴³

⁴³ John A. Palmer, "Skeptical Investigation," *Ancient Philosophy* 20, no. 2 (2000), Gisela Striker, "Scepticism as a Kind of Philosophy," *Archiv fuer Geschichte der Philosophie* 83, no. 2 (2001). Both these papers make explicit appeal to this unusual argument to support the conclusion that Sextus cannot be understood as genuinely inquiring.

If no theory will ever satisfy, what then would motivate one to continue to inquire? Despite obvious problems here Sextus chooses to make inquiry the defining mark of the Pyrrhonian in the opening sentences of the *Outlines*. How can this be explained?

Beginning with the motivation of Pyrrhonian inquiry, our starting point is the following passage in the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*.

‘These everyday observances seem to be fourfold, and to consist in guidance by nature, necessitation by feelings, handing down of laws and customs, and teaching of kinds of expertise. By nature’s guidance we are naturally capable of perceiving and thinking.’ (PH 1.23-24 Annas and Barnes trans.)

Of particular interest here is the claim that we are *naturally capable of perceiving and thinking*. If humans are naturally capable of perceiving and thinking they would be naturally capable of inquiry. After all inquiry is nothing but a mode of thinking, in this case a mode directed towards discovery.⁴⁴ Of course a capability for inquiry does not explain a motivation to put that capacity to use. It does however provide a hint that the motivation should also be sought in some appeal to those activities towards which humans are ‘naturally’ inclined. So the question then becomes; is there a natural inclination to inquire? If there is, then of the four categories Sextus lists above it is most likely to be found in the necessitation of feeling (*pathē*).

Further useful suggestions concerning inquiry are found in Frede’s comments on the Methodic school of medicine, summarised below.

‘Soranus also tells us both of anatomy and physiology that, though they are useless, one should take account of them *‘pros chrestomathein’* (Gyn. 4, 6ff.; 6, 6ff. 1 1b.). This suggest that knowledge of these theories satisfies learned curiosity, is, as it were, an amenity of life, a decorative ornament of the educated person.’⁴⁵

If Frede is right about the Methodic school of medicine’s view of the place of inquiry as satisfying learned curiosity, then we can draw from this the idea that it is this same

⁴⁴ If we take this idea seriously then we must also suppose that the Pyrrhonian does indeed have some beliefs, and this is indeed the view of Pyrrhonism taken here.

⁴⁵ Michael Frede, “The Method of the So-Called Methodical School of Medicine,” in *Essays in Ancient Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

learned curiosity which at least in part motivates engagement in the construction of theory and hence inquiry more generally. However, for this suggestion to be of any great use a connection between Methodism and Pyrrhonism needs to be traced. Fortunately, Sextus has helpful things to say at this point, for when discussing the relationship between the Pyrrhonians and the Methodic school he seems favourably inclined to the stance towards theory taken by the Methodics, and especially because of their reliance on the *pathē*. Comparing Pyrrhonism to the Empiric and Methodic schools Sextus clearly comes down on the side of the Methodics in the passage below.

‘He might better adopt the so-called Method, it seems to me, for it alone of the medical systems seems not to make precipitate assertions about non-evident things by self-assuredly telling us whether they are apprehensible or not apprehensible; and following the appearances, it takes from them what seems beneficial, in accord with the Skeptic practice.’ (PH 1.236-237, Mates trans.)

True, Sextus’ primary concern in this excerpt is to affirm not the Methodic view of theory as such but rather the Methodic unwillingness to make statements about non-evident matters. Yet the passage in question, in addition to the following passage, does affirm Methodic practice in so far as it derives from the necessitation of the *pathē*.

‘And so in sum –in order not to depart from the outline form by taking up each point individually – I consider all the things thus said by the Methodics can be classed as instances of the compulsion of the *pathē*, whether these *pathē* are natural or unnatural.’ (PH 1.239 Mates trans.)

Putting together Frede’s suggestion with the idea that the Methodics (at least often) base their practice solely around the *pathē* leads to the interesting thought that curiosity moving one to the construction of entertaining theories could be taken to be a *pathē*-driven practice. Thus Sextus *may* here have in mind to also affirm the practice of theory construction and inquiry more generally just to the extent that it is genuinely *pathē*-driven.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ This conclusion has implications for how we ought to read Sextus statements at PH 1.19-20. Here Sextus makes the following claim.

‘When we investigate whether existing things are such as they appear, we grant that they appear, and what we investigate is not what is apparent but what is said about the apparent – and this is different from investigating what is apparent itself. For example, it appears to us that honey sweetens (we concede this inasmuch as we are sweetened in a perceptual way), but whether (as far as the argument goes) it is actually sweet is something we investigate – and this is not what is apparent but something said about what is apparent.’

The moral of the story then is that inquiry can be motivated for an individual if their reasoning faculties are so structured as to provide them with an agreeable feeling when they do inquire. Inquiry then is motivated then in exactly the same way that eating is motivated, except that the motivation is far more moderate than hunger. In this story no belief in the worthiness of truth as a goal of inquiry is mentioned. In fact no beliefs are mentioned at all, in the same way that we might explain why a dog eats his food by mentioning the dogs instincts but not his 'beliefs' because a dog has no beliefs as such. So the Pyrrhonian can inquire after all, whenever he is naturally motivated to inquire.⁴⁷

The distinction between the way the Pyrrhonian goes about his inquiries and the way Sextus' implied readers go about their inquiry is clearly quite different. However the real question is whether the implied reader could be converted to this account of inquiry and simultaneously take himself to be adhering to common sense against philosophy as that distinction was described in the previous section. Yet surely taking inquiry to be motivated by pleasure is a piece of complex philosophical theorising and not representative of common sense. This is a genuine problem for Sextus, although the presence of this problem can be taken as reinforcing the idea that Sextus sees himself as commonsensical. The simplest way of avoiding this problem would be to withdraw the claim that the Pyrrhonian inquiries in a commonsensical sort of way, and this is something that Sextus does clearly *not* say. The only way to account for this is to say that it was very important to the Pyrrhonians that they be seen to be genuine defenders

Despite this passage leaving us with the general impression that Sextus focuses his particular attention on theoretical accounts of experience ('what might be said about the apparent') this cannot be Sextus' intention, in that at times Sextus allows for theoretical constructions of just this sort. Thus the real focus on Sextus' attention must in fact be the defence of such constructions as anything other than an innocent pastime. Such theoretical accounts, while entertaining, are not to be taken as a serious attempt to account for experience or get at the 'true nature of reality' or some such. However since even taking such theories as true would commit one to conclusions further commitments regarding the 'true nature of reality' we must also conclude that Sextus must not even go as far as taking those theories he finds entertaining to be true, which is to say that Sextus must not believe these theories. Sextus' point in PH1.19-20 would then have to be taken to be that we ought not commit ourselves to the truth of any of our theories, not that we ought not hold such theories absolutely. If it is possible to be committed to a theory without this commitment amounting to belief, and I think both that it is and that Sextus' account of entertaining theories shows us how it is, then presumably Sextus would be happy with such a commitment.

⁴⁷ Harald Thorsrud takes a rather different view of Pyrrhonian inquiry than that taken above, attributing to Sextus a view in which Pyrrhonian inquiry plays only a negative function in preventing them from coming to believe that the examined life – in the Socratic sense – is a good life. On this reading even inquiring for the pleasure this brings would be at best a dangerous use of the Pyrrhonian's time. See Harald Thorsrud, "Is the Examined Life Worth Living? A Pyrrhonian Alternative," *Apeiron* 36, no. 3 (2003).

of common sense, so important that it would ultimately lead Sextus to say something quite uncommonsensical.

iii) The commonsensical response to philosophical theory

The third and final set of observations to which we might appeal to reinforce the claim that Sextus established himself as a defender of common sense comes in the way he characterises the response we ought to make to some of the more counter-intuitive claims made by philosophers. This characterisation creates a sharp distinction between common sense and philosophy, and Sextus clearly comes down on the side of common sense. The relevant distinction emerges in Sextus' discussion of the way we ought to respond to sophisms, and in this discussion the role of the philosopher (or more correctly the logician/epistemologist) is played by the dialectician. However before moving directly to this point we need to understand what Sextus means by dialectic and sophisms. Sextus defines a sophism in the following way.

'They say that a sophism is a plausible and treacherous argument leading one to accept the consequence which is either false or similar to something false or unclear or in some other way unacceptable.'
[PH II.229]

At this point we may well wonder what the distinction between a sophistic argument and a sound argument really amounts to. The answer, according to Sextus, is that a sophistic argument is unacceptable for one reason or another, where this acceptability or otherwise cannot be couched in terms of plausibility, for even a sophistic argument can be plausible. Dialectic would then have to be the science by which we determine whether an argument is acceptable, regardless of its plausibility. That is, dialectic is that process in which we apply the laws of logic to arguments, accepting only those arguments that adhere to these laws. Interestingly though, this is not exactly what Sextus says, for he defines dialectic in terms of truth rather than conformity to the laws of logic as we see below.

'For, they say, if dialectic is the science which distinguished between true and false arguments, then dialectic will be capable of discriminating these things which sully the truth with apparent plausibility. That is why dialecticians, as though coming to the aid of tottering common sense, earnestly try to teach us the concept and the varieties and the resolutions of sophisms.'
[PH II.229]

The reason Sextus would define dialectic in this way can be understood if we suppose that Sextus takes the dialecticians (with whom he disagrees) to presume a connection between truth and the laws of logic. Given such a connection dialectic would provide a method of determining truth. What this does not explain however is why the dialecticians would go about this task so earnestly. That is, why do the dialecticians engage in dialectic at all? The answer must be that the dialecticians must think that our everyday commitments are in need of their support, that they are ‘tottering’. But why do they suppose that common sense is ‘tottering’ in the first place?

This question becomes more pressing when we observe that at least according to Sextus (and in keeping with his exposition of the place of the recollective sign in everyday life) normal people do not engage in dialectic in this way. In fact normal people make fun of the dialecticians for speaking as they do. Indeed, speaking on behalf of all ‘normal’ people Sextus likens the dialecticians to conjurors⁴⁸, suggests that the babble like children⁴⁹ and accuses them of unjustifiably accepting absurdities in the name of logical consistency.⁵⁰ Most entertainingly he also tells the following story.

‘A witty anecdote is told about Herophilus the doctor. He was a contemporary of Diodorus, who vulgarised dialectic and used to run through sophisticated arguments on many topics including motion. Now one day Diodorus dislocated his shoulder and went to Herophilus to be treated. Herophilus wittily said to him: “Your shoulder was dislocated either in a place in which it was or in a place in which it wasn’t. But neither in which it was nor in which it wasn’t. Therefore it is not dislocated.” So the sophist begged him to leave such arguments alone and to apply the medical treatment suitable to his case.’ [PH II.245]

Finally, after they have had their fun by making a joke of the dialecticians, Sextus describes ordinary people as proceeding to ignore all the arguments brought forward by the dialecticians without making any attempt to show why ignoring these arguments is warranted.

‘Having accumulated rubbish of this sort [i.e., various sophisms], he [i.e., the dialectician] frowns and takes out his dialectic and solemnly tries to establish for us by deductive proofs that some things come

⁴⁸ PH II. 250

⁴⁹ PH II. 251

⁵⁰ PH II. 252

into being, and that some things move, and that snow is white, and that we do not have horns ...And ordinary men set out on journeys by land and sea, and construct ships and houses, and produce children, without paying any attention to the arguments against motion and coming into being.’ (PH II.244 Annas and Barnes trans.)

Observe that the idea that common sense is ‘tottering’ is introduced in the context of defining the nature of dialectic, and in particular the role played by the concept of truth in dialectic. Yet according to Sextus, even if there is some connection between truth and logical laws (and Sextus does not concede that there is, rather foolishly) dialectic is not capable of resolving any practical issues arising from sophistic arguments. So for instance we have the following sequence.

‘Thus – to recall one or two examples – suppose the following sophism is propounded by a doctor:

In diseases a varied diet and wine are to be recommended at the abatement

But in every type of disease, abatement usually occurs before the first third day.

Therefore, it is necessary that a varied diet and wine be usually taken before the first third day.

A dialectician would have nothing to say towards the resolution of this argument, useful though one would be; but a doctor will resolve the sophism. For he knows that there are two sorts of abatement...’ [PH II. 237-238]

If dialectic can resolve anything (and Sextus is not convinced that it can) then it can only resolve theoretical issues and not practical ones. However ‘normal’ people seem to show no interest in theoretical issues of the sort examined by the dialectician. Remember that according to Sextus, when normal people are presented with sophistic arguments they simply continue about their lives and even make fun of the dialecticians for concerning themselves with such arguments.⁵¹

However it cannot be the attempt to resolve sophisms itself which draws such a negative response from normal people, for doctors can and do resolve some sophisms without drawing such a response. The feature of the dialectician’s practice that draws such a negative response must be that he engages with *certain sorts* of sophisms. In particular the dialectician engages in sophisms in which the conclusion is, from the

⁵¹ In fact the case of Herophilus demonstrates that if anyone is going to have practical problems with enacting their view then it will be the dialectician, not the man of common sense.

point of view of the ‘normal’ person, obviously false. So for instance Sextus provides the following example.

‘If anything moves, it moves either in a place in which it is or in a place in which it is not.
But neither in a place in which it is (for there it is at rest) nor in a place in which it is not (for how could it do anything in a place in which it simply is not?).
Therefore, it is not the case that anything moves.’

That is to say, the dialectician attempts to resolve arguments in which the conclusion is *commonsensically* false. But just because the conclusion for this argument is commonsensically false there is no need to resolve this argument. This would explain why, from the perspective of the Pyrrhonian, the dialectician is taking on unnecessary tasks – common sense is really not tottering. It would also explain why Sextus explicitly says that the dialectical resolution of sophisms is useless.⁵² After all, the dialectician for all his effort has not told us anything that we did not already know, or at least so Sextus would have us believe. Of course what Sextus has missed is that the dialectician could reveal not just that the conclusion is false (which we already knew) but also *why* the arguments leading to the false conclusion is a genuine sophism (which we did not know).

We can cast the disagreement between the dialectician and the Pyrrhonian’s commonsensical person as a debate over the necessity of knowing that you know for knowing at all. The following argument seems to lay behind the thought process of the dialectician as presented by Sextus.

- 1) *S* knows that the proposition *p* ‘that some objects move’ is true (by hypothesis)
- 2) If *S* knows that *p* then *S* knows that *not-p* is false
- 3) But *S* does not know that *not-p* is false
- 4) So, contrary to the original hypothesis, *S* does not know that some objects move

Obviously this argument turns on premise 3, so we must ask what reason the dialectician would have to accept this premise. Given the dialectician’s interest in arguments with conclusions that are commonsensically taken to be false we need not

⁵² PH II. 236

look too far for an answer. It makes sense to suppose that the dialectician implicitly assumes that knowledge is incompatible with being presented with apparently sound argument that one is unable to defeat.⁵³ That is, the dialectician takes it that claiming knowledge requires being able to provide an account of how that knowledge was obtained.⁵⁴ Put another way, knowledge requires entitlement, and in this respect it is not enough to appeal to the apparently obvious truth of the conclusion under consideration. To do so is mere question-begging dogmatism as it is precisely the truth of this conclusion that is under consideration. Given such background commitments dialectic becomes important because it can be taken to provide the foundation for the kind of account that would confer warrant.

The real debate between Sextus and the dialectician might then be over the requirement that one know that one knows in order to know, although this would be an overstatement. More exactly, the debate is over whether or not we need to know that we know when we are concerned with knowledge of common sense. Sextus could take it that the dialectician is wrong to suppose that we are under any such requirement regarding common sense. This would at least explain some of the oddness of ridiculing one's opponents when they present arguments to the effect that one lacks knowledge.⁵⁵

⁵³ Granting for the purpose of the argument that the dialectician grants that this particular version of Zeno's paradox appears to be sound. Of course it is not sound, but that is another matter which is not immediately relevant here.

⁵⁴ Such a requirement was hardly anything new in the Hellenistic period, as this very requirement had been the focus of Plato's *Theaetetus*.

⁵⁵ It is interesting that one finds this same response of ridicule in both Reid and Wittgenstein, and perhaps for the same basic reason in each case. Reid at least seems to think we have an entitlement to common sense that trumps any arguments to the contrary and does not require any arguments in its support. So for instance we find Reid saying

'Secondly, we may observe that opinions which contradict first principles, are distinguished, from other errors, by this:- that they are not only false but absurd; and, to discountenance absurdity, Nature hath given us a particular emotion – to wit – that of ridicule, – which seems intended for this very purpose of putting out of countenance what is absurd, either in opinion or practice. This weapon, when properly applied, cuts with as keen an edge as argument.' EIP VI. iv. p. 438b.

Wittgenstein makes a similar looking statement, although his conception of the relationship between common sense and reasons is somewhat more subtle than that we often find in Reid. So for instance we find Wittgenstein saying

'One might simply say "O, rubbish!" to someone who wanted to make objections to the propositions that are beyond doubt. That is, not to reply to him but to admonish him. [OC 495]
'The queer thing is that even though I find it quite correct for someone to say "Rubbish!" and so brush aside an attempt to confuse him with doubts at bedrock, - nevertheless, I hold it to be incorrect if he seeks to defend himself (using, for e.g. the words "I know").' [OC 498]

Regardless of the coherence of Sextus' conception of the relationship between logic and truth and what that reveals about the requirements under which we place ourselves when we lay claim to common sense it is clear that Sextus is here coming down on the side of common sense against philosophy. The reason for this is as yet unclear, and has something to do with an apparently unusual relationship that holds between common sense and reasons. In chapter 3 I shall return explicitly to what Sextus might have had in mind here and argue that Sextus supposes that common sense is constituted by practices to which we have no real entitlement beyond a pragmatic one. It is ultimately this idea that we have no entitlement to common sense and yet cannot provide ourselves with an entitlement through the provision of reasons that presents Sextus' position from changing from a genuine scepticism to a form of dogmatism.

The Pyrrhonian project

What then does this have to do with common sense and Broughton's reading of Pyrrhonian scepticism? Broughton takes the Pyrrhonians, represented in the writings of Sextus Empiricus, to be largely unconcerned with common sense and hence certainly not be concerned to attribute to common sense any *prima facie* authority. Such a reading must be wrong, for we have seen in Sextus' perception of his own project that he casts himself as a defender and advocate of common sense.⁵⁶ The point of arguing that the Pyrrhonian is a defender of common sense is that it takes one directly to the claim that common sense is inherently sceptical. I take it that the essence of the Pyrrhonian project is to make good this very claim; that common sense is inherently sceptical. This is to be done by focusing on our everyday practices and explaining that following these practices leads us into scepticism. Of course, carrying this project through requires that at least some effort is made towards clarifying exactly what common sense is.

⁵⁶ Of course Sextus does not always defend the views of ordinary people on all topics for in distinctly religious and ethical settings Sextus quite clearly does not do this. See for instance PH 1.145-163 and PH 3.200-237. However what Sextus does do is defend common sense in those instances where a clear distinction is to be drawn between common sense and philosophy (where philosophy is broadly conceived of to include religion). In those cases where no distinction can be maintained then common sense comes in for the same criticism as does philosophy. What Sextus is really defending then is not the views of the masses as they actually exist but those views as they would exist if the influence of philosophy (broadly construed to include religion) could be removed.

What makes the Pyrrhonian project a distinctly sceptical one as opposed to a conventional non-sceptical project in analytic epistemology is twofold. First, whenever serious investigations into the structure of common sense are carried out common sense turns out to be inherently sceptical. Second, that when this conclusion is reached no revision of our every practices or our conception of common sense is called for. Pyrrhonism does not take the emergence of scepticism from within a commonsense perspective to be a negative or unwanted conclusion. Hence this conclusion does not warrant either a wide-ranging revision of our everyday practices or an ongoing investigation to show why the emergence of scepticism from within a commonsensical perspective must represent some misunderstanding of the real character of common sense.

Nonetheless, there is indeed something ‘fishy’ about Pyrrhonian scepticism conceived of as common sense scepticism in that by-and-large someone guided by a commonsensical perspective is not sceptical about anything much. Such a one certainly doesn’t display anything like the character of Descartes’ meditator at the introduction of the Second Meditation. It seems that if we accept the legitimacy of the investigative process that leads to the emergence of Pyrrhonian scepticism then we would be unable to really understand common sense at all. Common sense is supposed to provide us with some grasp of the character of the world, developed through collaborative effort and honed over centuries. How can it turn out that following common sense could lead us to feel that we have lost our grasp on the world? That is, if the Pyrrhonian program can be carried through to completion then it creates problems not just for our supposed knowledge of the world; it also poses insuperable difficulties for our understanding of ourselves.

In summary then, what does the Pyrrhonian program aim to establish and what is required to carry it through? The Pyrrhonian program aims to establish that Pyrrhonian scepticism is commonsensical and that common sense is inherently sceptical. Pyrrhonism is commonsensical in that entirely commonsensical ways of conducting our enquiries can lead us, in certain unusual but not fanciful situations, to withdraw any claim to be entitled to what we in other circumstances would claim to commonsensically know. That is, if we operate from within a commonsensical perspective then no unambiguous affirmative answer can be given to the question ‘Are

we entitled to our common sense commitments?’ For if we are entitled to those articles of knowledge to which we commonsensically take ourselves to have an entitlement then we are also entitled to Pyrrhonian scepticism, which includes scepticism directed towards what we commonsensically take ourselves to know. If we deny our entitlement to Pyrrhonian scepticism then we must also deny our entitlement to common sense. The Pyrrhonian program is thus to present a dilemma for anyone who would claim entitlement commonsensically to know anything.

What is required to carry this program through? First, an account of how Pyrrhonian scepticism develops from inquiries carried out commonsensically into topics that we commonsensically recognise as being important. This account must be sufficiently detailed that a plausible defence can be made for the contention that it does indeed accurately capture our commonsensical ways of conducting our inquiries. Sextus is of little help in developing such an account, as we have seen above (chapter 2). Second, this account must lead to the conclusion that *if* we are entitled to common sense *then* we are also entitled to Pyrrhonian scepticism (chapter 2). Third, this account of the development of common sense scepticism must explain not just for our entitlement to common sense and scepticism, it must also explain our *sense of* entitlement to common sense and scepticism. We need to account for both the epistemological and psychological aspects of the relationship between common sense and scepticism. Here it must be recognised that we largely do *feel* that we are entitled to common sense which I take it is why the whole idea of common sense scepticism seems ‘fishy’, without warrant I might hasten to add. Fourth and finally, we must provide a fairly detailed account of those aspects of common sense that are responsible for the emergence of scepticism which explains why it is that the possibility of common sense scepticism often goes ignored (chapter 3).

Why is CSN given such a prominent position in carrying this program through? There are in fact several reasons for this. First, CSN implicitly challenges the contention that if we are entitled to common sense then we are also entitled to Pyrrhonian scepticism. It does this by appealing to our entitlement as part of a broader anti-sceptical strategy that takes us to have an entitlement to common sense. Second, Pyrrhonian scepticism is concerned with claims to *entitlement*, not rational justification as such. As such, Pyrrhonian scepticism allows that there may be a means of guaranteeing our

entitlement to a given commitment other than by providing rational justification for that commitment. CSN claims that indeed there are such means to provide entitlement, and as Pyrrhonism is sensitive to this claim it is a claim that must be addressed. Addressing this claim requires more than just showing that CSN doesn't guarantee that our entitlement to common sense is rationally justified. Third, in addition to the epistemological point that we have an entitlement to common sense, CSN also takes it that we are psychologically compelled to take ourselves to have such an entitlement. Further, lacking or being immune to this psychological compulsion is taken to be a sign of the breakdown of rationality, which means that according to CSN, Pyrrhonian scepticism can never be rational. For these three reasons CSN presents a challenge to both the epistemological and psychological prongs of the Pyrrhonian program in such a way that the Pyrrhonian is forced to respond and thus CSN needs to be addressed. Interestingly, it will be shown that when the character of common sense has been established then the supporter of CSN ought also to support Pyrrhonian scepticism. That is, Pyrrhonian scepticism can be generated while appealing only to principles that a defender of CSN would accept.

Outline of the chapters

Chapter 1 of this dissertation is devoted to developing a fairly clear understanding of the central claims of Common Sense Naturalism, and also the problems that face it in terms of tensions within its own theory. The focus of the exegesis of Common Sense Naturalism will be on explaining why it is that it is anti-sceptical, why it gives priority to common sense and what arguments are used to support it. In the course of this exegesis it will be shown that there have historically been two separate arguments brought forward in support of the claim that we are entitled to common sense, neither of which can simply be reduced to the claim that this entitlement is rationally justified. According to one argument our acceptance of some beliefs is natural, having what is essentially a psychological ground. According to the other argument our acceptance of some beliefs is required if reason is to find the proper context for its application, which essentially presents us with a transcendental justification for these beliefs. The main figures from whom inspiration is taken when developing this account of Common Sense Naturalism are Sextus Empiricus, David Hume, Thomas Reid, and the later Ludwig

Wittgenstein and P.F.Strawson. In each of these thinkers engages with Common Sense Naturalism, some in support, some in opposition.

Chapter 2 of this dissertation addressed the claim that common sense inquiry can in certain circumstances lead us to Pyrrhonian scepticism. Hence, if we are entitled to common sense, including common sense ways of conducting our inquiries, then we are also entitled to Pyrrhonian scepticism. In carrying through this part of the Pyrrhonian program we need to move considerably beyond the account of inquiry provided by Sextus Empiricus. As we have pointed out above this account faces significant difficulties over the place of the pursuit of truth in guiding inquiry. However inspiration can be drawn from Robert Fogelin's Neo-Pyrrhonian scepticism in developing this account, although chapter 2 extends his comments on this topic. Crucial to the argument of chapter 2 is the idea that respecting common sense must include respecting certain norms of inquiry. The argument of chapter 2 shows that once we clarify these norms it is quite easy to see how radical Pyrrhonian scepticism could develop. If chapter 2 is successful then it shows a clear need to reconsider how we understand common sense, in that the claim of Common Sense Naturalism that common sense is hostile to radical scepticism does not appear to be sustainable. In particular, the analysis of chapter 2 introduces the notion that whether common sense leads us to scepticism depends on the context in which we apply common sense. However the best way of understanding the resulting perspectivism remains unclear.

Chapter 3 addresses why, if we are entitled to Pyrrhonian scepticism as chapter 2 suggests, we *often* (but importantly not always) *feel* ourselves to have an entitlement to common sense that excludes Pyrrhonian scepticism. The resolution of this puzzle lies in the fact that what we take to be commonsensical varies over time. So at some times we take it to be just commonsensical that we have no entitlement to scepticism. At other times we can be brought to find it commonsensical that we obviously do have an entitlement to scepticism. Some people are more inclined to scepticism than are others, where Hume is one of those rare individuals who was unusually sensitive to scepticism, although even for Hume scepticism is not a permanent psychological state. For this reason Hume is a valuable source of inspiration when attempting to determine why we sometimes take ourselves to be entitled to common sense and sometimes do not do so. An important claim to emerge in this chapter is that the content of common sense is

partially constituted by norms, and that respecting these norms is in turn constitutive of the proper context in which reason can be applied. A further important claim to emerge from a consideration of Hume's encounter with scepticism is that what counts as being commonsensical at any given point in time is in fact sensitive to what mood one happens to be in at that time. One consequence of accepting this mood-sensitivity in common sense is that the scepticism that can be derived from respecting common sense becomes substantially more problematic than might otherwise be thought. In fact when some moods are present Pyrrhonian scepticism can become so radical and so highly generalised that it quite simply cannot be integrated into a rational perspective that contains everyday anti-sceptical views. Taking our cue from Carol Rovane we see that this in turn challenges our rational integrity and so our sense of personhood in that our sceptical selves have trouble understanding our non-sceptical selves and vice versa.

CHAPTER 1

Common Sense Naturalism

Outline

This chapter attempts to clarify the central claims and associated difficulties in a position that is here being termed Common Sense Naturalism (CSN), in the process drawing inspiration from some important historical and contemporary figures. These figures include Sextus Empiricus, David Hume, Thomas Reid and P.F. Strawson.⁵⁷ These figures have been made the focus of such attention because each comments, either in support or otherwise, on the central concerns of CSN. While this chapter does engage with the positions of thinkers in the history of philosophy no attempt is made to either argue that there is a coherent tradition to be found running through each of these philosophers and nor is an attempt made to argue that adherence to any such tradition (even if one could be identified) represents these philosophers' considered view. Presenting such arguments would be beyond the scope of this dissertation. However it will be insisted that considering the response of each of these thinkers together is a convenient means of identifying a position which, as has been indicated, is being termed Common Sense Naturalism. Hence this chapter is not a project in the history of philosophy. Rather it attempts to draw inspiration from some of the insights of various philosophers, both historical and contemporary, and especially those insights that are often overlooked in contemporary debates concerning the relationships between naturalism, common sense and scepticism.⁵⁸

In broad outline, considering various ideas drawn from the above thinkers will reveal that scepticism can, at times, be a commonsensical view to take. Further, it is not just everyday sorts of scepticism that can be commonsensical, for fairly radical scepticism can also become commonsensical. For example, it could become commonsensical to someone to suspect that they do not know their own name, and even not to believe that

⁵⁷ Clear Wittgensteinian influences are also evident in the readings presented of Reid and Strawson.

⁵⁸ This is not to say however that no tradition could be identified by considering these thinkers as a group, and recent work on Thomas Reid is moving in this direction by considering Reid together with Moore and Wittgenstein. I am confident that this work could be expanded by including Hume and Sextus also. However whether or not this is the case is not immediately relevant to this dissertation as all that is currently required is that we can in fact draw inspiration from the philosophers listed above, and this does not require that we identify a coherent tradition to which they each belong.

they know their own name.⁵⁹ However, radical scepticism of this sort is not constant, in that we do not always suspect that we lack knowledge of our name but sometimes even claim that this is certain knowledge. Thus it must be the case that what strikes us as commonsensical varies over time. Naturalism enters into this relationship via the assertion that the content of common sense is provided for us by the content of those commitments it is natural for us to adopt.⁶⁰ Interestingly, the natural beliefs held by one person at one time will not necessarily be the same natural beliefs as those held by someone else at that time or themselves at a later time. This partially accounts for the possibility that scepticism is not a persistent problem, instead being an intermittent one. However, because the source of radical scepticism is internal to our natural constitution it is also the case that radical scepticism can never be permanently defeated, avoided, answered or refuted. As such, the relationship between naturalism, common sense and scepticism is such that we are always at the risk of becoming radical sceptics.

An observation and a distinction

The important relations between naturalism, common sense and scepticism mentioned above all come to the surface through an analysis of CSN, although CSN itself is usually understood as being an anti-sceptical position rather than a sceptical one.⁶¹ Hence the immediate task is to clarify in what CSN consists, in the process of which inspiration will be drawn from the philosophers mentioned above. Answering two questions can provide this clarification. First, what makes CSN a version of naturalism? Second, what places CSN in the tradition of common sense philosophy? Taking the question of naturalism in CSN first we find this question addressed most cogently by P.F.Strawson in *Skepticism and Naturalism: Some Varieties*. The first point to be made here is that CSN relies fundamentally on a distinction between two kinds of

⁵⁹ This example is taken from Fogelin's fine analysis of Pyrrhonian scepticism. See Robert J. Fogelin, *Pyrrhonian Reflections on Knowledge and Justification* (New York: Oxford Univ Pr, 1994) pp. 93-94.

⁶⁰ The details of what it is for a commitment to be natural will be provided as the thesis progresses.

⁶¹ That designation derives most directly from a paper presented by Daniel Kaufman titled "*Hume, Reid, and the Epistemology of Modesty*," delivered at the annual meeting of the Center for the Study of Scottish Philosophy, Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, NJ, September 9, 2007. Similar ideas are also to be found in Daniel A. Kaufman, "Between Reason and Common Sense: On the Very Idea of Necessary (Though Unwarranted) Belief," *Philosophical Investigations* 28, no. 2 (2005), Daniel A. Kaufman, "Reality in Common Sense: Reflections on Realism and Anti-Realism from a 'Common Sense Naturalist' Perspective," *Philosophical Investigations* 25, no. 4 (2002).

proposition. Comparing Hume and Wittgenstein, Strawson puts the point in the following way.

‘Above all, there is, in Wittgenstein’s work, as in Hume’s, the distinction between “what it is vain” to make a matter of inquiry, what “we must take for granted in all our reasonings”, as Hume puts it, on the one hand, and what is genuinely matter for inquiry on the other.’⁶²

However the essential idea here is more subtle than it appears and hence the foundation of this distinction needs to be carefully understood. The central point is captured by appeal to the concept of vanity, which in its old-fashioned use carries the sense of futility or unproductiveness. Witness for instance the intensely frustrated opening passages Ecclesiastes, taken here from the King James Version (1622) and with which Hume (along with every other 18th century man of letters) would have undoubtedly been familiar.

‘Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity. What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?... There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after... The wise man’s eyes are in his head; but the fool walketh in darkness; and I myself perceived also that one event happeneth to them all. Then I said in my heart, As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me; and why was I then more wise? Then I said in my heart that this also is vanity.’ (Ecclesiastes 1:2-3, 11, 2:14-15.)

While we may dispute the extremely long view of things the Preacher is taking here we can at least understand his point. The result of labour is here implicitly anticipated to be remembrance, but all labour will be forgotten in the future. The goal of wisdom is to have a better overall life than the fool, although in the end both the fool and the sage will be taken by the grave. The point is that everything is vain because nothing makes a lasting difference. Hence no activity is attributed value as no activity achieves its anticipated goal. When applied to the activity of attempting to provide justifying reasons for some propositions the concept of vanity must then imply that such activity fails to achieve its anticipated result. But what result would Hume have here had in mind? In the normal course of events the result we would expect from inquiry in this

⁶² P. F. Strawson, *Skepticism and Naturalism: Some Varieties, Woodbridge Lectures; No. 12.* (London: Methuen, 1985) 14-15. The quotes taken from Hume are to be found in their original context at David Hume, L. A. Selby-Bigge, and P. H. Nidditch, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 2nd ed. (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1978) p.187.

justificatory mode is that we would only hold those beliefs which came out as justified through this process of inquiry.

Put another way, we would expect that the propositional attitude we take towards the propositions into which we had inquired would be sensitive to the result of that inquiry and hence vary according to those results. Indeed the very reason why we value justificatory inquiry, why justificatory inquiry is not considered to be vain, is that it allows us to align our beliefs to the available evidence. Against this background the idea of vanity as applied to justificatory inquiry must be interpreted as meaning that the propositional attitude we take towards at least some propositions is not sensitive to the outcome of justificatory inquiry. Justificatory inquiry then, when directed towards some propositions, really does turn out to be unproductive, to be vain, in that the beliefs we hold after the inquiry is finished are the same beliefs we held before the inquiry began regardless of the outcome of this inquiry.

However, it should be noted for future reference that the unproductiveness of justificatory inquiry into some beliefs should only be understood with reference to the anticipated goal of this inquiry, which in this case is the presentation of reasons which in some way ground the propositions in question. As we shall see, the fact that justificatory inquiry is futile is in fact *productive* in the sense that this futility provides the basis for the development of a transcendental argument supporting these propositions. While this is not the anticipated result of justificatory inquiry, in that transcendental arguments do not as such provide a ground for the propositions for which they argue, it is still an interesting and useful result.

The distinction upon which CSN relies can now be stated more clearly, by appeal to both propositions and propositional attitudes. The relevant distinction is that the propositional attitude we take towards some propositions is not sensitive to the outcome of the attempt to provide justifying reasons for those propositions. As a result justificatory inquiry when directed towards these propositions is considered to be vain, in the sense of being futile or unproductive.⁶³

⁶³ Of course, our propositional attitude towards these beliefs could vary for reasons other than the outcome of justificatory inquiry. In fact that such variation is possible is an important claim of the argument that will ultimately be developed.

Until such a time as they are inquired into such propositional attitudes manifest themselves as run-of-the-mill beliefs. However this manifestation may be deceptive, and although I shall defer for a later stage any discussion of what the propositional attitude we take towards these special propositions amounts to, it should not be assumed that it is not simply the attitude of belief. Indeed there are good reasons to think that this attitude cannot be that of belief, as Sextus and Wittgenstein seem to recognise although without extending this insight as far as they might have. These reasons shall be addressed in detail in chapter 3. As we shall see in that chapter, one important reason to think that the commitments in question are not beliefs is that they are not reason-sensitive in the way that beliefs ought to be. Another reason is that these commitments are neither true nor false, although they can be assessed on non-alethic criteria. Finally, these commitments actually turn out to be commitments to respect various norms of behaviour. As has been said, these claims will be discussed in chapter 3 and it is largely to maintain consistency with that chapter that the term ‘commitment’ ought to be used instead of ‘belief’. However as employed here the term commitment is quite broad, so as to include beliefs if that reflects the propositional attitude involved.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ As we shall see shortly, some commitments are accorded a special place in our cognitive economy. It also deserves emphasis that the reasons for justificatory inquiry is judged in this negative manner are pragmatic and descriptive. This distinction, appealing as it does on what is fundamentally a pragmatic notion of futility or unproductiveness, is quite different from a seemingly similar distinction drawn along semantic or rhetorical lines. It has been argued that attempting to offer justifying reasons for some propositions results only in *meaninglessness*, where such a conclusion is standardly reached on the grounds that the question, which one attempts to answer by offering this justification, is itself meaningless. Such arguments were famously advanced by Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. So for instance we have the following sequence from that work.

6.5 When the answer cannot be put into words, neither can the question be put into words.

The *riddle* does not exist

If a question can be framed at all, it is also *possible* to answer it.

6.5.1 Scepticism is *not* irrefutable, but obviously nonsensical, when it tries to raise doubts where no questions can be asked.

For doubt can exist only where a question exists, a question only where an answer exists, and an answer only where something *can be said*.⁶⁴

Thinking along these lines, questions such as ‘Is there an external world?’ or ‘Are there other beings in the universe with minds like mine?’ would be judged to be meaningless, because it is not possible to appeal to any evidence to decide the question one way or the other. Of course it has been widely acknowledged that such arguments (and there have been many over the years) face a significant problem, to wit, that they just sound implausible. After all, it does seem on the surface of it that a question like ‘Is there an external world?’ does make sense. While it might be the case that at some deep level such a question really is meaningless, given the surface appearance of meaningfulness convincing us of meaninglessness is going to be very difficult indeed. It is fortunate then that such semantic/rhetorical arguments are not part of CSN as understood here and that the relevant distinction is pragmatic rather than semantic/rhetorical.

When speaking of those commitments to which our propositional attitude is insensitive to the outcome of justificatory inquiry I shall for the moment at least leave undetermined who the *we* and *our* mentioned above expands to include, although again pre-empting subsequent discussion I can state that it includes most people all the time, a small minority (i.e., philosophical sceptics) most of the time (but importantly not always) and never includes an even smaller group (i.e., the insane). Reid and Hume both have useful insights on this, although neither captures the entire story when considered in isolation.

A distinction between those propositions to which our propositional attitude is sensitive to the outcome of justificatory inquiry and those propositions towards which our propositional attitude is insensitive to the outcome of justificatory inquiry can be found in all the thinkers mentioned above, albeit in different ways and with different emphasis. As a consequence each of the thinkers identified here also treats justificatory inquiry into some propositions as vain, and it is this which in part justifies considering these thinkers together. Starting with Sextus we find the following passage in which a distinction is drawn between those commitments he finds are forced on him and those which are in some way a matter of judgement and choice.

‘When we say that Sceptics do not hold beliefs, we do not take ‘belief’ in the sense in which some say, quite generally, that belief is acquiescing in something; for Sceptics assent to the feelings forced upon them by appearances – for example, they would not say, when heated or chilled, ‘I think I am not heated (or: chilled)’. Rather, we say that they do not hold beliefs in the sense in which some say that belief is assent to some unclear object of investigation in the sciences, for Pyrrhonists do not assent to anything unclear.’⁶⁵

Later Sextus extends these ideas to comment explicitly on why some forms of inquiry are vain, with the reason being that the results of such inquiries consistently lead to absurd conclusions. For Sextus, the reason why the outcome of some inquiries is absurd

⁶⁵ Sextus, Annas, and Barnes, *Outlines of Scepticism*. Unless otherwise stated translations are taken from this source. Hereafter I shall use the abbreviation PH for the *Outlines* and include references to Book and paragraph numbers, placing the reference in the main body of the text. Hence this reference would appear as [PH 1.19-20]. The reader should be aware however that the above quote is probably the single most commented upon passage in Sextus’ *oeuvre*, and that the translation of this passage is complex and debated. In these debates I stand with the Fredean line of interpretation, and especially with the position argued for in Frede, “The Sceptic’s Two Kinds of Assent and the Question of the Possibility of Knowledge.” At a later stage in this dissertation there will be opportunity for some justifying remarks to be made in favour of such an interpretation.

is that they lead to conclusions that we cannot possibly accept. Yet exactly what Sextus intends by this impossibility remains unclear. Sextus could mean either that it is psychologically or logically impossible to accept that we have no entitlement to some commitments, or indeed he could mean both. The following passage contains both.

‘The argument propounded leads us either to something unacceptable or to something which we *must* accept. If the second, we shall assent to it without absurdity. If to something unacceptable, we need not rashly assent to the absurdity because of its plausibility: rather, they must relinquish an argument which compels assent to absurdities – if at any rate, they have chosen, as they profess, not to babble like children but to seek what is true. If a road is leading us to a precipice, we do not drive ourselves over the precipice because there is a road leading to it; rather, we leave the road because of the precipice: similarly if there is an argument leading us to something agreed to be absurd, we do not assent to the absurdity because of the argument – rather, we abandon the argument because of the absurdity.’ (PH 2.251-252, translation altered)⁶⁶

The first point to note is that Sextus’ comments are entered in the context of those commitments that Sextus will find ‘forced’ upon him, those commitments towards which he *must* take himself to have an entitlement. However this need not be taken to be merely psychological in its thrust, for that Sextus is forced to take himself to have an entitlement to certain commitments is also entered in the context of recognising the logical implications of certain arguments and commitments. Further light might perhaps be shed on this issue by noting that the term Sextus uses for the absurdity of the relevant conclusions is the same term – *atopia* (and related terms such as *atopos* and *atopatos*) – that appears in the Platonic corpus as an adjective for describing the character of Socrates. Pierre Hadot makes much of the point that the character of Socrates is *atpoos*, *atopia* or *atopatos* and in the process enters the useful suggestion that the more appropriate translation of this term would be ‘unclassifiable’ rather than ‘absurd’.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ The translation of the Greek *chrēnai* has been altered here from ‘ought’ to ‘must’. In this I agree with Bury’s older translation against both the modern translations of Annas the Barnes and also the translation found in Mates, *The Skeptic Way: Sextus Empiricus’s Outlines of Pyrrhonism*. Translating *chrēnai* as ‘ought’ has little lexical support as the core sense of *chrē* (of which *chrēnai* is simply the infinitive form) conveys the sense of necessity, not that of normativity. Further, translating this term as ‘ought’ makes Sextus’ argument sound a great deal more dogmatic than his overall position would justify. For the older translation see Sextus and Bury, *Sextus Empiricus*.

⁶⁷ See Pierre Hadot and Arnold I. Davidson, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, trans. Michael Chase (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1995) pp.158-165.

We ought to recall at this point that something, or especially someone, being *atopia* is related in a Greek mind with the concept of *aporia* – roughly translated as puzzlement.⁶⁸ Socrates was *atopos* in the Platonic literature because rather than leaving someone with clarity over some concept at the end of one of the dialogues he usually left them with a profound sense of *aporia*. That is to say that at the end of a Platonic dialogue Socrates' interlocutor has the sense that they have somehow lost their grip on the relevant concept, be that piety, knowledge, love or whatever. I take it that Stanley Cavell is appealing to a sense of *aporia* when he describes the outcome of being led to ponder the sense of a term with which we are already quite familiar.

It sometimes happens that we know everything there is to know about a situation – what all of the words in question mean, what all of the relevant facts are; and everything is in front of our eyes. And yet we feel we don't know something, don't understand something. In this situation, the question "What is X?" is very puzzling, in exactly the way that philosophy is very puzzling. We feel we want to ask the question, and yet we feel we already have the answer.⁶⁹

This suggests that the sense in which the arguments rejected by Sextus are absurd is not entirely straightforward. In fact taking *atopia* to perhaps mean 'unclassifiable' suggests that there is perhaps an important semantic notion in Sextus' thought. That is, Sextus could well intend to draw our attention to an important way in which we just do not understand what the philosopher who presents the offending arguments is saying when he says, for instance, that movement is impossible upon expounding Zeno's Paradox. This thought suggests that what Sextus intends is that it is not possible to understand what the claims with which he is here concerned *mean*. This is not to say that Sextus does not understand what the original words mean, or that there is a grammatical error of some kind involved. It is to say that the philosophers (Sextus calls them sophists)

⁶⁸ For an excellent exposition of this term as it appears in the early Platonic corpus see Vasilis Politis, "Aporia and Searching in the Early Plato," in *Remembering Socrates*, ed. Lindsay Judson and Vassilis Karasmanis (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006). For an exposition of this same term in Aristotle's thought see Vasilis Politis, "Aristotle on Aporia and Searching in Metaphysics," *Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 22 (2006). While the Platonic background is more in focus here this is not to say that Aristotelian influences are irrelevant. There is evidence to suggest that Sextus was familiar with the thought of both.

⁶⁹ Stanley Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976) p.20. In fact Cavell explicitly connects this statement to a brief exposition of Socratic method. See also Stanley Cavell, *The Claims of Reason* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) p.193. Note especially in that in this latter passage Cavell speaks of the traditional epistemologist's words 'not being entirely under his control'.

who put forward these arguments do not themselves know what they had meant when they propounded such arguments, or do not know what they had *really* meant.⁷⁰

So rather than Sextus making a psychological point when he says that we are forced to take ourselves to have an entitlement to certain commitments because we are (psychologically) forced to take things this way, he could here be making a logical point. Sextus could be saying that we reject certain arguments not because (or not just because) we are psychologically compelled to accept their opposite but because we do not actually understand what these arguments would mean if they meant what the propounders of these argument are trying to say.

The moral we can draw from this Cavell-inspired reading of Sextus is that Sextus could well intend both the psychological and the logical points without himself introducing any absurdity. In that case the psychological point is that even if we could understand what the sophists mean when they present arguments that appear to lead to absurd conclusions, such arguments can never, in actual fact, make a difference for us. The logical point would be that we just do not understand what the sophist *really* means and so cannot even begin to take his argument seriously. Note however that the psychological point is consistent with us not actually having any entitlement to the commitments in question, unless it can somehow be shown that psychological compulsion is entitlement conferring. By contrast, Sextus' logical point would seem not to provide us any reason to suppose that any purported entitlement we have to the relevant commitment is not a genuine entitlement. After all, if we cannot understand what an argument means then it cannot provide us grounds for thinking that any entitlement to any commitment has been undermined.

So then, does Sextus' point about the absurdity/unclassifiability of certain arguments or conclusions leave everything as it was before regarding entitlement? At first glance it would seem so, as Sextus' psychological and logical points neither undermine any entitlement we might already have nor provide us with any further entitlement. Yet this is exactly the point that a defender of CSN would make, in that we have certain entitlements that are simply not touched by arguments attempting to either confirm or

⁷⁰ To speak this way is to obviously follow some of Cavell's other insights. See Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?* pp.39-40.

disconfirm this entitlement. The arguments drawn from Sextus above shows us that when we try to present such arguments we are met with either absurdity (and psychological compulsions drawing away from absurdity) or a loss of the sense that we know what the disconfirming arguments mean. That it, Sextus brings us face to face with the vanity of justificatory inquiry when directed towards certain commitments

We again see the vanity of justificatory inquiry when directed towards certain commitments in both Hume and Reid, where in this case the idea is that the commitments which justificatory inquiry cannot call into question are, in some sense, natural commitments.

‘Thus tho’ we clearly perceive the dependence and interruption of our perceptions, we stop short in our career, and never upon that account reject the notion of an independent and continu’d existence. That opinion has taken such deep root in the imagination, that ‘tis impossible ever to eradicate it, nor will any strain’d metaphysical conviction of the dependence of our perceptions be sufficient for that purpose.’⁷¹

‘My belief is carried along by perception, as irresistibly as my body by the earth. And the greatest sceptic will find himself to be in the same condition. He may struggle hard to disbelieve the information of his senses, as a man does to swim against a torrent; but, ah! it is in vain. It is in vain that he strains every nerve, and wrestles with nature, and with every object that strikes on his senses. For after all, when his strength is spent in the fruitless attempt, he will be carried down the torrent with the common herd of believers.’⁷²

Again, we see the same themes emerging in Wittgenstein and Strawson.

‘That is to say, the questions that we raise and our *doubts* depend on the fact that some propositions are exempt from doubt, are as it were like hinges on which those turn.’ [OC 341]

‘That is to say, it belongs to the logic of our scientific investigations that certain things are *in deed* not doubted.’ [OC 342]

⁷¹ Hume, Selby-Bigge, and Nidditch, *A Treatise of Human Nature* 214. Hereafter I shall use the abbreviation T for the *Treatise*, and refer to Book, part and section numbers in addition to page numbers, placing this reference in the body of the text. Hence this reference would as [T I.IV.2, p. 214]

⁷² Thomas Reid, *Works Now Fully Collected: With Selections from His Unpublished Letters, Papers, Notes, and Supplementary Dissertations*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Maclachlan Stewart and Co, 1849) EIP VI.iv p. 434a. Hereafter references to *An Inquiry into the Human Mind* shall be abbreviated to IHM, and those to *Essay on the Intellectual Powers of Man* shall be abbreviated to EIP. Reference to chapter and section number and page number in the standard edition, with the reference being incorporated into the body of the text. So the current reference would appear as [IHM VI.xx p.184a]

‘But it isn’t that the situation is like this: We just can’t investigate everything, and for that reason we are forced to rest content with assumption. If I want the door to turn, the hinges must stay put.’ [OC 343]

‘My *life* consists in my being content to accept many things.’⁷³ [OC 344]

‘The correct way with the professional sceptic doubt is not to attempt to rebut it with argument, but to point out that it is idle, unreal, a pretense; and then the rebutting arguments will appear as equally idle; the reasons produced in those arguments to justify induction or belief in the existence of body are not, and do not become, *our* reasons for these beliefs; there is no such thing as *the reasons for which we hold* these beliefs. We simply cannot help accepting them as defining the areas within which the questions come up of what beliefs we should hold on such-and-such a matter.’⁷⁴

With this basic observation of natural propositional attitudes established and the conclusion that justificatory inquiry directed towards these propositions is vain clarified it is now appropriate to establish in what sense CSN is naturalistic.

Naturalism in CSN

i) The nature of naturalism

Having established the distinction between two different types of propositions and the consequent vanity of justificatory inquiry when directed towards an instance of one of these types of propositions we are almost in a position to ask what makes this distinction relevant to classifying CSN as a version of naturalism. However before this can be accomplished some clarification must be offered as to what kind of naturalism is involved here, as the term naturalism is highly multivalent. One idea I might easily be taken to intend, given its continuing popularity, is scientific naturalism, in either its methodological or ontological guises.⁷⁵ In its methodological guise scientific naturalism holds that the method of inquiry employed by the hard sciences (particularly the mathematical expressions of physics) to be paradigmatic of all proper inquiry.⁷⁶ As

⁷³ Ludwig Wittgenstein, G. E. M. Anscombe, and G. H. von Wright, *On Certainty*, trans. Denis Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003). As references to Wittgenstein are frequent the standard abbreviation [OC xxx] will be used for this work.

⁷⁴ Strawson, *Skepticism and Naturalism: Some Varieties* pp.19-20.

⁷⁵ I am here following the schema laid out in Mario De Caro and David Macarthur, “Introduction: The Nature of Naturalism,” in *Naturalism in Question*, ed. Mario De Caro and David Macarthur (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004).

⁷⁶ Thus we could understand why Spinoza’s *Ethics* might be taken to be naturalistic in that it attempts to apply the method of the best science of its day to metaphysics.

a result philosophy is viewed as being continuous with science. In its ontological guise scientific naturalism is associated with the position that natural science provides us with the *only* true picture of nature.⁷⁷ Unsurprisingly, scientific naturalism of this sort is often called “scientism” and is often allied to a strong version of physicalism.⁷⁸ While naturalism of this scientific sort will be introduced shortly in connection with the views of Sextus and Hume there is nothing in CSN itself which would mandate such an approach to naturalism.

Another more productive way of defining naturalism is to contrast it with that position which holds that if some commitment lacks rational justification then it is unjustified *simpliciter*. As intended here, naturalism does not hold that the lack of rational justification for a commitment implies that the commitment is unjustified *simpliciter* as naturalism countenances forms of justification other than rational justification. Granted, it might be thought at this juncture that the naturalist could actually concede that rational justification is the only legitimate form of justification but then naturalise reason to avoid any appearance of rationalism. However, such an approach to justification must strike the rationalist as unwarrantedly changing the meaning of terms in the middle of a debate, for what the rationalist has in mind when he speaks of rational justification is something that *just cannot* be naturalised. For a rationalist, naturalised reason is not reason as they understand it and CSN exists in a framework in which this point is conceded to the rationalist as part of a broader strategy of convincing a rationalist that they ought to accept that rational justification does not exhaust the means by which we can come to be entitled to some commitment. We must keep this in mind throughout the remainder of this dissertation. Describing the naturalism involved in CSN Daniel Kaufman in the passage below objects to this sort of rationalism, in this case via an appeal to the principle that we ought only to be held responsible for that which it is possible to do, and it is not possible according to Kaufman that we give up our belief in the existence of the external world.

‘Small ‘r’ rationalism tells us that we ought only to believe those things for which we have warrant. The complimentary suggestion, of course, is that we ought not believe those things for which there is no

⁷⁷ A position such as eliminative materialism in the philosophy of mind would thus be a prime example of scientific naturalism in its doctrinal guise.

⁷⁸ See De Caro and Macarthur, “Introduction: The Nature of Naturalism.” for a discussion of the various ways of understanding physicalism and the difficulties associated with it.

justification, and this is where the skeptic purports to catch us in epistemic infidelity. But if the common sense naturalist is correct, these epistemological obligations must strike us as unreasonable. For if it is true that we cannot help but believe in the existence of the external world, the general reliability of our senses, etc., is it then reasonable to say that we *ought not* believe in them?⁷⁹

However, while naturalism will essentially mean what Kaufman means in the above quote a divergence from Kaufman must also be noted. Kaufman implies that everyday folk have a belief in the existence of the external, the general reliability of the senses, etc. That is, Kaufman implies that everyday folk have as beliefs the standard targets of Cartesian scepticism, and at this point Kaufman is mistaken. In fact everyday folk have no such beliefs with this content, as shall emerge as a consequence of the analysis presented in chapter 3. However the complete details of this argument will have to wait until a later stage in the dissertation. There is also the matter of whether the impossibility Kaufman mentions is logical or psychological, for this is not specified and either or both could be intended. In fact we see this tension emerging repeatedly in CSN, as some of the important thinkers favour appeals to psychology (as part of a form of scientific naturalism) whereas others favour appeals to logic (as part of a more liberal form of naturalism). This tension will be particularly evident later in this chapter when two quite different arguments in favour of CSN are introduced, one essentially psychological and the other logical. One of the goals of the present dissertation is to resolve this tension, although for the moment at least it must remain as a tension until such a time that sufficient philosophical resources are available to deal with it.

The naturalism involved in CSN consists in the rejection of the rationalistic idea that the lack of rational justification for a commitment implies that the commitment is unjustified *simpliciter*.⁸⁰ As we have already seen CSN also holds that justificatory inquiry, when directed towards some propositions, is vain. On this point Strawson says that

⁷⁹ Kaufman, "Between Reason and Common Sense: On the Very Idea of Necessary (Though Unwarranted) Belief," p.140. I of course object to the implicit idea here that we have a *belief* in the external world, as the propositional attitude here is not that of belief.

⁸⁰ CSN thus countenances the possibility that there could be other forms of justification beyond rational justification, and typically introduces varieties of justification such as perceptual justification. However this does not mean that beliefs that cannot be rationally justified can always be justified in some other way. A belief can fail to meet *any* plausible standard of justification.

‘the reasons produced in those arguments to justify induction or belief in the existence of body are not, and do not become, *our* reasons for these beliefs; there is no such thing as *the reasons for which we hold* these beliefs.’⁸¹

That is, we do not actually have, have never had, and never shall have, rational justifications for some propositions. Rational justification just does not connect up in the right way with some propositions. Recognising this, we are now in a position to explain the source of the distinction, drawn in CSN, between two kinds of propositions; those towards which our propositional attitude is insensitive to the outcome of justificatory inquiry and those commitments towards which our propositional attitude is sensitive in this way. The reason why some commitments display this type of insensitivity is that if such commitments can be said to have justification at all it is not of the type sought in justificatory inquiry. Thus while recognising the distinction drawn by CSN between two types of commitments is an important first step towards developing the theory, it is actually the idea that the kind of justification sought in justificatory inquiry does not connect up with some propositions in the right way that does the philosophical work. Without this idea the distinction drawn above is a mere observation. The idea that not all propositions have justification of the type sought in justificatory inquiry tells us why we observe this in the first place. However, if this is correct then it immediately raises the question of entitlement. If rational justification just doesn’t connect up in the right way with some commitments then what reason do we have to suppose that we have any entitlement to these commitments? This is the most important question facing the defender of CSN, and is a question to which we shall be returning after addressing an important objection.

ii) Interlude: An objection concerning reflection

It will no doubt be thought that something must be amiss with the characterisation offered by CSN in that while we may not have justifications for our pre-reflective commitments the process of reflection can provide this justification and thereby bring about a change in the manner in which these commitments are held. Thus when Strawson makes the following claim he will be taken to have missed an important

⁸¹ Strawson, *Skepticism and Naturalism: Some Varieties* pp. 19-20. The reader should keep in mind here that Strawson is incorrect to suppose that everyday folk have a belief in the existence of body.

feature of the way in which our propositional attitudes can develop in response to reflection.

‘We accept or believe the scientific theories (when we do) just because we believe they supply the best available explanations of the phenomena they deal with. That is our reason for accepting them. But no one accepts the existence of the physical world *because* it supplies the best available explanation etc. Anyone who claimed it was his reason would be pretending.’⁸²

Granted, pre-reflectively it may be that there is no such thing as the reasons for which I hold commitments such as ‘that the senses and memory are reliable’ or ‘that the other objects in the world that behave as I do have minds’. But why is it not possible that I could come to hold commitments *for reasons* as a consequence of reflecting on them and deciding that they are well justified? In part the answer to this question must wait until Argument 2 for the naturalism of CSN is examined. At that point it will be argued that the commitments considered here constitute the context in which, and only within which, concepts like justification and reason can find their proper application. That is, Argument 2 for CSN is a transcendental argument. If this argument goes through then no reasons could ever be provided for those commitments that play this transcendental role.

However this can only be a partial answer, as it is open to the obvious objection that it is actually quite easy to provide reasons for these commitments, with numerous philosophers throughout the ages claiming to have found reasons of just this sort. In fact the possibility of providing reasons for precisely these beliefs has always been the key recommendation for undertaking philosophical reflection in the first place. This also reveals an important weakness of transcendental arguments, in that it is also possible to confuse reaching the conditions for the possibility of applying some concept with a lack of imagination on the part of the person generating the transcendental argument. Perhaps there really are perfectly good justifying reasons for the propositions with which Strawson is concerned but Strawson just can’t think of them. Alternately, the reason why *post-hoc* justification appears to be futile is that we are less certain of the reasons than we are of the conclusion. However to conclude from this that the supporting argument is insufficient is to confuse the logical properties of arguments

⁸² Ibid. p.20.

with the psychological state of the agent assessing the argument, for certainty is a psychological state not a logical property.⁸³

The complete answer to this objection concerns the properties of those commitments that are insensitive to the outcome of justificatory inquiry, although the full details of this response will have to wait until chapter 4. As we shall see in that chapter, these commitments are commitments to respect certain norms, including norms of inquiry. The reason why *post-hoc* justification of commitments to these norms always fails is that we must already have a commitment to these norms in order to generate justifications for them and hence any justifications for these norms must be question-begging. The argument presented in chapter 4 shall also explain just why transcendental arguments in support of those commitments which are insensitive to the outcome of justificatory inquiry have consistently failed to satisfy the philosopher who is sceptical of our entitlement to these commitments. Such a sceptic can grant that we cannot give up these commitments (for psychological reasons) and also grant that we must rely on them to generate any further justifications (for logical reasons). However to conclude from the fact that such commitments are necessarily held in order for justification to be possible at all begs the sceptics question, for why should it be possible to present justification at all? In fact it will be shown through chapters 2 and 3 that relying on these commitments can in some circumstances lead directly to scepticism. Hence even if we are entitled to these commitments we are also thereby entitled, paradoxically, to scepticism. Hence if CSN is to insist that we are entitled to hold those commitments towards which our propositional attitude is insensitive to the outcome of justificatory inquiry, which it must, then CSN must also be an inherently sceptical position.

Arguments for the naturalism of CSN

Returning then to the outline of CSN, it emerges from what has been said above that CSN sees us as holding commitments which are insensitive to the outcome of justificatory inquiries but are not thereby unjustified. One way of capturing this is by saying that CSN sees us as having a range of default entitlements, and hence default

⁸³ The distinction between subjective certainty and its relationship to scepticism derives in this instance from David Macarthur, "The Seriousness of Doubt and Our Natural Trust in the Senses in the First Meditation," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 33, no. 2 (2003).

commitments, for which we are not required to present rational justification. The question remains however as to what kind of entitlement is involved when we bring these default commitments into view. Why should we have any entitlement to these commitments whatsoever if we cannot present rational justifications for them? From within the perspective of CSN two answers to this question are possible.

First, it may be argued, in transcendental fashion, that an entitlement to some commitments must be granted if we are to have an entitlement to any further commitments, in that there are some commitments that function to at least partially constitute the proper context for the application of reason itself.⁸⁴ Second, it could be argued that we have an entitlement to those commitments that come upon us ‘naturally’, that is, as a consequence of our physical constitution. In this case our default entitlement attaches to our natural commitments. This might suggest that there is such a thing as a ‘natural justification’, although as we shall see eventually this idea does not provide an adequate response to someone who is sceptical about our default entitlements. While nature can explain why we hold some commitment, and even explain why this commitment is insensitive to the outcome of justificatory inquiry, it cannot provide us with the kind of justification that would provide an entitlement to this commitment. In Strawson (and in a certain reading of Wittgenstein’s *On Certainty*) we can find the view that there are some commitments which constitute the proper context for the application of reason. In Reid we can find arguments to the effect that we are entitled to our natural commitments, and hence that holding these commitments is justified because they are natural – although we should note that Reid has two different views on this matter, and that his alternate view is very much like that of Strawson. An exploration of Reid’s views shall be undertaken later in this chapter. Hume and Sextus also explore this idea of entitlement to natural commitment, although they both ultimately diverge from Reid’s conclusion. While both Sextus and Hume identify some natural commitments that it is not within our power to do without, they do not conclude that we have any entitlement to these natural commitments. I would argue that while both *may* have been happy with talk of our default entitlements, the sense of entitlement they would be happy to go along with could not have been construed as being in any way the basis of an answer or refutation of scepticism. In this sense both Sextus and

⁸⁴ Strawson, *Skepticism and Naturalism: Some Varieties*. This work is based on the presentation and exploration of such arguments.

Hume are better guides than is Reid in that they both have a keener sense of the limitations of appealing to the natural as a source for justification.⁸⁵

The task that now presents itself is to explain why, from the perspective of CSN, we are entitled to those commitments that are insensitive to the outcome of justificatory inquiry. This requires that we examine the two arguments for this entitlement, as identified above, in turn.

i) Argument 1. Hume and Reid (and Sextus) on natural justification and default entitlement

Hume and Reid refer to our natural, shared, human constitution as a means of explaining how we come to hold, and commonsensically take ourselves to be entitled to hold, some commitments. This appeal to the natural is supposed to function as the basis for an argument to the effect that a commitment can lack rational justification without lacking justification *simpliciter*. Hume has been read as supporting such a move (although I argue that the reading is erroneous in chapter 3, which should come as no shock given the claims that were made in the previous section). Reid can also be read as supporting such a move, with significantly more justification than we find in Hume. According to this reading we have an entitlement to our natural commitments (or at least some of them, and the details vary) where this entitlement can be used to refute or answer the sceptic. So when the sceptic asks Reid to justify the claim that he is entitled to some commitment he can respond by saying that the commitment in question is justified because it is natural, where being natural means that a commitment is held as a direct consequence of our shared human constitution.

Here an appeal to nature is providing the justification for a claim to entitlement, and so we can call the justification to which Reid and Hume (on this ultimately erroneous reading) appeal a *natural justification*. If natural justification is a legitimate form of justification then it does not follow from the fact that some commitment lacks rational justification that the commitment in question lacks justification *simpliciter*, just in case

⁸⁵ That Hume had such a keen sense for this explains why he generally limits himself to explaining the genesis of our beliefs instead of attempting to justify our beliefs. Given this keen sense it should also come as no surprise that the fact/value distinction should play such a prominent role in Hume philosophy.

this commitment is a natural commitment and so has natural justification. That is, if we can show that some commitment is a natural commitment in that we hold it as a direct consequence of our shared human constitution, then we can rightfully claim to be entitled to this commitment regardless of whether we can present a rational justification for this commitment. Argument 1 attempts to establish precisely this claim. However two variants of Argument 1 can be discerned here. The first, Argument 1a, could be attributed to Hume, and has been done so by Don Garrett. The second, Argument 1b, derives from Reid although in presenting it here reference will also be made to both Sextus and Hume.

Argument 1a can be stated very simply, and in fact Hume manages to reduce this argument to a single sentence, found in the conclusion of Book 1 of the *Treatise*.

‘Where reason is lively, and mixes itself with some propensity, it ought to be assented to. Where it does not, it can never have any title to operate upon us.’ [T I.iv.vii. p.270]

Don Garrett has called the idea to which Hume refers the Title Principle, and I shall follow Garrett’s terminology.⁸⁶ The basic idea is simple enough. Since belief for Hume just is a vivacious idea, and is given that vivacity through some natural propensity to so believe, this amounts to saying that we ought to believe what the natural operation of our minds leads us to believe. So where a belief is found to be natural, where it ‘is satisfactory to the human mind’ as he says a little later, then it ought to be believed. Otherwise it should not be believed. Unfortunately, if this really is Hume’s argument then it leaves several questions unanswered.⁸⁷ What, for instance, are to be the criteria by which we judge whether any given belief is natural? More pressing is the question of normativity. The Title Principle seems to rely on pointing out a natural fact about vivacious ideas being beliefs, but it is unclear why this natural fact would warrant the normative claim. However as Argument 1b also faces a problem over normativity

⁸⁶ Don Garrett, “a Small Tincture of Pyrrhonism’: Skepticism and Naturalism in Hume’s Science of Man,” in *Pyrrhonian Skepticism*, Sinnott Armstrong, Walter (Ed) (Oxford: Oxford Univ Pr, 2004), p.8-89.

⁸⁷ I shall argue at length in chapter 3 that this cannot possibly be Hume’s argument, in that Hume shows no interest in defeating or refuting scepticism, on the grounds that such a refutation is impossible. Hume is himself a sceptic. Nonetheless, examining Garrett’s interpretation of Hume is a useful way of developing the two main arguments for the central thesis of CSN.

further discussion of this issue will be deferred until both arguments have been addressed.

Like Argument 1a, Argument 1b attempts to support the conclusion that (some) natural beliefs are justified on the grounds that they are natural, although it does so less directly. We might call this argument the ‘Mint of Nature’ argument in deference to Reid’s important exposition.⁸⁸ Understanding how Argument 1b manages this indirectness requires a brief word on its rhetorical structure. Rather than arguing in favour of natural justification Argument 1b is purely defensive in character. Note however that a purely defensive strategy can only be convincing of a positive thesis if set against the background of some independent reasons in favour of the positive thesis of which we wish an interlocutor to become convinced. In the case of Argument 1b the interlocutor would need independent reasons to think that non-rational forms of justification actually exist, and that these non-rational forms of justification provide us with an entitlement to some of our commitments. Without this, refuting the claim that justification must always be rational justification tells us nothing about the actual entitlement we have to our actual commitments. In fact the most coherent way of reading Argument 1b is as it being based on an appeal to the idea that we in fact have a default entitlement to our natural commitments and that we have this entitlement regardless of being able to present rational justification for these commitments. From here Argument 1b attempts to shift the burden of proof to the sceptic to show that we really do need to provide rational justification for our default entitlements, which is to say that the sceptic needs to show that we need to provide rational justification for our natural commitments.

The sceptic is pictured as accepting this burden and suggesting that our supposed default entitlement just doesn’t stack up well when compared with that entitlement of ours that is ground in rational justification. Argument 1b goes about refuting this claim by picking out the feature of reliability and suggesting that there are legitimate forms of justification that no more reliably lead us to truth than does a reliance on our natural commitments, for instance those provided by perception. However we should not lose sight of the fact that the appeal to reliability is not supposed itself to do the justificatory

⁸⁸ See footnote 90.

work. Remember that we are assumed to have a default entitlement to our natural commitments precisely because they are natural. The appeal to reliability is a means of showing that the sceptical claim is in fact unmotivated. In essence Argument 1b assumes a (default) entitlement to our natural commitments and goes about showing that there is no reason to question this assumption. Argument 1b derives from Reid and can be stated fairly simply.

- 1) If and only if a faculty is sufficiently reliable can that faculty be a source of justification⁸⁹
- 2) The faculty of Reason is a source of justification
- 3) Therefore, the faculty of Reason is sufficiently reliable (from 1 and 2)
- 4) The faculty of Perception is as reliable as the faculty of Reason
- 5) Therefore, the faculty of Perception is sufficiently reliable (from 3 and 4)
- 6) Therefore, the faculty of Perception can be a source of justification (from 1 and 5)
- 7) The faculty of Perception is a natural faculty
- 8) Therefore, natural justification exists (from 6 and 7)
- 9) A commitment is justified if it carries natural justification
- 10) Therefore, lack of rational justification does not imply lack of justification *simpliciter* (from 8 and 9)⁹⁰

⁸⁹ This argument is overtly externalist in flavour, as is any argument that makes reliability central to an explanation of how justification is produced. For those who agree with Stroud in thinking that externalism cannot provide a refutation of scepticism, as do I, then Argument 1b will be unsatisfying as an explanation of how we can have entitlement to our natural commitments. See Barry Stroud, "Scepticism, 'Externalism', and the Goal of Epistemology," in *Understanding Human Knowledge: Philosophical Essays* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), Barry Stroud, "Understanding Human Knowledge in General," in *Understanding Human Knowledge: Philosophical Essays* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁹⁰ I take it that it is the 'Mint of Nature' argument Reid intends to put forward in the following passage.

'I am aware, that this belief that I have in perception, stands exposed to the strongest batteries of scepticism. But they make no great impression on it. The skeptic asks me, Why do you believe the existence of the external object you perceive? This belief, sir, is none of my manufacture; it came from the mint of nature; it bears her image and superscription, and, if it is not right, the fault if not mine: I even took it upon trust, and without suspicion. Reason, says the skeptic, is the only judge of truth, and you ought to throw of every opinion and every belief that is not grounded on reason. Why, sir, should I believe the faculty of reason more than that of perception; they both came from the same shop, and were made by the same artist; and if he puts one piece of false ware into my hands, what should hinder from putting another?' [IHM VI.xx p.183b]

Recognising that this argument relies on the idea that reason can provide justification motivates Reid to spend several paragraphs immediately following this argument defending the idea of rational

Granting a plausible explanation of what it is to be sufficiently reliable can be provided this argument will turn on premise (4).⁹¹ However the strategy of attempting to draw an analogy between reason and perception considered as a natural faculty faces some difficulties, the most obvious of which is that the beliefs based in perception can be falsified by further perceptions, where the analogue of this in the case of deductive reasoning is not the case. That is, conclusions arrived at through valid deductions from true premises are guaranteed to be true, it being impossible that they could be made false by any further true premises being added to the argument. This feature of deductive arguments has been called its monotonicity.⁹² Perception is nonmonotonic, and we always allow that it is possible that we could receive falsifying information for any of our perceptual judgements. Inductive reasoning is more like perception than it is like deductive reasoning in this regard, as it is also nonmonotonic. With this difference in mind arguing that perception, or any other faculty also lacking the monotonicity of deduction such as induction, is as reliable as deductive reasoning will seem highly implausible.

To deal with this very problem arguments that can be shown to be typical of Sextus, Hume and Reid attempt to reinforce the plausibility of premise (4) not by attempting to elevate the status of perception but by decreasing the status of reason, and particularly deductive reasoning.⁹³ Arguing that some commitments simply have no rational justification is only one part of this overall strategy. More broadly attempts are either

justification. His fear is of course that the sceptic will want to throw out both natural and rational justification, which is indeed what Sextus does when presented with a similar argument.

More recently modern versions of this argument have been propounded, often with a direct appeal being made to Reid as the inspiration of this idea. A good example of such an argument, and its resources for dealing with scepticism is found in Greco, *Putting Sceptics in Their Place: The Nature of Skeptical Arguments and Their Role in Philosophical Inquiry*, John Greco, "'Reid's Reply to the Sceptic" in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Reid*, ed. Terence Cuneo (Cambridge: Cambridge university Press, 2004). See also Greco comments on the relationship between reliability and evidence in John Greco, "How to Reid Moore," *Philosophical Quarterly* 52, no. 209 (2002): p.19. I take it that Greco's arguments fail for they unwarrantedly take it that sceptical doubts can be dismissed. In this they share a flaw common to CSN, as we shall see when we examine Argument 2 for the naturalism of CSN.

⁹¹ We should note here that the senses and reason are reliable in different ways. Reason is reliable in the sense that the beliefs with which it provides us are (mostly) true. The senses are reliable in the sense that the beliefs for which they provide the basis are (mostly) true. That is, there is an extra step involved in deriving a belief from the senses than there is with reason, in that when the senses are in view we must move from the basis (provided by the senses) to the belief itself. However this makes no difference when we wish to compare the reliability of the senses and reason. Casting the argument in terms of trustworthiness would make a difference however.

⁹² See Fogelin, *Pyrrhonian Reflections on Knowledge and Justification* p.22.

⁹³ Sextus has a rather different purpose in presenting such an argument that does Reid.

made to bypass the operation of deductive reasoning or to explain this operation in naturalistic terms. So on the one hand we encounter arguments the purpose of which is to explain as much of the functioning of our mental faculties as possible without reference to what we usually think of as reasoning. On the other hand, where the first strategy is not possible the functioning of our reasoning faculties is explained in thoroughly naturalistic terms and hence even deductive reasoning is said to be subject to the same natural limitations as perception.

The strategy of bypassing reasoning as much as possible is particularly evident in Hume. For instance we see Hume defining belief as a 'vivacious impression'⁹⁴, and saying that 'belief is more properly an act of the sensitive, than the cogitative part of our natures.'⁹⁵ We also see Hume explaining the formation of a belief in terms that make no significant reference to the role played by reason. Take for instance Hume's description of the genesis of the belief in the 'external world' (for Hume, the problem of 'continu'd and distinct existence'). While reason is active here it is clearly the imagination and not reasoning which has primacy. Hume summarises the crucial role played by the imagination in these cases in the following way.

'Without this quality, by which the mind enlivens some idea beyond others (which is seemingly so trivial, and founded so little on reason) we cou'd never assent to any argument, nor carry our view beyond those few objects, which are present to our senses...The memory, senses, and understanding are, therefore, all of them founded on the imagination, or the vivacity of our ideas.' [T I.iv.viii p.265]

The important point here for our purposes is not that the imagination plays such an important role in belief formation, but that reason does not. In fact Hume points out that reason could not play such a role without disastrous consequences, for if it did we would be left with no beliefs whatsoever. Taking aim specifically at deductive reasoning Hume argues that such reasoning should only be taken to be reliable if those faculties productive of it are themselves reliable. This requires that we make an estimation of the reliability of these faculties, however he points out that we must do so using these faculties. Hence we must make an estimation of the reliability of our

⁹⁴ [T I.iii.v p.86]

⁹⁵ [T I.iv.i p.183]

original estimation of that reliability, and so on and so forth. Such a process, Hume argues, takes us inevitably to the complete undermining of deductive reasoning.

‘When I reflect on the natural fallibility of my judgment, I have less confidence in my opinions, than when I only consider the objects concerning which I reason; and when I proceed still farther, to turn the scrutiny against every successive estimation I make of my faculties, all the rules of logic require a continual diminution, and at last a total extinction of belief and evidence.’ [T I.iv.i p.183]

Hume’s argument here is ingenious because rather than attempting the very difficult task of undermining the reliability of deduction itself, Hume turns his attention to our ability to correctly carry out deductive processes of reasoning.⁹⁶ However, Hume would want us to keep in mind that we continually take to be reliable not just deduction as an idea (if we do this at all), we take actual deductions to be reliable. Establishing the possibility of error here is far more plausible, and makes establishing a plausible analogy between the trustworthiness of the beliefs formed via deductive reasoning and through perception far easier.

However, Hume’s argument does require that we think of our ability to perform deductions in much the same way that we think of our ability to correctly perceive objects through our senses, and this requires some support. Hence we come to the second strategy involved in Argument 1b; the naturalising of those faculties we employ when we actually engage in reasoning. Hume produces several analogies to support this idea. For instance he speaks of our passions and sentiments as ‘flowing’,⁹⁷ as if our minds were composed of tiny channels that thoughts move through in some fashion. He also speaks of our shifting our attention from one idea to another as being ‘smooth’, ‘uninterrupted’, ‘easy’ and of ‘sliding’ from one idea to another.⁹⁸ Along the same lines he also likens to operations of the mind (in this case the imagination but given the

⁹⁶ Undermining deductive reasoning itself, rather than our ability to carry out deductions, is difficult precisely because it is monotonic. However whether a premise is true and logically implies another is not so clear, which is what Hume wants to point out.

⁹⁷ Quotes such as ‘the spirits being diverted from their natural course, are not govern’d in their movements by the same laws, at least not to the same degree, as when they flow in their usual channel [T I.iv.i p.185]’ and ‘The straining of the imagination always hinders the regular flowing of the passions and sentiments’ are typical here.

⁹⁸ So for instance we have statements such as ‘The passage between related ideas is, therefore, so smooth and easy, that it produces little alteration on the mind, and seems like the continuation of the same action.’ [T I.iv.ii p. 204]

priority of the imagination the point is of general application) to the movements of a great ship that

‘when set into any train of thinking, is apt to continue even when its object fails it, and, like a galley put in motion by the oars, carries on its course without any new impulse.’ [T I.iv.ii p.198]

However beyond analogies of this sort, frequent and important as they are, Hume offers us little in the way of argumentation. Fortunately however Sextus has already provided precisely this kind of argument, and in the most well known section of his work no less, that being the Ten Modes of Aenesidemus.⁹⁹ Of particular interest is the idea that the faculties we employ when we reason are conditioned in their operation by the physical properties of the organ (and there is some ambiguity in the ancient world over whether this is the heart or the brain) through which they operate. This is because the activities of whatever organ is relevant to reasoning are interfered with by what Sextus calls ‘admixtures’. These admixtures are the result of the mixing of the matter making up the perceptive organs with other matter that moves around the body in seemingly unpredictable ways (the four humours for instance, but also other material influences). This is not to say that Sextus relies on some sort of reduction of the mind to the brain (or heart). All he requires is that our physical circumstances have some influence on the way we reason, and this is not nearly as contentious. In support of the idea of the physical influence on the mental of this sort Sextus has the following to say.

‘Depending on the different dominance of our humours, the appearances too become different, as we established in our first argument. Further, in virtue of these humours, there are many differences in our choice and avoidance of external things...’ [PH 1.80]

‘For anyone who decides them is either in some of these conditions or in absolutely no condition at all. But to say that he is in no condition whatsoever (i.e. neither healthy nor sick, neither moving nor at rest, of no particular age, and free from the other conditions) is perfectly incongruous. But if he is in some condition as he judges the appearances, he will be part of the dispute. And again, he will not be an unbiased judge of external existing objects because he will have been contaminated by the condition he is in.’ [PH 1.112-113]

⁹⁹ It must be clearly kept in mind through the rest of this section that while Sextus does deploy this argument he is not himself committed to its conclusion as he does not share the premises from which it derives. Sextus’ interlocutors do however accept these premises and so are committed to the arguments’ conclusion.

With these observations in play Sextus can then introduce his more complete argument, found below, based on what his opponents would recognise as their own medical theories.

‘So because of the admixtures our senses do not grasp what external existing objects are accurately like. But our intellect does not do so especially since its guides, the senses, fail it. And no doubt it too produces some admixture of its own to add to what is announced by the senses; for we observe the existence of certain humours round each of the organs in which the Dogmatists think that the ‘ruling part’ is located – in the brain or the heart or in whatever part of the animal they want to locate it.’
[PH 1.127-128]

So we see that according to the arguments Sextus produces there are good reasons for anyone accepting the best medical theories of their day to conclude that the operation of those faculties we use in reasoning really is no more reliable than that of perception or induction. However Sextus’ point here can be easily modernised by an appeal to the findings of cognitive science that also indicate that the physical construction of our brains does have some influence on the way we reason. Following a more contemporary version of Sextus’ argument we would have to conclude that deductive reasoning, as it is actually employed by physically-conditioned humans, cannot necessarily claim greater reliability than does perception or induction.

To this point however Sextus’ argument, even in a modernised form, equivocates between supporting two theses. First is the uncontroversial thesis that our faculties are influenced in their operation by our physical constitution, in that the proper functioning of this physical constitution is a condition on perceiving and thinking correctly. Second is the controversial thesis that any complete explanation of what these faculties, including our rational faculties, provide us must in the final analysis refer to these same conditions and hence must refer to the properties that appear in a completed natural science. I believe that it is this more rigorously naturalistic thesis that Sextus must intend for his argument to go through. If reason is autonomous of our purely natural properties then it remains possible to describe its operation, and hence its reliability, without having to refer to the features to which Sextus wishes to draw our attention.

If this is correct then McDowell would accuse Sextus of engaging in bad metaphysics, and he would be right to do so.¹⁰⁰ The Sextan argument at this point is flawed in that it does unwarrantedly assume that we may only refer to those properties that would appear in a completed natural science if we are to enter any properly objective claims. McDowell's response to Sextus (which is much the same response that he would make to Hume, and unsurprisingly so in that we find Hume presenting a version of the Sextan argument in the *Treatise*) is that the onset of reason allows us to step back from nature and consider whether natural facts can be for an individual reasoner actual reasons to justify a belief or an act. As McDowell says that the

'ability to conceptualize the world must include the ability to conceptualize the thinkers own place in the world; and to find the latter ability intelligible, we need to make room for not only conceptual states that aim to represent how the world anyway is, but also for conceptual states that issue in interventions directed towards making the world conform to their content.'¹⁰¹

Sextus however seems to have completely missed the point that if we are to reason at all then we must also be able to distance ourselves from and critique the features of our natural constitution that influence our reason, which in turn implies that our reason must be autonomous of these features.

What then does this mean for the plausibility of Argument 1b for CSN? The point of Sextus' original argument was to defend premise 4 by reducing the authority of reasoning such that it is essentially on a par with perception as a means of providing justification for our beliefs. If McDowell is right, as I think he is, then it seems that such a reduction on purely naturalistic grounds is not possible. Reason allows us to take a critical stance towards our 'brute' nature that perception does not allow and hence reason has an autonomy towards this brute nature that perception does not.

This means that we need to appeal to a modified version of Sextus' argument according to which we ask whether reason is any more reliable than perception as a means of justification for our beliefs without simultaneously appealing to what McDowell calls 'bad metaphysics'. However, even if reason is autonomous in the way that McDowell

¹⁰⁰ See John McDowell, *Mind, Value and Reality* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998) pp.177-182.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. p.170.

supposes this need not mean that reasoning must in general be more reliable than perception. While reason may always be autonomous of brute nature as McDowell explains this autonomy cannot of itself reassure us that our reasoning leads us to truth. At best this can assure us that reason aims at truth. Yes, we may be able to provide reasons that are acceptable to reason by its own light, but what confidence can we have that reason places things in the proper light?

Asking this question does not all by itself require that it be answered by appealing to what McDowell calls ‘first natural’ facts – facts of the sort that appear in the natural sciences.¹⁰² Granted, we may ask this question by asking something like ‘how do I know that I am not right now brain-damaged in such a way that I consistently derive incorrect conclusions from arguments’ (which does appeal to the facts of natural science) but we need not ask a question such as this. We might also ask whether we attach proper importance to the requirements of consistency vs. explanatory power due to the way we have been trained to employ our rational capacities, and *that* question does not require appealing to such facts.¹⁰³

One might still wonder whether this modified version of Sextus argument, a version devoid of an appeal to bad metaphysics, is really sufficient to warrant premise (4) of Argument 1b for CSN. For while we might be able to ask the right sort of questions about either inductive or even abductive reasoning it still does not seem plausible to ask such questions of deductive reasoning at least when this is considered as a purely formal matter. The canons of deductive reasoning are imposed by reason itself and if we correctly adhere to standards demanded by reason itself it does not seem to be possible that we could go wrong in our deductions. While the premises we use in our deductive reasoning might fail to be true Sextus’ corrected argument provides us with no conclusive reason to suppose that the deductive process itself will be unreliable so long as it is carried out with due care and respect for the demands of reason.

However, while Sextus’ modified argument may not provide us with everything we want it does provide us with enough to be going on with, in that it suggests that

¹⁰² Ibid. p.190.

¹⁰³ I intend here to draw an implicit parallel between the ethical case McDowell considers and a more obviously epistemological case. See Ibid. pp.193-194.

perception is at least as reliable as inductive and abductive forms of reasoning, and we do recognise these forms to be justification conferring. It is by appeal to these forms of reasoning that premise (4) can be made more plausible. With premise (4) defended in this way a supporter of CSN is in a position to claim that the absence of rational justification for a commitment does not lead to the conclusion that this commitment is unjustified *simpliciter*, as there exists a perfectly respectable kind of justification independent of rational justification.¹⁰⁴

This is not to suggest that Argument 1, in either version, is unproblematic. Indeed, several problems are noticeable. First, by undermining the claims of deductive reasoning to the high place it normally occupies Argument 1b invites the sceptic to deny premise (2) and so derive a conclusion sceptical of the idea that anything can be a source of justification.¹⁰⁵ Such a move would be devastating for the argument as it requires that we accept that reason is a source of justification and attempts to “piggyback” natural justification on rational justification. Further, there is also a conceptual problem to deal with, in that Argument 1 raises questions of normativity. It is commonplace to suggest that I ought to take as true any proposition which emerges as ‘best’ as judged through a process of reasoning. That is, reason is connected with normativity. However, it is not so obvious that I ought to believe that at which I arrive as a consequence of my nature. As Hume would no doubt be quick to point out, what I am by nature is an *is* statement, a statement of fact, and one cannot derive an *ought* from an *is*. However, Argument 1 concludes that nature is normative by arguing that it is a source of justification, and justification is an inherently normative conception.¹⁰⁶ How is such a conclusion sustainable?

¹⁰⁴ However, Sextus is correct about other things. First, he is right to think that the distanced attitude to our natural constitution made possible by the onset of reason cannot be, for us, a permanent attitude, and this for thoroughly natural reasons. Second, Sextus (or if not Sextus then at least Hume, for the evidence regarding Sextus is less than clear) is right to think that it is this distanced attitude itself which creates space for scepticism to develop.

¹⁰⁵ In fact Sextus deploys this very argument against his opponents. Of course Sextus is not committed to this conclusion himself as he does not accept the truth of his own premises. Reid anticipates this very argument, making three separate responses. First, that it is not within his power to avoid beliefs given to him by reasoning, as we have already seen. Second, that such a denial would make life untenable. Third, that God has guaranteed the reliability of reason, as experience teaches us. However such responses make no ground against the purely epistemic motivation to deny premise (2).

¹⁰⁶ This provides us with another reason this think that Argument 1 cannot in fact represent Hume’s actual position, as it leads to a conclusion that we could not accept. Argument 1 then must contain as much of Hume’s interpreters as it does of Hume himself.

In fact, that Argument 1 leads to the conclusion that appeals to nature could provide warrant for normative claims *could* just as easily be taken as a *reductio ad absurdum* of its premises rather than as a confirmation its conclusion, so entrenched is the fact/value distinction. This is not to say that Argument *should* be taken in this way, for while the fact/value distinction remains the orthodox position it has also come under sustained critique in recent times.¹⁰⁷ However, because supporting the fact/value distinction is the orthodox position a defender of Argument 1 would be obliged to explain why they rejected this distinction. To be sure, it may not be an impossible task. For instance it may be possible to defend Argument 1 on this point by arguing that a complete description of a subject's nature cannot be reduced to natural facts about that subject but must include irreducibly normative claims.¹⁰⁸ That is, a defender of Argument 1 may argue for what Putnam calls the entanglement of facts and values.¹⁰⁹ However, as such arguments are complex and controversial we can conclude that Argument 1 for CSN does face some significant problems, both in its naturalising of reason and its treatment of normativity. Now is not the place to address these problems, although that time will come soon. For the moment it is enough to provide an outline of CSN and the arguments for it, as well as to introduce some of the problems CSN faces. The remainder of the dissertation will indeed be an exercise in attempting to address these and other difficulties and so now we turn to Argument 2 for CSN.

ii) Argument 2. Wittgenstein and Strawson on transcendental arguments.

The argument drawn from Wittgenstein and Strawson is somewhat more complex than those drawn from Sextus, Hume and Reid although it does still attempt to support the same conclusion as does Argument 1, namely, that the absence of rational justification for a commitment does not imply that this commitment lacks justification *simpliciter*. Where Argument 1 attempts to show that non-rational forms of justification are

¹⁰⁷ See Hilary Putnam, *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002) esp. ch. 1-2. This work contains both excellent arguments against the fact/value distinction and also a helpful survey of much of the literature on the topic. One should also note that the understanding of 'nature' for which McDowell and to which reference was made above would also imply that normative considerations could be read off natural facts and this also undermines a strict is/ought distinction.

¹⁰⁸ Something akin to Aristotle's teleology might be able to carry this sort of philosophical burden, invoking a principle such as 'you ought to act and believe so as to realise your (naturally-defined) telos'. However even if it can one wonders whether an appeal to such a teleology, metaphysically loaded as it is, is truly conformable to the spirit of CSN.

¹⁰⁹ Putnam, *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy and Other Essays* pp. 28ff.

available, Argument 2 recognises only one form of justification, that being rational justification.¹¹⁰ Instead Argument 2 attempts to show that the concept of rational justification only finds its proper application in a specific context, and that this context is partly constituted by those same commitments towards which our propositional attitude has been observed to be insensitive to the outcome of justificatory inquiry. Strawson summarises this idea the following way.

‘The point was that our commitment on these points is pre-rational, natural, and quite inescapable, and sets, as it were, the natural limits within which, and only within which, the serious operations of reason, whether by way of questioning of justifying beliefs, can take place. (“Serious” = “actually making a difference.”)’¹¹¹

One result of adopting such a view is that some commitments are seen to stand outside the context in which justification finds its application, as they define that context rather than being part of it, and so some commitments must always remain unjustified. However precisely because these commitments stand outside the context for the proper application of the concept of justification they cannot be judged to be *unjustified* any more than they can be judged to be justified. Hence it follows that the absence of rational justification for a commitment does not imply that the commitment is unjustified *simpliciter*, just in case the commitment in question is one of those constituting the proper context of justification. We can see now that this argument has a transcendental structure, although without any appeal to metaphysics. Argument 2 attempts to show that it is a condition for the application of the concept of justification that there be present a commitment to a certain range of (as yet unspecified) commitments.

However we need to ask whether the context in which these observations are made biases the results. For instance, while it may strike us as odd to begin to ask questions about the past existence of the physical world or the uniformity of nature when in a history class it has generally struck philosophers as quite appropriate to ask these same questions in the context of philosophical, especially epistemological, inquiry. While our commitment to, say, take other human-like objects in the world to have minds may be

¹¹⁰ Hence in this section all talk of justification is to be taken to be talk of rational justification.

¹¹¹ Strawson, *Skepticism and Naturalism: Some Varieties* p.39. We shall have reason to return to the notion of seriousness shortly.

pre-rational and natural as Strawson suggests it does not seem to be entirely inescapable. However if asking the questions Strawson thinks we may not ask is unexceptional in the context of philosophical inquiry then this raises a troubling possibility for a defender of CSN. For it may be the case that there is more than one rational context, and that each such context is structured by different pre-rational, natural and ‘inescapable’ commitments.¹¹²

For the moment it has not been established that the possibility of there being more than one rational context can in fact be realised. However, a significant portion of chapter 3 shall be devoted to establishing that this possibility can be realised via specifying how our commitments could shift and so create several different rational contexts or perspectives. Further, chapter 3 shall establish that some of these contexts or perspectives are thoroughly sceptical. Even so, just the possibility of our commitments being able to constitute more than one rational context poses significant problems for CSN, the most pressing of which concerns the way CSN handles scepticism.

Recall that CSN does not attempt to refute scepticism, but instead attempts to dismiss it as vain because it does not make a difference to the structure of our commitments and so is not worthy of our serious attention. It also should be kept in mind that Strawson defines “serious” as meaning “actually making a difference.” Yet even taking seriousness thus defined as an appropriate criterion poses a problem. As defined here seriousness is a psychological criterion, concerning whether anyone feels the psychological force of sceptical arguments. However, it is not the psychological force of scepticism that must be the sceptics primary concern. As we have said, the sceptic is concerned with our entitlement to our commitments. The fact that our psychology is such that we *feel* entitled to commitments to which we in fact have no entitlement reveals an interesting, even disturbing, fact about our psychology but is not inconsistent with scepticism. That is, a sceptic may well reply to Strawson’s appeal to seriousness with the rejoinder that what he says is true but irrelevant.

¹¹² I place ‘inescapable’ in scare-quotes because of course such commitments will only be inescapable in a given context because they are constitutive of that context. These ‘inescapable’ commitments could in fact be escaped if we were to shift to a different context not constituted by these commitments.

Even if we grant that an appeal to the notion of seriousness is an appropriate criterion against which to judge scepticism such an appeal does still not seem to help the defender of CSN. While an appeal to the apparent *unseriousness* of scepticism might go uncontested in a history class, or even in many other contexts, it may not go uncontested in an epistemology class. Indeed, when in such a class it is possible to begin to doubt that one knows all sorts of things, and to contemplate a radical revision of our commitments. But if sceptical doubts naturally emerge when undertaking distinctly epistemological inquiry, and history itself teaches us that several philosophers have claimed that this is indeed the case, then sceptical doubts cannot simply be dismissed in the blanket fashion required by CSN. Suddenly sceptical doubts and sceptical questions must be moved into the category of the “serious”.

In the face of such a challenge several moves could be made in defence of CSN. First, it could be argued that even in the context of epistemology, or philosophy more generally, sceptical doubts are vain, having no real impact on our commitments. I take this to be an empirical question, best answered by considering those philosophers who have claimed to genuinely feel the force of sceptical doubts when undertaking philosophical reflection. Admittedly, this approach seems unlikely to succeed given the frequency with which philosophers have claimed to have fallen into sceptical doubts. Second, failing being able to show that sceptical doubts are always vain, a defender of CSN could argue that even though such doubts do emerge in some philosophical contexts there is nevertheless something ‘wrong’ with these contexts. For the moment I leave undetermined what exactly ‘wrong’ is understood to mean, as there are many different possibilities. One could for instance argue that the philosophical context suffers from some internal contradiction, adherence to an undefended but contentious theory or some other logical error.¹¹³ One could also argue that the philosophical context is not a rational context and further classify the emergence of sceptical doubts as the

¹¹³ An excellent example of this kind of approach to scepticism, particularly Cartesian scepticism, is found in Williams, *Unnatural Doubts: Epistemological Realism and the Basis of Scepticism*. Here Williams argues that the normal epistemic context in which sceptical arguments are pursued is committed to a doctrine he calls the epistemic realism. More recently he has pointed to the generality, or hyper-generality, of the sceptic’s questions in Michael Williams, “Scepticism and the Context of Philosophy,” *Nous Supplement* 14 (2004).

breakdown of rationality and hence a species of madness.¹¹⁴ That is, one could attempt a diagnosis of scepticism rather than a refutation of it.

Interestingly, if it is conceded that sceptical doubts are serious and a diagnosis is attempted CSN will find itself committed to a distinction between distinctly philosophical contexts and other contexts, where the criterion for drawing this distinction will be whether a context allows for the legitimate development of sceptical doubts. However if such a distinction were introduced and it was still insisted that scepticism could be dismissed then CSN would be committed to privileging contexts not permissive of sceptical doubts (non-sceptical contexts) over contexts that are permissive in this way (sceptical contexts). Otherwise it would be just as valid, so far as the argument goes, to dismiss non-sceptical contexts. Yet privileging any one context over others runs contrary to the central thrust of CSN, at least as it emerges in Strawson's work. Strawson is committed to a 'relativising move' that explicitly denies any one perspective, that of science for instance, has a privileged status. We thus see another tension within CSN to add to problems we saw earlier in connection with the idea of normativity. Here the tension is not caused by naturalising reason or the direct appeal to nature as normative but instead by the possibility that sceptical doubts cannot be dismissed as vain in the blanket sense needed by CSN, and the resulting possibility that a privileged distinction between different kinds of contexts would have to be introduced to account for the reality of sceptical doubt. Note however that this tension could be removed if it were simply conceded that sceptical doubts are not vain and emerge naturally in a specifiable context but without granting that this context is in any way privileged. That is, to remove this tension CSN could be adapted such that it is compatible with scepticism. There would still be a distinction between sceptical contexts and non-sceptical contexts but without the need to privilege the one over the other. As we shall see, distinguishing between sceptical and non-sceptical contexts without privileging either is a key feature of Pyrrhonian scepticism.

Naturalism and commonsensical commitment in CSN: two views

¹¹⁴ Reid presents this idea in his *Inquiry*, where he calls scepticism "metaphysical lunacy". See [IHM VI. p.209b]

Having now provided an outline of the two main arguments for the kind of naturalism involved in CSN it would now be wise to look more closely at the different kinds of naturalism that could be encompassed by CSN, and the relationship between these naturalisms and the notion of common sense. Examining these issues will also allow us to gain a clearer grasp on how the positions of Sextus, Hume, Reid and Strawson interrelate. As we shall see in this section, what binds these four philosophers together is that they all agree that there is such a thing as a natural commitment, and that it is our natural commitments that constitute (at least an important part of) common sense. Where differences emerge is over the question of our entitlement to these natural commitments, although even here the various responses to this question are recognisably similar in their conceptual structure.

i) *Hume and Sextus: Common sense as scientific nature*

We find in Hume a connection between natural commitments and those that we rely on in everyday life. Moreover, we also find the idea that these natural commitments are held in common by all humans. Of particular interest is the belief in the uniformity of nature, which is held not just by all humans but by many animals also (if I may be here permitted to momentarily follow Hume and call such a ‘belief’ even though I shall ultimately argue that it is really no such thing). To confirm his own conclusions Hume draws a parallel between human cognition and animal cognition, arguing that they share an identical source and so one that must be attributed to a shared animal nature.

‘Here we must make a distinction betwixt those actions of animals, which are of a vulgar nature, and seem to be on a level with their common capacities, and those more extraordinary instances of sagacity, which they sometimes discover for their own preservation, and the propagation of their species. A dog that avoids fire and precipices, that shuns strangers, and caresses his master, affords us an instance of the first kind. A bird, that chooses with such care and nicety the place and materials of her nest, and sits upon her eggs for a due time, and in a suitable season, with all the precaution that a chemist is capable of in the most delicate projection, furnishes us with a lively instance of the second. As to the former actions, I assert they proceed from a reasoning, that is not in itself different, nor founded on different principles, from that which appears in human nature.’ [T.I.iii.xvi. p.177]

Hume here attributes to animals of a vulgar nature not just a generic ability to reason but an ability to engage in higher-order reasoning. Note that even this higher order

reasoning is described as an expression of an instinct of our nature arising from habits that are themselves based on lower-order instincts like natural induction. Hume says this quite clearly when he continues the above quote.

‘To consider the matter aright, reason is nothing but a wonderful and unintelligible instinct in our souls, which carries us along a certain train of ideas, and endows them with particular qualities, according to their particular situations and relations. This instinct, it is true, arises from past observation and experience; but can any one give the ultimate reason why past experience and observation produces such an effect, any more than why nature alone should produce it? Nature may certainly produce whatever can arise from habit: nay, habit is nothing but one of the principles of nature, and derives all its force from that origin.’ [T.I.iii.xvi. p.179]

Indeed, part iv of Book 1 of the *Treatise* is in many ways an extended defence of the idea that the beliefs which shape our common sense responses to the world are all held as a consequence of our nature, given that these commitments are founded in the operation of the imagination and that operation is explained in naturalistic terms. In Hume’s case then we could gloss ‘natural’ with ‘the kind of thing that could be discovered through scientific investigation’ and ‘nature’ with ‘the world as described by science’ and capture his basic meaning. That Hume takes such a scientific view of nature is the only reason why the appeal to animals could feature so prominently in his work.

However of itself the appeal to science to account for nature is not exceptional. The truly interesting feature of Hume’s position is that it leaves no place for an appeal to anything other than what can be explained by science in that scientific explanations are complete. Note that all reasoning can be explained naturalistically in the above quotes.¹¹⁵ When McDowell refers to, and vehemently disagrees with, Neo-Humean empiricism it is this view that empirical scientific investigation tells us everything there is to which he is objecting.

Hume thus offers us a straightforward reading of what it is for a commitment to be natural. A commitment is natural if it can be accounted for purely in terms of empirical

¹¹⁵ Note also that in the closing passages of the introduction to the *Treatise* Hume seems to explicitly state that the limits of (empirical) science are the limits of knowledge, and hence that we cannot go beyond what science can reach. For Hume it also turns out that science doesn’t tell us all that much.

science. Of course this doesn't tell us much, since by Hume's standards *all* commitments can be accounted for by empirical science if they can be accounted for at all. Rather than asking what beliefs are natural in this sense we ought to ask which beliefs are naturally common. To answer this question all we need do is disregard any commitments that are held due to individual idiosyncrasies, and the remainder will be held by any and all humans. While this remainder may be quite restricted it will also be very important, containing principles such as that the objects of perception are 'continu'd and distinct', that objects retain an identity even through great physical change, that all events have a cause, that nature is uniform etc.

I suggest that this remainder will form an important part of the content of common sense, and that Hume would have recognised it as such.¹¹⁶ Hume's repeated appeal to the views of the 'vulgar', those who unwarrantedly but pre-philosophically accept all the above principles, would itself suggest that these principles are indeed commonsensical.¹¹⁷ This impression is reinforced by Hume's claim that when not actually engaged in philosophical reflection even philosophers accept the above principles.¹¹⁸ If this is correct then because common sense is natural in this strict scientific sense it is also unavoidable. While we have already noted that this does not of itself show that common sense is normative it does explain why it is consistently observed to hold; why it is *common* sense and not *good* sense.

We find a very similar view on the relationship between natural belief and common sense in Sextus. The Sextan position is similar to that we find in Hume in that both appeal to the same empirical scientific approach. We have already seen the Sextan version of this in connection with the defence of premise (4) of Argument 1a for CSN. Keeping this earlier analysis in mind, we now find Sextus making the point that the commitments which both structure our everyday lives and which we hold in common (as opposed to culturally determined or idiosyncratic commitments) are attributable to our natural constitution, what he here calls the "necessitation by feelings".

¹¹⁶ A further socio-cultural but changeable element will usually in practice be added to this, for every culture has taken its own parochial views to be commonsensical. However this need not invalidate the general method.

¹¹⁷ For some relevant appeals to the views of the vulgar see T.I.iii.xii, p.132, T.I.iv.ii, p.192-194, 209, 213, 216.

¹¹⁸ See T.I.iv.ii, p.217.

We said above that ordinary life, which the Sceptics too participate in, is fourfold, consisting in the guidance by nature, necessitation by feelings, handing down of laws and customs, and teaching of kinds of expertise. By the necessitation of feelings the Sceptics are conducted by thirst to drink, by hunger to food, and so on. In the same way Methodic doctors are conducted by feelings to what corresponds to them: by contradiction to dilation as when someone seeks refuge in heat from the compression due to intense cold) and by flux to checking (as when those in baths who are dripping with sweat and relaxed come to check it and seek refuge in the cold air.)...I think that everything which the Methodics say in this vein can be brought under the necessitation of feelings, either natural or unnatural. (PH 1.238-239)

In Sextus and Hume then we have a distinctly scientific view of the origin of common sense, although as McDowell has pointed out it is not without its deficiencies. However, even so the Humean-Sextan view is not totally without plausibility either. It does after all account for why common sense is *common*. Further, given the strict scientific criterion that it establishes it also allows us a method to separate what is generally part of common sense from what is merely a cultural artefact. The implied parsimony regarding what we are to take as being genuinely commonsensical is one of the chief advantages of this view. The question though is whether the Humean-Sextan view is too parsimonious for its own good.

ii) Strawson: Nature as the presupposition of reason

In contrast to the strictly scientific approach to natural commitment and common sense we have Strawson's view. Reflecting on Hume, Strawson finds himself in broad agreement with the general thrust of Hume's conclusions. However, Strawson is able to accommodate many of the main points of the Humean-Sextan view without reducing natural commitment and common sense to a strictly scientific basis.

Of course, we can be convinced that a particular reaction of ours on a particular occasion was unjustified, just as we can be convinced in particular cases that what we took for a physical object, or a physical object of a certain kind, was no such thing. But our *general* proneness to these attitudes and reactions is inextricably bound up with that involvement in personal and social interrelationships which begins our lives, which develops and complicates itself in a great variety of ways throughout our lives and which is, one might say, a condition of our humanity. What we have, in our inescapable commitment to these attitudes and feelings, is a natural fact, something as deeply rooted in our nature as our existence as natural beings.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ Strawson, *Skepticism and Naturalism: Some Varieties* p.33.

In Strawson we see ideas connected with sociality and rationality emerging alongside talk of ourselves as natural beings. Of particular importance is the idea that our natural commitments provide the ‘condition for our humanity’. Such a notion as a condition of our humanity could not feature in the Humean-Sextan view as our natural commitments having such-and-such a structure is a consequence of us having a physically human constitution, and not a condition of that constitution. I suggest that Strawson is introducing at least two new elements into what we understand to be natural.

First, Strawson introduces the question of what it is that makes us truly human, refusing to understand that in the strictly biological way implicit in the Humean-Sextan view. Strawson’s answer to this question is that we must include our uniquely human social interactions in any answer to this question, in addition to our ability to reflect on our strictly natural constitution. Strawson’s view includes the social and rational realms in the scope of the natural. This social element is not something that can be explained in the way that we explain the interaction of other animals because other animals do not enter into the process of demanding reasons for their commitments as humans do. That is, the social element is essentially a rational element. What makes us truly human is not that we are rational *animals*, it is that we are *rational* animals. The Humean-Sextan position places insufficient emphasis here. Granted, rationality is still something which is to be accounted for naturalistically in that it is ‘as deeply rooted in our nature as our existence as natural beings’ and so is not something imposed on an otherwise natural creature from the outside. However, in Strawson’s account the necessary space is made for the kind of distancing of ourselves from what McDowell calls our first nature that is a requirement for any rationality worth the name.

This brings us to the second new feature in Strawson’s account of what it is for a commitment to be natural which, as has been alluded to, is that Strawson introduces the idea of a condition. If we keep in view the idea that our uniquely human social interactions are rational interactions then the conditions that make social interactions possible must be the conditions for the application of reason when applied to the social sphere. What conditions might these be? One prime candidate would be the supposition that other human-looking objects we encounter have minds. Another would be that these minded objects must be treated as both moral objects and moral agents. On this

reading some commitments are natural not because they are provided by our scientifically-defined nature, but because we only achieve our truly human nature by presupposing these commitments. Fundamentally, what separates the Humean-Sextan view from Strawson's view is a debate about what criteria we are to impose on judgement of what it is to be genuinely human.

Like the Humean-Sextan view, Strawson's view is also capable of explaining why there is such a thing as genuinely common sense. By associating natural commitments with the content of common sense, and then arguing that natural commitments are necessary if humans are to be human in the fullest sense of humanity, it follows that these natural commitments will indeed be common.

iii) Reid: Tensions over nature and common sense

Having now explained the divergent views of Sextus, Hume and Strawson we are now in a position to mention the position of Reid. Reid has been left to last because he equivocates between a position that looks more that the Humean-Sextan position and one which seems to anticipate that of Strawson. Hence it is easier to understand Reid when one already understands these other philosophers.

a) Outline of the basic points to Reid's view

Regarding the immunity of common-sense to philosophical arguments Reid would have it that the defenders of philosophy have erred in that

'the votaries of this philosophy, from a natural prejudice in her favour, have endeavoured to extend her jurisdiction beyond its just limits, and to call to her bar the dictates of common sense. But these decline this jurisdiction; they disdain the trial of reasoning, and disown its authority; they neither claim its aid nor dread its attacks.'¹²⁰

Note that common sense here does not emerge as being justified after being submitted for philosophical examination, but is not as a consequence judged to be unwarranted.

¹²⁰ Reid, *Works Now Fully Collected: With Selections from His Unpublished Letters, Papers, Notes, and Supplementary Dissertations* IHM I.iv. p.101b.

Instead common sense beliefs ‘disdain the trial of reasoning’ and do not ‘dread its attacks’. That is, common sense is immune to any challenges which philosophy might present. Reid pushes the point even further than this by arguing that it is both theoretically and practically impossible that common sense could be called to the bar of philosophy.

Practically, any resultant examination would surely end in unmitigated disaster.¹²¹ Theoretically, for philosophy to call common sense into question is for philosophy to engage in a self-undermining activity. Take for instance the following passage.

‘Such principles [i.e. principles of common sense] are older, and of more authority, than philosophy: she rests upon them as her basis and not they upon her. If she could overturn them, she must be buried in their ruins; but all the engines of philosophical subtlety are too weak for this purpose; and the attempt is no less ridiculous than if a mechanic should contrive an *axis in peritrochio* to remove the earth out of its place.’¹²²

Reid also notes that in some cases common-sense beliefs also have the property of being arrived at independently of any process of reasoning, inferential or otherwise. Taking into consideration the belief that the testimony of consciousness can be trusted Reid makes the following remarks.

‘But why did he [i.e., Descartes] not prove the existence of his thought? Consciousness, it may be said, vouches that. But who is voucher for consciousness? can any man prove that his consciousness may not deceive him? No man can: nor can we give a better reason for trusting to it, than that every man, while his mind is sound, is determined, by the constitution of his nature, to give implicit belief to it, and to laugh at, or pity, the man who doubts its testimony. And is not every man, in his wits, as much determined to take his existence on trust as his consciousness.’¹²³

This last quote also makes it clear that Reid takes common-sense to be genuinely common. Observe that the only people who are said to be lacking these common-sense beliefs are those suffering from some kind of mental disturbance. We see here the close connection in Reid’s thought between accepting our natural commitments and having a normally functioning psychology. We also see the close connection between having

¹²¹ Ibid. IHM VI.xx p.183b.

¹²² Ibid. IHM I.v. p.102b.

¹²³ Ibid. IHM I.iii. p.100a.

these commitments and being rational. Indeed Reid takes the acceptance of common-sense beliefs to be the criterion according to which the limits of rationality can be assessed.¹²⁴ From this we must concede that Reid's understanding of common sense revolves around the idea that the beliefs constitutive of common sense are both forced upon us and are immune to being overturned as a consequence of countervailing philosophical considerations.¹²⁵ They are also common among all sane individuals. As we have indicated, these are precisely the characteristics typical of natural commitments.

b) Reid's primary 'foundationalist' view

Moving then to Reid's two views on the nature of common-sense, or natural commitment, we can already see above indications of the view which ultimately comes to dominate Reid's thinking in its clearly foundationalist overtones. On this view common sense provides us with what are genuine first principles, able to play a foundational role for the construction of philosophical systems. In fact according to this view without such a foundation in common sense philosophy would be impossible. Granted, Reid does not think that these foundations are anything like those sought in the Cartesian project, but they play a similar functional role nonetheless. That Reid thinks about common sense in these foundational terms becomes more obvious when we survey his later works, especially the *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (hereafter EIP). While introducing the idea of a common sense Reid has this to say.

'But there are other propositions which are no sooner understood than they are believed. The judgement follows the apprehension of them necessarily, and both are equally the work of nature, and the result of our original powers. There is no searching for evidence, no weighing of arguments; the proposition is not deduced or inferred from another; it has the light of truth in itself and has no occasion to borrow it from another.

¹²⁴ As later chapters will show this association between accepting common-sense and assessments of sanity has far-reaching consequences for the normativity of natural commitments.

¹²⁵ While there are no doubt some differences between the perspectives of Reid and Hume on this subject it is important not to overlook the similarities. This observation is by no means original or modern, being noted from contemporaries of Hume and Reid.

Propositions of this last kind, when they are used in matters of science, have commonly been called *axioms*; and on whatever occasion they are used, are called *first principles, principles of common sense, common notions, self-evident truths.*¹²⁶

A number of points stand out in this statement. First, we see again that natural commitments are forced upon us and are natural in this sense. This appears to be a psychological point, not an epistemic one. Second, and not surprisingly given the preceding observation, natural commitments are not inferred from any other beliefs. Third, and to reemphasise an important point, in virtue of their not being inferred from other beliefs, natural commitments can function as foundational premises for the construction of further arguments. Note for instance that the axioms of mathematics and natural science are these natural commitments under another name, and Reid makes it quite clear that the reason why mathematics and natural science had made such stunning progress by the late 18th century is that these branches of inquiry had been able to make explicit the natural commitments relevant to these fields of inquiry. Making explicit the natural commitments operative in other fields of inquiry was hence seen as a prerequisite for the same kind of rapid advancement that had recently been seen in the sciences; so much so that Reid claims such an achievement would

‘contribute greatly to the stability of human knowledge, and consequently to the improvement of it, if the first principles upon which the various parts of it are grounded were pointed out and ascertained... There are two branches of human knowledge in which this method has been followed – to wit, mathematics and natural philosophy; in mathematics, as far back as we have books... The science, once firmly established upon the basis of a few axioms and definitions, as upon a rock, has grown from age to age, so as to become the loftiest and the most solid fabric that human reason can boast.’¹²⁷

Further, while these natural commitments may be implicit for many people, having been forced upon them in the absence of any process of reasoning, Reid thinks that we should not thereby be led to conclude that these beliefs can only ever be implicit. When functioning as premises in arguments they must in fact be made explicit, and Reid is quite comfortable with the process of making these beliefs explicit. The most famous example of Reid’s engagement in this task occurs in the chapter titled ‘First Principles of Contingent Truths’. Here is a sampling of the principles he lists.

¹²⁶ Reid, *Works Now Fully Collected: With Selections from His Unpublished Letters, Papers, Notes, and Supplementary Dissertations* EIP VI.iv. p. 434.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.* EIP VI.iv. p. 436.

- That the thoughts of which I am conscious are the thoughts of a being which I call MYSELF, my MIND, my PERSON.
- That those things do really exist which we distinctly perceive by our senses, and are as we perceive them to be.
- That the natural faculties, by which we distinguish truth from error, are not fallacious.
- That, in the phænomena of nature, what is to be, will probably be like what has been in similar circumstances.

Reid makes it quite clear that the attitude we take towards these principles (whatever that may be) cannot *in practice* be influenced by reasons, as these principles are not adopted *for reasons*. The reason-*insensitivity* of common sense is implicit in the earlier quotes, and the following passage is also indicative of this general view.

‘In this unequal contest betwixt Common Sense and Philosophy, the latter will always come off both with dishonour and loss; nor can she ever thrive till this rivalry is dropt, these encroachments given up, and a cordial friendship restored....’¹²⁸

Thus perhaps we ought to conclude that natural commitments are not actually beliefs, and introduce some new designation instead. Belief, after all, is a reason-sensitive propositional attitude. Such a move would be premature at this stage for to conclude that we do not actually believe these natural commitments would commit us to the odd consequence that we do not believe any axiom or self-evident proposition, as these are also reason-*insensitive* in the same sense that Reid’s common-sense beliefs are. Yet surely we cannot say that we do not believe the axioms of mathematics. As a result of such considerations we ought perhaps to conclude that according to this conception natural commitments are reason sensitive. At the very least we ought to recognise that if these natural commitments do amount to beliefs then there is something queer about them. They seem to form a class of their own, and to function quite differently to normal beliefs.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ Ibid. IHM I.v. p.100b.

¹²⁹ Assigning beliefs ‘at the foundation’ special properties is of course a feature common to many, if not all, foundationalist epistemologies.

c) Reid's secondary 'proto-transcendental' view

Even granting that distinguishing a special class of commitments that play this foundational role has been a recurrent theme among epistemologists for some time, Reid's foundationalist framework does raise some difficult questions. In particular we might wonder whether natural commitments really can or do function as premises in philosophical arguments. We can appeal to Wittgenstein for assistance on this question, much as Wolterstorff has done recently. In *On Certainty* Wittgenstein undertakes numerous investigations, not all of which can be easily brought together to form one coherent view. One of these investigations concerns the foundation for our inquiries, and especially our philosophical inquiries. This investigation was prompted by Moore who, following Reid's view as explained above, had taken various principles of common sense as premises in philosophical arguments. Moore's warrant for taking such a position was that he was more certain of the beliefs he took to be premises than he was of anything else. Keep in mind that it is only because these commitments are genuine beliefs that they could be made explicit in the way Moore required. This had led Moore to make some rather unusual statements, for instance that he knew an external world existed because he knew he had two hands. Quite rightly, Wittgenstein was prompted to wonder whether we really do 'know' that we have two hands in the sense in which Moore intended, or whether Moore had somehow misrepresented our epistemic state in speaking thus. Hence some of Wittgenstein's observations are useful when we ask whether the principles Reid identifies can really function as premises for arguments. So it is to these observations that we now turn.¹³⁰

Of particular importance at this juncture is Wittgenstein's idea that our inquiries find their terminus in our practice rather than in any foundational premises of the sort Reid identifies. For instance Wittgenstein makes the following points.

¹³⁰ There is however a proviso in what follows, in that the conclusions I draw from Wittgenstein's may not have been Wittgenstein's conclusions. In fact I am not convinced that Wittgenstein drew any one conclusion from his inquiries, or even that the term 'conclusion' is the appropriate terms with which to describe the terminus of his thought. Rather than attempting to follow Wittgenstein's thought I shall instead draw inspiration from a few of the observations he made. Note that Wolterstorff also makes extensive use of Wittgenstein's insights, although he comes to different conclusions to those I draw here. See Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Reid on Common Sense, with Wittgenstein's Assistance," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 74, no. 3 (2000).

‘Giving grounds, however, justifying the evidence, comes to an end;- but the end is not certain propositions’ striking us immediately as true, i.e. it is not a kind of seeing on our part; it is our *acting*, which lies at the bottom of the language-game.’ [OC 204]

‘If someone is taught to calculate, is he also taught that he can rely on a calculation of his teacher’s? But these explanations must after all sometime come to an end. Will he also be taught that he can trust his senses – since he is indeed told in many cases that in such and such a special case you cannot trust them?

–

Rule and exception.’ [OC 34]

‘In certain circumstances, for example, we regard a calculation as sufficiently checked. What gives us a right to do so? Experience? May not that have deceived us? Somewhere we must be finished with justification, and then there remains the proposition that *this* is how we calculate.’ [OC 212]

‘Our talk gets its meaning from the rest of our proceeding.’ [OC 229]

Wittgenstein’s point in speaking in this manner is perhaps that it is our practice that ultimately provides the ground for our justificatory activity. That is, our justifications come to an end when we act on our beliefs, and not when we find a solid foundation for those beliefs in terms of a deduction from first principles. This would explain why Wittgenstein says that our talk (including, I believe, our justificatory procedures) gets its meaning from the rest of our proceeding, that is, it gets its meaning from our practice. I take it that Wittgenstein’s intent would then be to change the direction of analysis by giving priority to appeals to practice over appeals to theories of justification. While I will argue in chapter 3 that this basic intuition about the proper direction of analysis is quite correct I think that *if* the above comments capture Wittgenstein’s view then Wittgenstein must have been wrong. It is not the practices but the norms that those practices respect that gives meaning to the rest of our proceeding.

We see this attempt to change the perspective from which the debates over justification are normally carried out in the following statement.

‘We are asking ourselves: what do we do with a statement “I know...” For it is not a question of mental processes or mental states.

And *that* is how one must decide whether something is knowledge or not.’ [OC 230]

Our focus here needs to fall on the phrase ‘what do we do’, in that this phrase brings to our attention the claim that it is our practices which form the foundation for our justifications, and not the other way around. Once we grasp this point it becomes perfectly obvious what Wittgenstein intends when he makes the following claim.

‘If the true if what is grounded, then the ground is not *true*, nor yet false.’ [OC 205]

For practices are not true or false, propositions are. But the ground is the practices, or ‘the rest of our proceeding’, not the propositions. Casting this in terms more directly relevant to the current discussion of the character of our natural commitments, we can point out that beliefs, in virtue of having propositional content, can be said to be true or false (in a derivative sense). But then if we take it that our natural commitments are beliefs then, if Wittgenstein is correct, these natural commitments cannot be the foundation for our philosophical justifications that both Reid and Moore require.

This immediately suggests that if Wittgenstein is right then Reid’s view that our natural commitments are beliefs (even if of a special sort) must be mistaken. By the same token Moore is also mistaken to appeal to his knowledge of the existence of his hands to ground his activity of saying that he knows there exists an external world. The mistake however is not that the principles Reid and Moore introduce are false, for if they are at the ground then they are neither true nor false. Nor is the error to be found in some faulty deduction from these principles. Rather the error of these two philosophers is to take it that the ground can play a foundational role in the construction of philosophical theories in the way they suggest. Moore was right to appeal to the practice of using his hands, but wrong to think that this could be the basis for a deductive refutation of scepticism. That is, Moore should have responded to the sceptical challenge just as Sextus and his Cynic forbears did, by practicing in normal everyday sorts of ways.¹³¹

¹³¹ Of course there is some reason to think that Moore was not offering a refutation of scepticism in a traditional sort of way, and he may well have been meaning to give priority to practice in holding up a hand and proclaiming ‘Here is a hand’. See Greco, “How to Reid Moore.” If that is right, then Moore may have made a crucial mistake in attempting to translate his practical refutation into a published paper, as this fundamentally distorts the point Moore was trying to make.

Ironically, Wittgenstein here accuses Reid of an error of which Reid had previously accused Descartes. We have seen earlier that Reid accused Descartes of attempting to prove his own existence in the following passage.

‘But why did he [i.e., Descartes] not prove the existence of his thought? Consciousness, it may be said, vouches that. But who is voucher for consciousness? can any man prove that his consciousness may not deceive him? No man can: nor can we give a better reason for trusting to it, than that every man, while his mind is sound, is determined, by the constitution of his nature, to give implicit belief to it, and to laugh at, or pity, the man who doubts its testimony. And is not every man, in his wits, as much determined to take his existence on trust as his consciousness.’¹³²

The thrust of Reid’s criticism of Descartes at this point is that Descartes is attempting to find a justification for something Reid takes to be a ground. The details here are worth dwelling upon, for the ground that Reid takes Descartes to have misidentified is not the kind of first principle that Wittgenstein’s argument indicates cannot be the ground. Rather Reid picks out here a feature of our practice as the ground. Specifically, Reid points to the practice of taking our existence on trust, and following Wittgenstein we would have to grant that Reid is quite correct to criticize Descartes in this manner.

This in turn suggests that Reid must have an alternate understanding on what function is played by natural commitments, one in which they do not appear as first principles functioning as premises in arguments intended to justify our knowledge claims. Otherwise it would not be possible for Reid to coherently criticize Descartes on exactly the same point concerning which Reid was indirectly criticized by Wittgenstein. Why Reid has this alternate understanding of natural commitment is not of immediate importance. What is of immediate importance is what this understanding amounts to, and it is to this issue that we now turn.

As Wolterstorff rightly points out, there is some good textual support for the idea that Reid had more than one way of understanding natural commitment.¹³³ Take for instance the following statement of Reid’s.

¹³² Thomas Reid, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970) I.iii. pp. 10-11.

¹³³ Nicholas Wolterstorff, “Reid on Common Sense,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Reid*, ed. Terence Cuneo (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p.84ff, Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Thomas*

‘If there are certain principles, as I think there are, which the constitution of our nature leads us to believe, and which we are under a necessity to take for granted in the common concerns of life, without being able to give a reason for them; these are what we call the principles of common sense; and what is manifestly contrary to them is what we call absurd.’¹³⁴

To further clarify the character of a natural commitment according to this new conception requires some examples. Looking at some other of Reid’s statements can help us to determine what our answer ought to be. For instance consider the following, drawn from *An Inquiry into the Human Mind*.

‘The skeptic asks me, Why do you believe the existence of the external object you perceive? This belief, sir, is none of my manufacture; it came from the mint of nature; it bears her image and superscription; and, if it is not right, the fault is not mine: I even took it on trust, and without suspicion...I think it would not be prudent to throw off this belief, if it were in my power...But what is the consequence? I resolve not to believe my senses. I break my nose upon a post that comes my way; I step into a kennel; and, after twenty such wise and rational actions, I am taken up and clapped into a mad-house.’¹³⁵

This example invites a distinction between a belief and a natural commitment, in that there are some commitments that are reason-insensitive because they provide the context in which reasons find their proper application. Reid brings out the constructive feature of these commitments by imagining what would happen were it in our power to abandon them (which of course it is not). The conclusion he reaches is that we would be ‘taken up and clapped in a mad-house’. That is, abandoning these commitments is tantamount to abandoning rationality.¹³⁶ If we are to reason at all, Reid wants to say, then we must accept some commitments. In Reid’s case these commitments are provided for us by the ‘mint of nature’, which is to say that the commitments that we must accept to be rational at all are the same commitments that we find it natural to adopt. Clearly, such commitments cannot be reason-sensitive because they stand outside the context in which reason finds its proper application. However, beliefs are reason-sensitive, and so these constitutive commitments cannot be beliefs.

Reid and the Story of Epistemology, ed. Robert B. Pippin, *Modern European Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) p.223ff.

¹³⁴ Reid, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind* II.vi. p. 32.

¹³⁵ Ibid. VI.xx. pp. 207-208.

¹³⁶ Reid appears here to be attempting to collapse Arguments 1 and 2 for CSN. While his attempt is not entirely successful because it unhelpfully blurs the distinctions between epistemology and psychology, it is indicative of the direction in which these arguments would need to be developed.

Supposing that a natural commitment is not a belief coheres well with some of Wittgenstein's intuitions about the structure of the grounds for our beliefs. Take for instance the following sequence.

'I have a telephone conversation with New York. My friend tells me that his young trees have buds of such and such a kind. I am now convinced that his tree is...Am I also convinced that the earth exists?' [OC 205]

'The existence of the earth is rather part of the whole *picture* which forms the starting point of belief for me.' [OC 209]

'Does my telephone call to New York strengthen my conviction that the earth exists? Much seems to be fixed and is removed from the traffic. It is so to speak shunted into an unused siding.' [OC 210]

'Now it gives our way of looking at things, and our researches, their form. Perhaps it was once disputed. But perhaps, for unthinkable ages, it has belonged to the *scaffolding* of our thoughts. (Every human being has parents.)' [OC 211]

Using the distinction drawn from Reid, we would say that Wittgenstein here has a belief that certain young trees in New York are of such and such a variety which is grounded in some non-belief which is also a natural commitment. This seems to be the thrust of Wittgenstein's questions in the above quotations and Reid can on these grounds be accused of carelessness in designating natural commitments as beliefs.¹³⁷ This is not to say that Reid has simply anticipated Wittgenstein's insights in a less rigorous form, as there is a genuine divergence between these two thinkers over the content of these natural commitments. As *OC* 210-211 indicates (see above) Wittgenstein allows for the possibility that the character of our natural commitments can and do shift over time. At another point in *On Certainty* he goes further and states unequivocally that this character does indeed change over time.

'It might be imagined that some propositions, of the form of empirical propositions, were hardened and functioned as channels for such empirical propositions as were not hardened but fluid; and that this relation altered with time, in that fluid propositions hardened, and hard ones became fluid.' [OC 96]

¹³⁷ Note also that at times Wittgenstein seems to make the same mistake, designating what are really grounds for belief as belief. See for instance *On Certainty* 240-242.

‘The mythology may change back into a state of flux, the riverbed of thoughts may shift. But I distinguish between the movement of the waters on the river-bed and the shift of the bed itself; though there is not a sharp division of the one from the other.’ [OC 97]

On this Reid and Wittgenstein diverge, as Reid takes it that the principles he identifies are timeless, even if they also happen to be contingent. I believe, *pace* Wolterstorff, that Wittgenstein has the better of the argument at this point and preference shall be given to this view in chapter 3.

Nature and common sense: convergence, divergence and debate

Having now provided an outline of the two views of nature in the authors taken to be of central importance for an analysis of CSN we can now ask what brings these authors together and what keeps them apart. First we can note what keeps them apart, and here we can appeal to the obvious distinction between Hume and Sextus (nature as that described by science) on the one hand and Strawson (nature as the condition for reason and fully realised humanity) on the other, with Reid falling to both camps depending on which passage we choose to highlight. As has been noted, this distinction is based on a more fundamental distinction over what the best way of understanding the human person. Are we *rational* animals or are we rational *animals*? It is divergence on this point that creates a further divergence in the view taken of common sense. Hume and Sextus take the content of common sense to be common on account of a shared physical constitution. Strawson takes (or would have to take were he to comment directly on the matter) common sense to be common on account of all humans entering into distinct social interactions that require certain forms of rational activity that in turn are only made possible by the prior acceptance of the principles of common sense. Again, Reid confusingly says both.¹³⁸

¹³⁸ While it is true that these views are not actually inconsistent, they are not actually consistent either. Consistency requires conceptual overlap, and no such overlap exists here as Arguments 1 and 2 appeal to quite different factors in explaining why the lack of rational justification does not imply the lack of justification *simpliciter*. It would seem that Arguments 1 and 2 are actually incommensurable. Hence if we are to make these arguments consistent then one or both would need to be substantially modified. It will be a secondary *desiderata* of this dissertation to show exactly what modification would be required to render Arguments 1 and 2 into a consistent set.

However observing the divergences can blind us to the genuine convergences. Of these convergences two are of great importance. First, all four philosophers take it that there is such a thing as natural commitment, and also take it that these natural commitments, even if contingent, are also common to all humans. These common natural commitments is what each identifies as common sense, Reid more explicitly than the others. Second, all four also take it that appealing to the naturalness – in the sense in which each understands nature – of common sense explains why justificatory inquiry directed towards common sense is vain. Each philosopher agrees that try as we might nature will not be denied.

Hence according to CSN it is accurate to say that it is commonsensical to take such-and-such an attitude to specifiable content. In this way CSN sidesteps debates over whether common sense is to be defined in terms of content or in terms of attitude. In fact both attitudinal and content-based appeals are required to do justice to common sense. Appealing exclusively to attitude is inadequate as the natural attitudes important for common sense cannot be maintained when directed towards just any proposition. Some propositions really do have a special place in our cognitive economy. However simply listing these propositions is also inadequate as it leaves unexplained why these propositions are special. To account for that we need to appeal to the natural fixity of our propositional attitudes when directed towards these propositions.

It is only by grasping these convergences that we are also able to grasp what these thinkers are really disagreeing about, for to disagree with anyone about anything we must first agree with them about something. As it turns out the real disagreement between these philosophers turns on whether the naturalness of common sense provides us with any entitlement to common sense. This question is highly motivated because of the vanity of inquiry into common sense, for if we always find ourselves unable to do without commitments to which we have no entitlement then this carries clear sceptical implications. Thus the disagreement between these philosophers is predicated on both the reality of common sense as *natural* and the fact that our taking common sense as *commonsensical* is insensitive to outcome of justificatory inquiry into common sense. As it turns out each of Sextus, Hume, Reid and Strawson is in disagreement with each of the others in one way or another. We can see this by looking at the answer of each to the question ‘Are we entitled to common sense’?

To this question Sextus and Strawson give categorical answers, Sextus in the negative and Strawson in the affirmative. To avoid any form of dogmatism Sextus adds to this negative claim the further claim that we are also unentitled to both the contrary of common sense and, interestingly, the non-entitlement claims just mentioned. Sextus and Strawson thus represent the extreme wings of the debate over our entitlement to common sense. On the reading I will defend both as Hume's position and the correct position in its own right, Hume's answer is cast hypothetically rather than categorically. It follows from his position that *if* we have an entitlement to common sense *then* we also have an entitlement to (Pyrrhonian) scepticism. This is not to say that we do have such an entitlement to common sense, but does imply that the anti-sceptical use of appeals to common sense is misguided. Reid supports Strawson's conclusion, but perhaps provides a different reason for thinking that we have an entitlement to common sense when we engage with the scientific view we see in Hume and Sextus.¹³⁹ Hence Strawson and Reid defend CSN, Hume is a revolutionary or insurgent operating from inside a framework accepted by the defenders of CSN and Sextus attacks CSN from the outside. Thus Hume represents the most dangerous response to a defender of CSN and the remainder of this thesis is in fact an extended defence of the Humean response to the question of whether we are entitled to common sense. However the remainder of the present chapter is devoted to drawing some conclusions regarding CSN.

Summary of CSN and its problems

This chapter began with the contention that CSN boils down to an observation and two assertions. The observation is that there are propositions towards which our propositional attitude is insensitive to the outcome of justificatory inquiry, and importantly so when we consider the usual outcome of justificatory inquiry is to lead to our propositional attitudes varying. Given this insensitivity in the context of justificatory inquiry, commitments with this propositional content are seen not to connect up with rational justification in the right way. Attempting to find rational justifications for these commitments is thus judged to be vain, as is attempting to show that no rational justification exists for these commitments. As scepticism invokes

¹³⁹ Given the variation that Reid introduces in particular it is clear that which side of the question of entitlement on which one comes down is not determined by the view one takes of nature.

precisely these justificatory considerations it too is considered to be vain on this view. Thus this observation apparently (but incorrectly) leads to the conclusion that scepticism, as vain, can be safely dismissed.

The first assertion, constituting the naturalism of CSN, is that the absence of rational justification for some commitments does not imply that the commitment is unjustified *simpliciter*. Either there are forms of justification apart from rational justification or some commitments are required if rational justification is to find a proper context for its application. In either case we are in a position to say that such commitments ought to be held, as either they are justified independently of rationality or they are required in order for rational justification to be possible. The second assertion, concerning common sense, is that these propositions constitute the content of common sense. We should now have a tolerably clear idea about what this means when the details are spelled out.

There are several problems facing CSN at this juncture, quite apart from the tensions over which arguments we are to use to support it that were mentioned earlier. The first concerns normativity. CSN argues, as we have seen, that we have an entitlement to common sense. If this is argued on the ground that common sense is justified because our commitment to common sense is a natural fact (as in Argument 1a) then CSN will face problems. Natural facts are not normally thought to warrant normative claims. CSN also faces the same problems with normativity if it is argued that natural justification is equally as respectable as rational justification, in addition to inviting a sceptical attack on rational justification itself. This leaves open the second argument for naturalism in CSN, that common sense is constitutive of the context in which rational justification is possible. However this approach will only be plausible if scepticism really is vain, and hence only if it can be shown that sceptical doubts do not in fact lead to any revision of the propositional attitude taken towards our commitments. However there are strong arguments both for the conclusion that scepticism is not vain in this way and further that scepticism sometimes emerges naturally and inevitably from within our common sense perspective. If these arguments are sound then scepticism cannot be dismissed. But if scepticism cannot be dismissed so easily then the 'transcendental' argument of CSN must strike us as question begging by assuming that sceptical doubts are not both real and rational.

Thus we see that CSN faces problems over both naturalism and scepticism. Further, these problems interact in such a way as to bring CSN face-to-face with the possibility of legitimate scepticism. Either CSN must show that scepticism is not both real and rational or it must concede scepticism a legitimate place in our cognitive lives. I suggest that CSN would do best to adopt the second approach, given the strength of arguments developed in favour of Pyrrhonian scepticism in recent years. These arguments, taken mostly from the work of Robert Fogelin, will be examined in chapter 2. If these arguments succeed, as I think they do, then in order to claim that common sense is normative CSN must concede that scepticism is equally normative.

However a further perspectivism must be developed here both to deal with the contradiction implied in granting scepticism normativity and also to account for a sense in which CSN is right to insist that scepticism is vain. The sense in which CSN seems to get things right is that scepticism *usually* does not influence the commitments we actually hold. According to this perspectivism there is a perfectly legitimate sense in which scepticism is normative, but *only* emerges when we occupy the philosophical perspective, or perhaps a better way of saying this is that scepticism only emerges when we are in the philosophical mood. However while this mood is perfectly legitimate it is only one of many moods in which we can find ourselves and has no greater claim to privilege than any other. Perhaps Cavell, himself inspired here by Emerson, has captured the idea best.

‘Emerson may be said to be a philosopher of moods and it is one wise with moods who observes that “Our moods do not believe in each other” (“Circles”). Neither do our philosophies, or visions, which is why the idea of pluralism in philosophy, however well meant, is so often an empty hope; and neither do our non-philosophical and our philosophical moods believe in each other.’¹⁴⁰

The undoubted insight of Emerson notwithstanding, it is Hume who provides the best analysis of the sceptical mood, perhaps because he is one of the few philosophers who recognised that scepticism is both real and rational, but limited to a specific and quite unusual context.¹⁴¹ Re-examining what Hume can tell us here will provide the material

¹⁴⁰ Stanley Cavell, *The Senses of Walden*, An Expanded ed. (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1981) p.151.

¹⁴¹ This is not just a restatement of the central thesis of Williams, *Unnatural Doubts: Epistemological Realism and the Basis of Scepticism*. While that work did argue that scepticism only emerged in a special

for chapter 3. The immediate task however is to defend the idea that someone can in fact find themselves immersed in radical scepticism even while respecting common sense, for it is at this point that CSN appears to be at its weakest. If this idea can be defended then CSN, by its own standards, must take scepticism seriously. This will entail a reconsideration of what is actually included in the special class of our natural commitments, and what these natural commitments actually are.

context, the special context was not defined with reference to the inquirer. Instead the special context was defined in terms of its unique content, specifically in terms of the uniquely general or global questions that it addressed. No such content-based account is envisaged here.

CHAPTER 2

Common sense and radical Pyrrhonian scepticism

Outline

Chapter 1 has already provided us with an outline of Common Sense Naturalism (CSN) and explained the view that would be adopted towards scepticism by a defender of CSN. To repeat some points that were made in the Preface; unless otherwise specified scepticism here means Pyrrhonian scepticism, where among other things Pyrrhonian scepticism is conceived of as challenging our entitlement to knowledge. The present chapter shall focus on two important components of the view taken towards this sort of scepticism. First, CSN claims that scepticism is not *serious* in the sense that it does not actually lead anyone to revise any of their actual commitments. Second, CSN claims that indeed we are entitled to those commitments questioned by the sceptic, for one of two possible reasons as explained in chapter 1. First, we could have an entitlement to these commitments because they are forced upon us by our natural psychological constitution, where we have an entitlement to any commitment that is natural in this sense. Second, we could have an entitlement to these commitments because they partially constitute the proper context for the application of reason. If this latter possibility obtains then without an entitlement to these reason-constituting commitments we would never even be able to conceive of having an entitlement to a commitment. Further, it emerged in the course of developing our understanding of CSN in chapter 1 that the commitments to which we have an entitlement according to either of these two methods provide the content of common sense. Hence it follows straightforwardly that if either of the two methods introduced in chapter 1 really does provide us with an entitlement to these commitments then we thereby have an entitlement to the content of common sense.

It is at this point that the Pyrrhonian enters with a dilemma for a defender of CSN, for the Pyrrhonian will attempt to show, quite paradoxically, that *even if* we grant that we have an entitlement to common sense then it can also be shown that we have an entitlement to Pyrrhonian scepticism. That is, the Pyrrhonian shows that common sense is inherently sceptical because Pyrrhonian scepticism is inherently commonsensical.

Now it may also be the case that common sense really isn't a respectable authority, being in fact nothing more than a reification of ignorance or apathy. If so this can only make the situation worse for the defender of CSN and easier for the Pyrrhonian. The strength and danger of Pyrrhonian scepticism when deployed against CSN is that Pyrrhonism grants to the defender of CSN every premise they need regarding our entitlement to common sense and from there still manages to derive a sceptical conclusion. The purpose of the present chapter is to attempt to show exactly how this sceptical conclusion can be reached. This requires showing in some detail how it is that Pyrrhonian scepticism can be derived from common sense.

The method employed to carry this project through to its completion is to show that radical (but non-general) scepticism can be derived from an adherence to norms of inquiry that are themselves commonsensical. It is the goal of this chapter to make clear that if we adhere to these norms then on some occasions scepticism of a fairly radical kind does (or at least could, where which it is depends in interesting ways on the inquirer) completely undermine any entitlement we might have had to commonsensical commitments. The main source of inspiration for this preparatory work is Robert Fogelin's Pyrrhonism, and especially the argument that radical scepticism emerges quite naturally when we inquire into the structure of our everyday epistemic practices, taking these practices to be paradigmatically commonsensical. However specifying with some precision what the relevant norms are goes beyond what Fogelin has done and makes use of some important observations made by David Lewis. The main objections to the argument of this chapter are; first, that the kind of reflection involved in carrying out these inquiries is not actually what it presents itself to be and hence inquiries of this sort are not internal to our everyday practices; second, that if Pyrrhonism does manage to be commonsensical it can only do so at the expense of being radical. Both these objections are found in the work of Michael Williams. According to Williams any radical scepticism can only manage to undermine our entitlement to our commitment as the result of a prior commitment to questionable philosophical theory at odds with our everyday epistemic practices.¹⁴²

¹⁴² That is, according to this argument Fogelin's Pyrrhonism is in fact a disguised form of Cartesian scepticism, as that distinction is drawn in the introduction. In fact this argument goes further and suggests that Fogelin is faced with the dilemma of conceding that his scepticism is actually Cartesian or conceding that it is not really scepticism at all, in fact being a manifestation of fallibilism. See Michael Williams, "Fogelin's Neo-Pyrrhonism," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 7, no. 2 (1999).

Where then does this leave the claim that scepticism is not serious in the sense that it does not *actually* lead anyone to revise any of their *actual* commitments? To this one of two answers is possible. Either we could insist that scepticism is not serious in the defined sense or we could concede that at least sometimes scepticism can become a serious problem. It is in fact the second of these options which must appear the most palatable even to the defender of CSN, for adhering to the first option only creates more problems for the commonsensical perspective that CSN wishes to preserve from sceptical attack. This becomes apparent when we consider the implications of the dilemma with which the Pyrrhonian presents the defender of CSN. For if it can be shown that our entitlement to common sense can be undermined in straightforwardly commonsensical ways, and yet our actual commitment to common sense does not actually vary then so much the worse for common sense. In this case our commitment to common sense is in violation of that principle of reason according to which the strength of our commitments should be shaped according to our best available evidence. Further, one need not reach too far back into the history of philosophy to find examples of thinkers for whom scepticism has seemed serious in this sense. Thus our first option is both conceptually and historically unappealing. Given that the strongest defence of CSN could be mounted on the concession that scepticism is at least sometimes serious, much of this chapter is devoted to exploring how this seriousness comes about. The goal of this activity is to explain that a proper understanding of this mechanism that can avoid the two main objections deployed by Michael Williams.

Given all this, the present chapter begins with a brief outline of Fogelin's Pyrrhonism, providing in the process some further clarifications on the distinction between Fogelin's Pyrrhonism and Cartesian scepticism. After this will come an extended treatment of the argument for taking Pyrrhonian scepticism to be internal to these practices and an assessment of the counter-arguments that Pyrrhonian scepticism is either an imposition on these practices or is not radically sceptical. It will be shown how these counterarguments fail, leaving us facing the conclusion that scepticism is internal to our everyday epistemic practices and counts as common sense scepticism. This presents CSN with the dilemma of either conceding that scepticism is commonsensical or abandoning common sense. As we shall see, it also brings us face to face with the problem of the rationality of scepticism, and the associated problem of explaining how

we can be entitled to both sceptical perspectives and anti-sceptical perspectives. Chapter 3 addresses this theme of the rationality of scepticism and especially our entitlement to scepticism, and thus taken together chapters 2 and 3 show not just that we are entitled to scepticism from within a common sense perspective but that at times this common sense perspective is prone to morph into a radically sceptical perspective.

An outline of Pyrrhonism

i) Problematic inquiry

The central claim of Fogelin's Pyrrhonism is that Pyrrhonian doubts are both natural and unanswerable. That is, inquiring into the structure of justification and taking seriously our everyday intuitions about what we are right to claim to know leads us to question whether we know that much at all, in that we don't seem to be able to provide the kind of justification we intuitively require for our beliefs to count as knowledge. However all attempts to provide this justification by undertaking further inquiries into the nature of justification (apparently) fail. Certain kinds of inquiry lead us only into further inquiries, where no resolution to these inquiries in terms of a settled conclusion seems possible. One form of inquiry to which Fogelin pays particular attention are inquiries that allow us to ask any questions we like about any topics we like. I shall call inquiry of this sort *problematic* inquiry, although this term requires further clarification.¹⁴³ Let us provide this clarification by contrasting problematic inquiry with non-problematic inquiry, such as that one might find in a history class for instance.

In a history class one does not ask, because one is not allowed to ask, about whether the external world exists or whether we have knowledge of other minds or other such things. Were a student in a history class to suddenly begin to ask such questions their teacher might smile indulgently but would not likely answer them or even attempt to answer them, as the discipline of history simply presupposes that there is a world and from here supposes that we can know (or fail to know) its history.¹⁴⁴ Historical inquiry

¹⁴³ Such reflection is labelled as *problematic* precisely because it is unclear whether this reflection is internal to our everyday practice of conducting inquiries or is an imposition on these practices, where this matter is central to the current investigation.

¹⁴⁴ I know this because I have asked history teachers and been told that they would probably just laugh at such questions in a class as it would disrupt the learning process.

is non-problematic because it rules some questions out of court as a consequence of the way the inquiry is set up. Indeed to stay genuinely *historical* these inquiries must rule some questions out of court. Problematic inquiry is problematic just because it doesn't make the same move of ruling out any questions. So whenever we engage in problematic inquiry it is always legitimate for someone to ask us (or perhaps even for us to ask ourselves) any question they like.

Let us imagine how a problematic inquiry into, say, the chemical composition of a particular cup of tea might proceed. Suppose we begin this discussion by tasting the tea, and suppose that we know enough of tea to say that the tannin content is unusually high and that the tea tastes as if it has been heavily oxidised. However, because this is a *problematic* inquiry what would happen if someone were to ask 'Are you sure the tea has a high tannin content, or have you just become too used to drinking weaker teas?'. We would have to rule out the possibility that our palette has become overly sensitive to tannin due to under-exposure to it. This question will cause us no particular trouble. What if someone were to ask 'Was that really tea you tasted just now, or just an infusion from a quite different species of plant?' What if someone were to ask 'Does the tea now taste the same as it did then, or have its properties changed as it has cooled?'. We would have to address these questions also. So far things are not so bad, for while answering these questions would be time-consuming and difficult it would at least be possible. However things become much worse if a question such as 'But did you really taste the tea just now, or was the tea cup replaced with a technologically advanced copy which creates the holographic illusion of tea within the cup and feeds appropriate electrical signals to the nerves in your tongue and mouth?' At least at first glance this looks to be a very difficult question to answer, if it can be answered at all.

The important point to recognise is that it seems that not only would such questions make inquiries into the chemical composition of tea rather difficult, they would also make inquiries into any other particular empirical matter extremely difficult if not impossible. Engagement in problematic inquiry seems to eventually raise questions about the likelihood of a successful conclusion to any of our particular inquiries, in that the questions with which we can be faced are equally difficult regardless of the details

of the particular empirical matter into which we wish to inquire.¹⁴⁵ Importantly, this also seems to be the case when the matter into which we are inquiring is the structure of our everyday epistemic practices.

Traditional epistemology, accepting problematic inquiry to be a legitimate form of inquiry and thereby giving such inquiries an air of respectability, is tasked with carrying out inquiries even when faced with the possibility that such questions will be asked. The ultimate goal of carrying out such inquiries is finding some justificatory framework which can lead to the successful outcome of our inquiries *even when we do not restrict the range of questions we are allowed to ask*. Fogelin argues that while problematic inquiry raises doubts about our ability to provide the kind of justifications we seek, further problematic inquiry on these doubts cannot make them disappear. Hence we fall into what Fogelin calls Pyrrhonian doubt. Such was the conclusion of *Pyrrhonian Reflections* which Fogelin stated in the following way.

‘These reflections, then, seem to yield a dual conclusion. First, Pyrrhonian doubts are the natural and intelligible result of the unrestricted examination of our epistemic practices. Second, Pyrrhonian doubts, once raised, seem incapable of resolution.’¹⁴⁶

However, it should be noted that Pyrrhonian doubt as described here does not of itself imply any wide scale revision to all of our commitments. Pyrrhonian doubts as understood by Fogelin directly target only knowledge claims, not beliefs as such. Further, Pyrrhonian doubts only target those commitments into which we have actually inquired. As described above they do not need to be, and nor should they be expected to be, completely general doubts.¹⁴⁷ Even so, our inability to demonstrate that we do know what we pre-reflectively take ourselves to know does come with some implications, particularly as this regards the motivation we might feel to engage in inquiries aimed at grounding or transcending our everyday practices. The Pyrrhonian’s experience has taught him that such inquiries lead only to further inquiries without any real sense of progress being achieved, in much the same way that one may painfully learn that

¹⁴⁵ Where successfulness looks something like actually finding the chemical composition of the tea in a particular teacup at a particular time.

¹⁴⁶ Fogelin, *Pyrrhonian Reflections on Knowledge and Justification* 203.

¹⁴⁷ This implies that at this stage of his argument Fogelin is conceiving of Pyrrhonian scepticism as being knowledge scepticism rather than belief scepticism. Later in the chapter we shall make clear that Pyrrhonian scepticism will in fact lead to the development of belief scepticism also.

gambling as a means of extracting oneself from gambling debts generally leads only to further debts. That is, the Pyrrhonian may revise his commitment to the idea that problematic inquiry is a fruitful use of his time. In his more recent work there are signs that Fogelin has moved in this direction, as evidenced by the following statement.

‘Not only is philosophy as traditionally pursued incapable of discovering or providing the foundations it seeks, but the philosophical enterprise may itself dislodge the contingent de facto supports that our daily life depends upon. If that is so, then philosophizing in a certain unrestricted way not only reveals the precariousness of our intellectual life, but actually makes it more precarious.’¹⁴⁸

The task of epistemology when restructured to account for Pyrrhonism, to the extent that it survives at all, is to *prevent* us from inquiring into the structure of our knowledge in those ways which lead to Pyrrhonian doubts, as we have learnt that such doubts cannot be resolved by further inquiry, as least not so far.¹⁴⁹ Only by such means can the acceptability and usefulness of common sense be preserved.

In the view of the Pyrrhonian sceptic, problematic inquiry is unable to validate the knowledge claims we feel perfectly entitled to enter when engaged in our everyday epistemic practices. One interesting feature of Pyrrhonian scepticism is that it does not conclude that we ought to withdraw the knowledge claims we make when engaging in our everyday epistemic practices as a result of problematic inquiry being unable to validate these practices. However, nor does the Pyrrhonian make any straightforward claim to the effect that we are entitled to these practices, and nor does the Pyrrhonian claim that these epistemic practices are somehow normative for philosophy. Remember that the claim of the Pyrrhonian is the conditional claim that if we are entitled to our everyday practices then we are entitled to Pyrrhonian scepticism. So we can either claim to be entitled to our everyday practices and intermittently lose this entitlement to scepticism or we can deny this entitlement to everyday practices and accept an even greater scepticism. That the Pyrrhonian (in both his Classical and modern

¹⁴⁸ Fogelin, *Walking the Tightrope of Reason: The Precarious Life of a Rational Animal* 67.

¹⁴⁹ This does not commit the Pyrrhonian to the conclusion that problematic inquiry is fundamentally flawed in some way, or that it will never lead to the resolution of Pyrrhonian doubt, and nor does Fogelin ever argue for such a strong conclusion. The Pyrrhonian claim is based on past experience and so does not warrant any certain statements regarding what might be discovered in the future. In fact Fogelin explicitly says that such a strong conclusion is not warranted by the arguments he presents in *Pyrrhonian Reflections*, although the Pyrrhonian may still be left with the general impression that the prospects for success here are extremely dim. See Fogelin, *Pyrrhonian Reflections on Knowledge and Justification* p.194.

manifestations) chooses to cast himself as a defender of common sense suggests that he chooses the former option.¹⁵⁰ This naturally raises a question as to the extent of the Pyrrhonian's scepticism, and indeed whether we have any reason to take them to be sceptics at all.¹⁵¹

ii) Pyrrhonism and radical but non-general scepticism

We see from the above considerations that the Pyrrhonian develops a scepticism about epistemology, although some features of this scepticism deserve emphasis. Here scepticism, Pyrrhonian scepticism, is being taken in the same sense in which we say that someone is sceptical about the existence of witches. That is, they think that there is no good reason to think that the proposition 'that witches exists' is true. Other items about which we might be sceptical would include aliens, telepathic ability, human-caused climate change and the ability to predict the outcome of the next general election. Observe however that holding scepticism about, say, witches does not in any way imply that one is sceptical about the existence of, for instance, human-caused climate change. That is, scepticism as used here is non-general in that its target is always a particular belief the falsity of which does not imply that all or even most of our other beliefs are also false. The scepticism here is thus of a prosaic and somewhat unexciting variety, quite some way removed from what gets called Cartesian scepticism, which as has been said in the Preface is here being understood as *abstract, knowledge* scepticism.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ I have already provided several reasons to think that the Classical Pyrrhonians as represented by Sextus Empiricus saw themselves as defenders of common sense in the Preface to this dissertation, and this in turn implies that they must have allowed themselves to have some beliefs, regardless of whether they would have recognised these as beliefs as such. As will emerge in the following discussion it is also the view taken by Fogelin. Anyone familiar with the literature will recognise this is to adhere essentially to Frede's reading of Pyrrhonism and against Burnyeat, Barnes, Striker and most (but not all) other commentators.

¹⁵¹ Of particular importance is the claim that Pyrrhonism is really nothing more than exaggerated fallibilism. See Williams, "Fogelin's Neo-Pyrrhonism."

¹⁵² I am here implicitly representing Cartesian scepticism as targeting *all* knowledge (except knowledge of the cogito and other first person present sense-impressions) and this requires comment. While Broughton does defend a view such as this, it has also been questioned in Macarthur, "The Seriousness of Doubt and Our Natural Trust in the Senses in the First Meditation." Macarthur has argued that Descartes only targets certain knowledge – *scientia*. The main reason I reject Macarthur's view is that it does not explain why Descartes would use such strong language at the close of Meditation One and the opening of Meditation Two. I take this language to represent a sceptical crisis, and yet undermining *scientia* does not appear to lead to any sceptical crisis. Macarthur's reading leaves this point unexplained, and implies that Descartes is claiming far more than that to which he is entitled regarding the scope and importance of his scepticism. A further reason to reject Macarthur's view is found in the arguments presented by Gail Fine,

Because Fogelin's Pyrrhonian scepticism is non-general we must be careful to avoid any implication that a very wide range of our beliefs are false when clarifying what the target of Pyrrhonian scepticism actually is. The actual target of Pyrrhonism must be 'that engaging in problematic inquiry directed at any particular knowledge claim entered while following our everyday epistemic practices will always lead us to be secure in the knowledge claims we enter when following these practices'. Fogelin's Pyrrhonism partially consists in not accepting that this proposition is true.¹⁵³ However it could well seem that taking this to be the target of Pyrrhonian scepticism does introduce general scepticism, as this above proposition can be easily taken to include any and every knowledge claim we could enter.¹⁵⁴ Further, the above proposition can be thought to encompass propositions such as 'that there are other minds' or 'that the senses are generally reliable' or 'that the future will in general resemble the past'. It seems that if we are not able to demonstrate that such propositions are true then general scepticism does seem to follow, in that a vast number of our everyday beliefs rely for their truth on propositions such as 'that the future will in general resemble the past' also being true.

However, taking general scepticism to follow from the target of Pyrrhonism as clarified relies on several errors, which the following two observations bring to light. First, just because a commitment cannot be grounded by providing rational justification for it through some process of problematic inquiry does not imply that the commitment is

who has argued that not only did Descartes' scepticism target *all* of our knowledge it targets our beliefs also. See Fine, "Descartes and Ancient Skepticism: Reheated Cabbage?." In describing Descartes' scepticism as knowledge scepticism I take it that while I am saying less than I might I am not actually contradicting what Fine has claimed.

¹⁵³ Fogelin often mentions the idea that reflection (of a certain sort I shall further specify shortly) can cause us to doubt the trustworthiness of our everyday epistemic practices. See Fogelin, *Pyrrhonian Reflections on Knowledge and Justification* 94, 193, 195-196.

¹⁵⁴ Fogelin describes his position as a form of scepticism about philosophy, not scepticism about epistemology. This despite the fact that his immediate target is obviously epistemological in character. This leads to the conclusion that Fogelin takes it that epistemologically is prior to other fields of philosophical inquiry in such a way that undermining epistemology undermines all philosophical activity. There is some plausibility to introducing this priority, as without a clear understanding of what knowledge is it remains unclear how we could claim to know anything else, or at least could not claim to understand what we mean when we make such a claim. In any case, without the priority of epistemology there is no way to move from a failure of epistemology to scepticism about philosophy. However I do not think that Fogelin is alone in positing the priority of epistemology. This priority is evident in the structure of Descartes' *Meditations* and also in the structure of Sextus' works. I suspect that the priority of epistemology is a broadly-held thesis among many philosophers taking scepticism seriously and was a thesis to which I was introduced as an undergraduate. Wittgenstein is of course a notable exception.

unjustified, as a defender of CSN would be at pains to remind us. We could be unable to provide rational justification for a commitment and still hold it to be justified just in case the commitment was justified in some other way, by being constitutive of the proper context of rationality for instance. That is, the Pyrrhonian could actually appeal to arguments for CSN to defend himself against the claim that his scepticism is in effect general. This is interesting, for it raises that possibility of Pyrrhonism generating a form of scepticism consistent with CSN and hence as a serious challenge to the anti-sceptical thread of CSN.

Second, the target of Pyrrhonism as clarified above explicitly mentions knowledge claims we make when following our everyday epistemic practices, but for what reason do we suppose that these practices include claiming to know the principle of induction to be true or claiming to know that the ‘external world’ exists? Our everyday knowledge claims do not in general include explicit claims to know, for instance, that there are other minds or that we know the principle of induction to be true, or that our senses are reliable. We simply respond to others as if they have minds, take it for granted in our actions that the future will in general resemble the past and likewise take it for granted that we do have knowledge of the world through the senses. But in doing so we make no appeal to the principle of induction or any other such abstract principle, and indeed our ability to interact with the world as we do would be severely limited if we did. Hence rather than granting the right of problematic inquiry to judge all our commitments on the basis of its inquiries into principles like the principle of induction perhaps we ought to conclude that this judicial process is an artificial and unnecessary imposition on our everyday activity of entering knowledge claims. Wittgenstein perhaps says it best.

‘But do we not simply follow the principle that what has always happened will happen again (or something like it)? What does it mean to follow this principle? Do we really introduce it into our reasoning? Or is it merely the natural law which our inferring naturally follows? This latter it may be. It is not an item in our considerations.’ [OC 135]

‘The squirrel does not infer by induction that it is going to need stores next winter as well. And no more do we need a law of induction to justify our actions or our perceptions.’ [OC 287]

These two observations can be taken together to yield a combined argument against the idea that Pyrrhonian scepticism is general in scope. This argument would proceed first by claiming that some commitments are exempt from the range of rational justification, for one reason or another. Second would be the claim that the propositions typical of general scepticism (other minds, induction, reliability of the senses etc) form part of the content of the propositions that are exempt in this way. Third, even if these theoretical reasons to exclude such propositions fail there remains the point that questioning the propositions typically used to generate general scepticism is just not something that we *actually* do, regardless of whether we *could* do this. Hence Pyrrhonian scepticism, recognising all this and wishing to respect our everyday practices, implicitly removes such propositions from its scope.¹⁵⁵

As has been made clear in the Preface, Pyrrhonism does not need to generate sceptical problems by targeting highly abstract propositions the truth of which is implied by a wide range of other propositions. However, as we also said in the Preface, there is nothing to prevent Pyrrhonism from targeting such abstract propositions, provided that this is a coherent activity, and it has already been noted that Williams and others think it is not. Thus when the above argument suggests that Pyrrhonism reserves some propositions from its scope it may well be misrepresenting Pyrrhonism, where whether it does so is contingent on the conceptual coherence of general scepticism. If targeting a proposition such as ‘that there are other minds in the world’ turns out to be coherent then Pyrrhonian scepticism is free to make such a proposition its target. However one strength of Pyrrhonism is that it is not committed to targeting such propositions in a way that Cartesian scepticism is, in that it is possible that *abstract* scepticism is not conceptually coherent. Thus for the moment I take it to be undetermined what the actual scope of Pyrrhonism is, as the conceptual coherence of *abstract* scepticism has not been resolved, although I also believe that *abstract* scepticism is not coherent, taking my cue from Williams. In any case this thesis shall proceed on the supposition

¹⁵⁵ This suggests that Pyrrhonian scepticism is not so much scepticism about epistemology as it is scepticism about problematic inquiry. That is, Pyrrhonian scepticism is sceptical about the ability of problematic inquiry to yield positive results. It is because epistemology engages in problematic inquiry that it is singled out for special attention. However as we shall see later in this chapter we do not require problematic inquiry to generate troubling forms of scepticism. Recall the overarching point of the present chapter is to defend the idea that quite troubling forms of scepticism can emerge when we behave entirely commonsensically. Thus even if problematic inquiry is an imposition on our everyday practices such a fact (if it is a fact) cannot provide an escape from Pyrrhonian scepticism.

that the coherence of *abstract* scepticism has not yet been established and hence will read Pyrrhonism, in a conservative fashion, as being non-abstract.

Let us suppose for the moment that Pyrrhonism does make such exemptions as the above argument suggests, and consider whether this would lead to the conclusion that Pyrrhonism is not an interesting form of scepticism. I suggest that it would not. For instance, even if we grant that some commitments are not properly taken to be in need of rational justification and so remove some commitments from the reach of scepticism, some commitments still remain within easy reach of scepticism. For instance, while the commitment that my son (a toddler) has a mind may be beyond sceptical reach, it seems quite reasonable to doubt whether he really understands the content of the propositions with which I present him. That is, even once we exempt some of the commitments which seem to underpin our everyday knowledge claims from sceptical undermining¹⁵⁶ we must still leave a wide range of commitments open to sceptical undermining. Further, the non-general scepticism generated in this way clearly has the potential to effect the way I interact with the world. For instance, in the above example I would interact with my son differently if I doubted whether he genuinely understood what I say to him. That is, we do not need the full generality of Cartesian scepticism (or nearly full generality, remembering that Cartesian scepticism exempts the cogito and a few other first-person present impressions) to encounter quite troubling sceptical problems.

Hence there is still a significant scope allowed for the development of sceptical arguments even once general scepticism is eschewed. The crucial point is that avoiding general scepticism means that such sceptical arguments as can be developed must be iterative in nature, taking commitments on a case-by-case basis. We have already seen that this limitation is an important distinguishing feature of Pyrrhonian scepticism as against Cartesian scepticism, as Cartesian scepticism does involve arguments for general scepticism. We now have a clearer idea of why this must be the case. That is to say, Pyrrhonian scepticism considers one proposition at a time whereas Cartesian scepticism attempts to introduce consideration that target all the propositions we could believe all at once. Hence terms such as ‘our knowledge of the world’ (whatever that

¹⁵⁶ Either by rejecting problematic inquiry into these commitments altogether or by arguing that these commitments form proper context for the exercise of rationality, or both.

may mean, and I admit I suspect that it has no definite meaning) will not be a feature of Pyrrhonian scepticism, although they are a feature of Cartesian scepticism.¹⁵⁷

This is not to say that Pyrrhonian cannot at times be radical, for we need to distinguish being radical from being general. A Pyrrhonian is free to argue that I am not (or do not appear to be at least) in a position to claim to know anything about whether matter is partially composed of electrons, or about the colour of the ink in my favourite pen, or about...and so on. While the Pyrrhonian limits himself to considering propositions in this iterative fashion this process can be extended to include virtually all the propositions we care about. As we have noted above, there is nothing to prevent the Pyrrhonian from asking of our entitlement to any given commitment, so long as asking of this entitlement is conceptually coherent. The only limitation on this inquisitive activity derives from the practical limitations deriving from our finite capacity for actually formulating propositions for judgement.¹⁵⁸ However, we cannot conclude from the fact that there are practical limitations on inquiry that we are somehow entitled to those commitments into which we cannot practically inquire. That we cannot practically inquire into some commitments shows only another reason why we are unable to answer the Pyrrhonian's legitimate questions.

Interestingly, by limiting itself from engaging in arguments for general scepticism Pyrrhonism makes itself immune to an important argument against foundationalism which also targets the radical scepticism that foundationalism attempts to refute. This is the now familiar argument that for any inquiry to be possible some propositions must be held to stand outside the bounds of inquiry, and is of course an objection that a

¹⁵⁷ Even at its most radical Classical Pyrrhonism, i.e., the Pyrrhonism of Sextus Empiricus, did not go so far as to question the existence of the objects felt through the senses although they did go so far as to argue that we know nothing for certain about their properties, given what we know about how our senses function, or at least so I would argue. See [PH 2.72-75]. However as noted in the Preface, Gail Fine thinks otherwise. See footnote 4. The argument presented in this section parallels rather closely the sceptical arguments Hume derives from an adherence to the 'way of ideas', that is, the 18th century empiricist doctrine that we perceive ideas, not objects.

¹⁵⁸ It was limitations of this sort which seem to have motivated Descartes not to attempt this task, as he explains in the opening paragraphs of the first meditation. "So, for the purpose of rejecting all my opinions, it will be enough if I find in each of them at least some reason for doubt. And to do this I will not need to run through them all individually, which would be an endless task. Once the foundations of a building are undermined, anything built upon them collapses on its own accord; so I will go straight for the basic principles on which all my former beliefs rested." Descartes et al., *Descartes: Selected Philosophical Writings* AT VII 18.

supporter of CSN would be comfortable entering. Wittgenstein encapsulates the anti-sceptical, anti-foundationalist import of this argument in the following passage.

‘That is to say, the *questions* that we raise and our *doubts* depend on the fact that some propositions are exempt from doubt, are as it were like hinges on which those turn.’ [OC 341]

‘That is to say, it belongs to the logic of our scientific investigations that certain things are *in deed* not doubted.’ [OC 342]

‘But it isn’t that the situation is like this: We just *can’t* investigate everything, and for that reason we are forced to rest content with assumption. If we want the door to turn, the hinges must stay put.’ [OC 343]

If Wittgenstein is correct then Descartes’ foundationalist approach is fundamentally flawed, as it incorrectly assumes that all our commitments (other than the cogito and other first-person present sense impressions) can be called into question, and justified, all at once. Unsurprisingly, the general scepticism this foundationalism is attempting to refute is also fundamentally flawed, as it leaves nothing beyond the range of doubt. This reveals that the practical limits with which Descartes was concerned were not the most important limits. The most important limits, so Wittgenstein teaches us, are conceptual. Note however that this objection is not necessarily devastating for the iterative method adopted by Pyrrhonian scepticism. Since only one proposition is called into question at any time, and because those propositions that are questioned are not of the fully general type targeted by Cartesian scepticism then some propositions will always be considered to be beyond inquiry. Thus there is no reason to suppose that Pyrrhonian scepticism would have to call into question all our beliefs (excluding the cogito etc), or even all our knowledge claims, all at once.

However some further comments are necessary here regarding the perception that the preceding passage could be taken to be attributing to Wittgenstein a foundationalism at odds with what has been described above as his anti-foundationalism. The troublesome foundationalism could emerge if it were supposed that the commitments that must stand fast in any investigation are always the same commitments and in that way provide a foundation for inquiry. Yet the situation is not like this, for what stands fast in any given inquiry will do so relative to that inquiry, and hence what stands fast in one inquiry may not do so in another. This in turn means that no commitments are being

treated as foundational in the sense of being permanently and univocally removed from the range of commitments that require support. This is not foundationalism.

Hence Pyrrhonian scepticism achieves highly generalised (but not fully general) scepticism without falling prey to the objection that it attempts to call into question too much. In the case of knowledge this should be fairly obvious, as for any putative item of knowledge Pyrrhonian scepticism can ask whether we are entitled to take this to really be knowledge, provided of course that such a question can be sensibly asked at all.¹⁵⁹ This may mean that some items of putative knowledge are not questioned, for Pyrrhonism does not suppose that it does make sense to think that we can ask questions of entitlement about any item of knowledge.

Further, it should also be clear that there is nothing to stop Pyrrhonism from expanding its view beyond knowledge to include belief. This is because questions of entitlement can be as sensibly asked of beliefs as they can be of knowledge. Granted, in each case different standards will be applied when answering questions of entitlement, with the standards of belief being far lower, and thereby easier to meet, than the standards applying to knowledge. However to say that standards are lower and easier to meet is not to say that there are no standards. For instance, merely finding some commitment entertaining does not give us an entitlement to take the propositional content of that commitment to be true. Thus were it to turn out that we failed to have any entitlement to both our knowledge and our belief then Pyrrhonism would result in both highly generalised scepticism (by virtue of targeting a very wide range of propositional contents) and also quite radical scepticism (by targeting a wide range of propositional attitudes to these propositional contents). Thus by describing Pyrrhonian scepticism as radical I intend to convey the idea that Pyrrhonism is at least theoretically capable of targeting beliefs in addition to knowledge, although I have not yet shown that it does successfully undermine our entitlement to either our beliefs or our knowledge.

Again, it should be clear that as described Pyrrhonian scepticism is capable of posing a significant problem for CSN if it actually does turn out that Pyrrhonism can be derived

¹⁵⁹ Adding this final clause is necessary precisely because it is possible to ask questions that in fact have no sense but where the senselessness is not at all apparent.

from the same common sense basis as that to which CSN appeals. In this case we would either have an entitlement to Pyrrhonian scepticism or no entitlement to common sense. Either is disastrous for CSN. The question then is whether Pyrrhonism truly is commonsensical. Can one develop Pyrrhonism whilst only appealing to our everyday epistemic practices?

iii) Pyrrhonism and everyday practice

For all his radical (even if not fully general) scepticism, Fogelin still pictures the Pyrrhonian as someone who follows our everyday epistemic practices. In fact Fogelin goes out of his way to make this point quite clear in the passage below.

‘The Pyrrhonian freely participates in common epistemic practices, drawing on all the practical distinctions embodied in them. These practices are often fallible. Often this fallibility doesn’t matter, since the price of being wrong is not high. When the cost of error becomes excessive, the skeptic, like others, may seek ways to improve these practices so that the chances of error are reduced. Pictured this way, the skeptic is rather like Hume’s moderate skeptic (whom he improperly contrasted with the Pyrrhonian skeptic): cautious, agreeable, and sane.

Historically, the Pyrrhonian skeptics have targeted the philosopher as the object of their skeptical attack. Here the philosopher is understood as someone who either (1) attempts to *replace* our common fallible modes of thinking about the world with new modes that transcend them, or (2) accepts these common modes of thinking, but attempts to *ground* them in modes that transcend them.’¹⁶⁰

This claim is bound to strike us as odd, for even if we grant that the Pyrrhonian is no general sceptic, his radical scepticism will still not seem to feature in our everyday epistemic practices. Hence we might well wonder how a Pyrrhonian can be both a radical sceptic while simultaneously claiming to be an adherent of our everyday epistemic practices. To dispel the sense that the Pyrrhonian is attempting to fool us at this point he would need to argue that radical scepticism is indeed internal to our everyday epistemic practices. An obvious way in which this could be accomplished would be to argue that the form of inquiry which leads to radical scepticism is itself just another form of the kind of inquiries in which we involve ourselves as we go about our everyday practices. However it has already been suggested that problematic inquiry is an imposition on these practices, in that it inevitably generates a general scepticism at

¹⁶⁰ Fogelin, *Pyrrhonian Reflections on Knowledge and Justification* 88.

odds with our everyday practices. Hence if the form of inquiry involved in generating the radical scepticism typical of Pyrrhonism is to be internal to our everyday practices then it must be carefully distinguished from problematic inquiry. The form of inquiry which leads to radical scepticism shall be termed *radical* inquiry. The form of inquiry in which we engage when following our everyday practices shall be termed *everyday* inquiry.

In practice, defending Pyrrhonism against the claim that it artificially imposes a scepticism on our everyday practices amounts to describing the mechanism by which we move from those forms of inquiry that do not generate radical scepticism to those forms of inquiry that do in such a way that the continuity between these forms of inquiry is obvious. If you suspect that this will lead to the evaporation of the recently introduced distinction between radical and everyday inquiry, then you would be right. It will turn out that radical inquiry is really everyday inquiry in unusual (but not far-fetched) situations. While those who are already inclined towards the idea of a common sense scepticism may have no problems with this, those with no such inclination will take this to be a contentious idea, which is exactly why the distinction is being introduced. The distinction does not exist to allow us to identify a real difference, it exists to allow us to examine a form of inquiry without contentiously assuming that this form of inquiry is everyday inquiry.

As it turns out, Fogelin has shown how this is possible although arguing for this continuity leads to some interesting outcomes. One of these outcomes is that Pyrrhonism is inherently unstable, and in fact this is one of its most distinctive features. This instability results from the fact that while radical inquiry is continuous with everyday inquiry we do not always engage in radical inquiry. Yet radical scepticism only emerges when we do engage in radical inquiry. Hence while we are always prone to encounter radical scepticism, we are not always radical sceptics, or at least so the Pyrrhonians argue. As a result a Pyrrhonian will often appear to be a non-sceptic at all those times at which he is not actually engaging in radical inquiry.

However this instability is itself difficult to understand, and faces the Pyrrhonian with some problems. If the Pyrrhonian can recall that problematic inquiry did not result in the resolution of the doubts that originally motivated the inquiry, and if it also turns out

that radical inquiry fares no better, then we should also expect him to remember this. However if he can recall this point, why does the Pyrrhonian also feel equally entitled to engage in our everyday practices? Have these practices not been undermined by the results of radical inquiry, at least in all those regions to which radical reflections have extended? Given that the one undermines the other, it is difficult to understand how a Pyrrhonian could adhere to both. A useful test for the successfulness of the Pyrrhonian argument that radical inquiry is internal to everyday practice, although problematic inquiry is not, will be whether it can resolve these questions.

The precariousness of problematic and radical inquiries

i) Inquiry and levels of scrutiny

To this point problematic inquiry has been described merely by saying that it is that form of inquiry that does not rule out any possibilities which would falsify our everyday knowledge claims. Such a definition has been adequate to this stage, as the argument to this point has focused on clarifying the challenges which face Pyrrhonian scepticism. However as the argument now turns to a sustained analysis of problematic inquiry significantly more detail needs to be provided, where the first and most important detail to be mentioned is what Fogelin calls the level of scrutiny. This is required if we are to draw a clearer distinction between problematic and radical inquiry.

In order to understand what a level of scrutiny is we first need to grasp the idea that our everyday epistemic practices are carried out against the background of a wide range of possibilities which, if realised, would defeat at least some if not all of our knowledge claims. For instance the possibility that Parliament has just now mandated that all representation of the time of day conform to the French decimal system of 1793 but not informed me of this statute would, if realised, defeat the claim that I know when a certain TV broadcast will begin based on looking at a TV guide issued after the statute came into effect. That the TV guide contains a misprint would also defeat the claim that I know when the broadcast will begin based on looking at the defective TV guide. These scenarios and others like them can be arranged into a spectrum, although there is some ambiguity over what principle should determine where the different scenarios are placed in the spectrum. Some of the alternatives would be:

- i) *The range of commitments a scenario would falsify were it to be realised.* For instance the possibility that Parliament had changed our method of representing the time would, if realised, falsify all my claims to know what time it was based on reading this in some official publication. The possibility that the TV guide contains a misprint does not carry these broad consequences, as it only applies to the defective TV guide itself.
- ii) *Whether a possibility can be eliminated and how difficult it would be to do so.* For instance the possibility that Parliament have enacted a given statute without informing me is somewhat more difficult to check than whether a TV guide contains a misprint. In the latter case all I need do is consult a second TV guide and check for consistency. In the former case I would need to access the Hansard record of the daily proceedings of Parliament, and if Parliament is intentionally keeping things from me this could prove to be difficult, in exactly the way that conspiracy theorists would find compelling.
- iii) *The probability that the scenario does obtain.* For instance it is more probable that a TV guide contains a misprint than that Parliament, in a fit of revolutionary fervour, would change the way we represent time.

While in this simple example the same ordering of scenarios is given this will obviously not result in every case. That there is an ogre standing directly outside my study window at this very moment is less likely than there being a man hiding under my window at this very moment. However the presence of an ogre is easier to check than the presence of a man hiding, as ogres would be easier to see than are hiding men for ogres are (reputedly) larger than are men.

While Fogelin says less than he could on this matter what he does say indicates that what determines the place of a scenario in the spectrum is the probability that it could be realised.¹⁶¹ In our everyday epistemic practices we usually set aside all scenarios with probabilities of being realised that we deem to be too low. For instance it is possible but highly improbable that someone has disconnected my keyboard from my

¹⁶¹ At least, so it seems. Fogelin doesn't explain this concept in terms of probabilities speaking instead of possibilities. However the talk of some possibilities being more distant than others does lead one to think in these terms. However as we shall see there are some reasons to think that Fogelin has something else in mind.

computer and that the letters now appearing on my screen are doing so at random. I have dismissed this possibility and assume that my keyboard is functioning normally, although I admit that I have not actually checked the connections to make sure that things are as I assume them to be. A higher level of scrutiny requires that we consider even scenarios with a low probability of being realised. A lower level of scrutiny requires that we only consider scenarios with a higher probability of being realised. The level of scrutiny thus defines how far along the spectrum we need to go before we arrive at scenarios which we deem to have too low a probability of being realised to be worthy of our consideration.

No doubt many will find this concept of a level of scrutiny to be unacceptably vague, for several reasons. First, what would a probability of, say, 0.76293 really mean to us, and how fine-grained are the probability calculations of which we are capable? Second, if the spectrum here is a smooth spectrum then how are we able to set a limit at all without falling prey to slippery-slope arguments and other objections related to vagueness? Third, how would we determine the probability that, say, we are a brain in a vat? In fact scenarios such as that we are a brain in a vat, in that they are systematically ineliminable, either seem to apply everywhere or only as a limiting case as we have no means of determining the probability that they do obtain. Clearly such scenarios do not in practice enter into our thinking all the time, so how is it that systematically ineliminable possible defeaters ever enter into our thinking? As the probabilities attached to scenarios involving these defeaters are unknown it must be that these scenarios become relevant when the level of scrutiny rises to an unrestricted level where all scenarios are taken seriously regardless of their probability. Systematically ineliminable possible defeaters thus emerge as a limiting case for the level of scrutiny, in that they only emerge when the level reaches its highest possible level. Finally, just because the probability attaching to these scenarios is unknown, wouldn't we need to consider them, just in case they do obtain?

The solution to some of these puzzles is that even granting that the level of scrutiny is defined in terms of probability it is not as if we explicitly determine the probability that a scenario obtains before deciding whether it is worthy of our consideration. Rather than making any such explicit judgment we simply find that the level of scrutiny is set for us when we engage in any kind of inquiry. This in turn implies that grasping where

the level of scrutiny is set is simply part of knowing how to properly engage in a process of inquiry. The more general point is that every practice in which we might engage occurs against a background of possible defeaters which we could consider but do not, and that learning how to engage in a given practice includes learning which defeaters are to be ignored and which are to be considered.

Recognising this allows us to see that thinking of the spectrum as being organised in terms of explicit probabilities is a mistake. Talk of probabilities is actually a reflection of what we have learned to pay attention to by being immersed in a shared practice. The possible scenarios against which our everyday practices take place may have specific probabilities of being realised, but that is not what determines whether we find them to be salient. That we find some scenarios to be salient and not others is a fundamental fact of the way we live our lives, not to be explained by reference to anything else other than the nature of our practice.

Speaking specifically of the practices involved in using language, Fogelin indicates that he takes this perspective when he speaks approvingly of Wittgenstein in the following way.

‘Wittgenstein is saying that we accept things, believe them, and act on them, in the face of identifiable risks that we could eliminate but do not. He further claims that this is simply how we employ our language, and accepting this is essential for a proper understanding of how our language works.’¹⁶²

Take another example drawn from the functioning of my computer keyboard. When I sat down at my desk this morning and began typing at my keyboard I did not first check that the keyboard was connected to the computer. But nor did I consider the possibility that the keyboard was not connected too low to bother with. In fact I made no determination one way or the other. I simply started typing, and would suggest that anyone who did routinely consider all the ways in which a keyboard could fail to function and eliminated each of these before attempting to use the keyboard does not really know how to use a keyboard properly.¹⁶³ I demonstrate my knowledge of how to

¹⁶² Fogelin, *Pyrrhonian Reflections on Knowledge and Justification* 92.

¹⁶³ This would not be the case if computer keyboards proved to be chronically unreliable. In such a case one would anticipate that the level of scrutiny would in general be set somewhat higher than it is currently. In this case correct use would require some checking for reliability.

properly use a keyboard by just using it, and by not dwelling on certain possible ways in which it might fail. Analogously, I demonstrate that I know how to properly enter knowledge claims not by checking to see that every possibility which could falsify my knowledge claim fails to obtain but rather by just entering knowledge claims in the face of these possibilities.

This is not to say that the level of scrutiny does not fluctuate as we engage in our everyday practices, for it obviously does. However when it does shift there will be a good reason for it shifting, and particularly for it shifting upwards. A paradigmatically good reason would be the observation that a possibility we had previously considered to be too remote had in fact been realised. In such a case the level of scrutiny will automatically rise such that it encompasses this suddenly relevant possibility, thereby making relevant certain other scenarios also.

This means that explicating the level of scrutiny is something we can only do *after* we have begun to *act*, and in consequence of which practices have been carried out successfully in the past. With this description of the level of scrutiny in place we can now more precisely describe problematic inquiry as that form of inquiry which is undertaken at a maximally heightened level of scrutiny. That is, when involved in problematic inquiry we do not consider any scenario too improbable to be worthy of our consideration. That means that problematic inquiry will be distinctive from all other forms of inquiry by it taking seriously systematically ineliminable possible defeaters, as these defeaters are only considered at a maximally heightened level of scrutiny.

However from what has been said above it should be clear that we do not necessarily engage in problematic inquiry on the basis of antecedent inquiries which take seriously any uneliminated possible defeaters to our knowledge claims leading us to conclude that we ought to move to this heightened level of scrutiny. We should not expect that the level of scrutiny would shift to an unrestrictedly high level based on such an observation, for two reasons. First, although raising the level of scrutiny is important in terms of getting things right and demonstrating due caution and attention, there is also a real practical cost to raising the level of scrutiny. This practical cost includes the opportunity costs of not being able to carry out other important activities if all our time is dedicated to one inquiry. At some point getting things right will become less

important than engaging in other activities we take to be important, and at this point we will cease raising the level of scrutiny. I suggest that these pragmatic considerations lead to a default level of scrutiny at which our inquiries begin and at which they stay unless some further consideration becomes relevant. Second, while no observation can count decisively against a systematically ineliminable scenario no observation can count in favour of such a scenario either. By hypothesis such scenarios are always consistent with any observation we make, and so cannot be confirmed or disconfirmed by any experience. Thus merely being aware of systematically ineliminable possible defeaters does not provide a reason all by itself to raise the level of scrutiny sufficiently high to consider these scenarios.

ii) Engaging in problematic inquiry

If when engaged in everyday practice the level of scrutiny at which we operate is raised consequent to us beginning on an inquiry, and not based on antecedent reflection on the ways our knowledge claims can go wrong, then how is it that we do come to engage in problematic inquiry? That is, what observations would lead to the level of scrutiny reaching a level where no probability is considered to be too unworthy of our consideration, and hence lead us to consider systematically ineliminable possible defeaters. As it turns out, according to Fogelin merely reflecting on the level of scrutiny at which we have been operating in the past tends to raise the level of scrutiny and lead us to engage in problematic inquiry. We have already seen that part of properly enacting our everyday epistemic practices entails excluding a wide range of scenarios that would falsify our knowledge claims were they to be realised. However mere exclusion does not mean that these possibilities are not realised, as the memory of our own errors tells us. But what happens if we start to consider all the ways in which we could go wrong in our knowledge claims?

According to Fogelin we will, *as a matter of fact*, begin to doubt. Imagine that upon walking into my study in the morning and sitting at my desk but before I start typing at my keyboard I think about all the ways in which the keyboard may have stopped functioning properly since I last used it. Maybe the connection has come loose, maybe tea has been spilt on the keyboard causing a short-circuit, maybe someone has scrambled the relationship between the letters on the keys and the signals sent to the

computer. Now that I am aware of these possibilities what should I do? Should I do anything? I believe I should do something, and it is fairly easy to see what this something should be. I should test the keyboard, perhaps by typing out the alphabet on a blank document, and checking that the letters come out in the correct order. That I find this a perfectly reasonable thing to do on this particular morning indicates that the level of scrutiny has shifted, and hence that following everyday epistemic practice requires that I take seriously possibilities I had not previously considered. But what else could have caused this shift in the level of scrutiny but explicitly considering that I had not ruled out various scenarios which would falsify my claim to know that the keyboard would work? That is, reflecting on everyday epistemic practice, and particularly those aspects according to which we do not consider various scenarios which if realised would force us to withdraw some claims or act differently.

However to this point it has been argued that the level of scrutiny does not, or at least does not *typically*, rise as a consequence of antecedent inquiry into the ways our knowledge claims could go wrong. Yet antecedent reflection of exactly this sort is what Fogelin indicates is involved in encouraging us to engage in problematic inquiry. After all, it is not as if I actually observed some problem with my keyboard in the above example and that as a result of this observation the level of scrutiny was raised to include probabilities that had previously been excluded. Even if this process of raising the level of scrutiny begins with some observation it is unclear exactly what such an observation might include. It would surely have to be of an extraordinary nature to warrant moving to an unrestrictedly high level of scrutiny, and the more extraordinary this observation is the more problems the necessity of it creates.

If the observation that originally impelled us into problematic inquiry is extraordinary it is also likely to be quite rare, and this will not do. For problematic inquiry to be the kind of activity we can pursue in a systematic fashion we need to have some control on how it begins, and when it begins. Relying on rare observations to get problematic inquiry underway fulfils neither of these criteria, and nor does it make sense of our experience. Problematic inquiry is one of the most structured and systematic of activities, going hand-in-hand with a focused mind and freedom from distraction. That is why it is important, even necessary, that we remember that no observations of any kind are necessary for problematic inquiry to begin, and insist that reflection alone is

sufficient to provide this impetus, as reflection is the kind of thing that can fall under our own direction. However this means that the way in which problematic inquiry develops is markedly different from the way our more everyday inquiries develop. This lends support to the idea that problematic inquiry is an imposition on our everyday practices. Hence, even if problematic inquiry does generate scepticism this would not in itself indicate that scepticism could be both serious and continuous with our everyday practices, as it remains a possibility that problematic inquiry is an imposition on our everyday practices. Troublingly, it also suggests that radical inquiry may also be an imposition on our everyday practices, at least to the extent that it is also motivated independently of any actual observations.

iii) Unserious scepticism and problematic inquiry

We have now arrived at an appropriate place at which to consider arguments in favour of the idea that problematic inquiry generates scepticism. We shall see that the scepticism that these arguments generate is always unserious scepticism. As our goal is the development of serious scepticism these arguments are not immediately useful except as a means of drawing attention to the correct way of arguing for serious scepticism. Given the way that problematic inquiry has been defined above these arguments can be presented in a fairly straightforward way, for all that is required for scepticism to be inevitable is that we be unable to secure our knowledge in the face of systematically ineliminable possible defeaters to our knowledge claims. Possibilities such as these are raised for us in well-known sceptical scenarios such as those involving the possibility that we are dreaming or are a brain in a vat.

To aid efficiency we can introduce the following schematic argument for scepticism, and ask whether this argument can be defeated when systematically ineliminable possible defeaters are allowed into the argument. The basic set-up for arguments for scepticism is as follows.

- 1) If p, then not-q
- 2) S knows that (if p, then not-q)

3) If S knows that p, then S knows that not-q¹⁶⁴

This conditional allows for both a *modus ponens* and a *modus tollens* to be applied, and we ought to consider which on these we ought to accept

Modus Ponens (the anti-sceptical case)

If S knows that p, then S knows that not-q

S knows that p

Therefore, S knows that not-q

Modus Tollens (the sceptical case)

If S knows that p, then S knows that not-q

S does not know that not-q

Therefore, S does not know that p

Let us suppose that:

p = I am typing at my keyboard

q = I am dreaming

So then, which of the above two cases ought to be accepted, the sceptical or the anti-sceptical case? The answer to this question can be given very easily, as it is *ex hypothesi* impossible that one could know that one is not dreaming.¹⁶⁵ From this it is

¹⁶⁴ Note that this way of setting up the sceptical argument assumes the truth of the principle of closure under known entailment. While this principle has been questioned by Dretske and Nozick in my judgement the result of denying the principle is simply the development of another form of scepticism.

¹⁶⁵ Whether this *ex hypothesi* assertion is in fact reasonable has been challenged, notably in J. L. Austin and G. J. Warnock, *Sense and Sensibilia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962). In that work Austin insists that while we might say the same things about dreams and waking experiences we should not be led astray into thinking that this way of speaking reflects how things really are. There is, he asserts, a 'dream-like' quality that we recognise in dreams but not generally in waking experience. Austin may well have been right, although his point will not convince the sceptic who will simply ask why we associate this 'dream-like' quality with cases of deception and the opposite quality with accurate perception. Nor does Austin limit his comments to dreams in this regard, criticising philosophers for too quickly assuming there is 'no qualitative difference' between two perceptions when there really is such a difference. More recently the assertion that we can never *know* that we are not dreaming has been provided with a vigorous defence, with which I am sympathetic, in Barry Stroud, *The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism* (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1984) pp.19-27. The crux of Stroud's reconstruction of Descartes' argument is that to know that we are not dreaming

clear that the non-sceptical case is unacceptable for it incorrectly assumes that we can know that we are not dreaming. With this case unavailable we are thus forced to accept the sceptical case.

Clearly, an extremely wide range of propositions can be substituted for p whilst holding q fixed. In fact on a liberal interpretation of what is involved in dreaming we could let $p =$ that we are dreaming and coherently substitute for q any belief about the state of affairs in the world around us. In fact if we understand dreaming to include the possibility that our beliefs are invented by us then we may even be in a question to call into question the belief that the world around us includes physical objects like busses, televisions and tea. We could well have merely imagined that such objects existed.

This also suggests that basing arguments for scepticism on systematically ineliminable defeaters invites the move to general scepticism about all knowledge claims hinging on references to matters of fact in the world around us. True, this does not necessarily warrant fully general scepticism as it may be that there is some knowledge that is immune to such sceptical arguments as it could perhaps be known even if we are dreaming. Necessary truths known *a priori* suggest themselves as possible objects for this special kind of knowledge. However even with such truths exempted from these arguments we are still facing a scepticism of an uncomfortably broad scope.

It is also quite clear that all the work being done in this argument is being done by the idea that the possibility that we are dreaming is systematically ineliminable. Without this feature we would not so easily be able to dismiss the anti-sceptical case, as it would always be possible that we would be able legitimately show that we do have knowledge by showing that the relevant possible defeaters do not obtain. This is precisely the way that we would attempt to secure *a priori* knowledge or perhaps knowledge of necessary truths. As indicated, that the defeator invoked in the above argument is systematically

we would need to carry out some test to show that we are not dreaming. However to trust the results of such a test we would need to know that we had carried out the test while we were not dreaming, and this does not appear to be something that the test itself could tell us. So we would need a further test, and then yet another test for the further test. That is, once we accept that knowing that we are not dreaming is a condition on knowing in general then, Stroud argues, we cannot know. I take it that Stroud's argument has in this case carried the day against Austin's, given that it is commonplace in epistemology to attempt to refute the sceptic by other means than by appealing to the different 'feel' that dreams have to waking experience.

ineliminable is also what provides some encouragement for this argument to be generalised. Systematically ineliminable possible defeaters can easily be constructed (and usually are constructed) such that they undermine the justification available for a wide range of possible knowledge claims.

However, while it is relatively straightforward to generate scepticism if systematically ineliminable possible defeaters are allowed to form the foundation of the sceptical argument the scepticism generated in this way cannot possibly be taken seriously (in the sense in which that this term is used in CSN). To see this imagine what would result were this highly generalised scepticism taken seriously, where to take scepticism seriously requires that it change the structure of our commitments to account for our sceptical conclusions. In this case all beliefs about any state of affairs in the world around us would have to be withdrawn. For instance I would have to withdraw any beliefs I might have about what words are currently displayed on the screen of my computer, whether my hands are currently in contact with the keyboard or whether my wife is now standing in front of me telling me that dinner is ready. Yet withdrawing all such beliefs is clearly an untenable position, and CSN has a simple explanation of why this is so. Fully general scepticism fails to recognise that there are natural commitments to which we are entitled, as explained in chapter 1. Yet if we are entitled to these commitments, and if these commitments contradict the conclusions of any arguments for scepticism based on systematically ineliminable defeaters, then we can safely disregard such sceptical arguments. If our natural commitments include such commitments as that the senses are generally reliable, that there are other minds etc then they would indeed appear to contradict the conclusion of sceptical arguments based on systematically ineliminable defeaters.

What then of the fact that arguments for the above scepticism seem to many to be entirely watertight? This I take is one of the deeper problems facing CSN, and it is the problem that our natural commitments do not seem to be appropriately related to the demands of reason. Why for instance do we not derive an entitlement to any commitment we take to be rationally justified, as we might well take the conclusions of the above sceptical arguments to be? Surely reason demands that we have such an entitlement as the very notions of rationality and entitlement suggest that rationality grants entitlement. Why does CSN violate this? I admit that I can think of no warrant

for allowing this violation. Note also that while the above scepticism is the locus for the problems of rationality and entitlement that beset CSN, the possible rationality of this form of scepticism is not the real issue. The issue is that CSN allows for the possibility that we could take some commitment to be rationally justified and not take ourselves to be entitled to it. It is one thing for CSN to say that rational justification is not necessary for entitlement, but it is quite another to say that it is not sufficient. The above scepticism merely happens to be the relevant example of this troubling move.

iv) Elimidable defeaters and scepticism

While the above version of scepticism may be common and interesting in its own right it is not the form of scepticism with which Pyrrhonism is concerned. As has been said, Pyrrhonian scepticism need not rely on systematically ineliminable defeaters. While it is conceivable that it can generate general scepticism, were Pyrrhonism to do so it would have to be through the iterative analysis of all our beliefs. Hence as a first step towards developing a form of Pyrrhonian scepticism we must develop a scepticism that does not rely on systematically ineliminable possible defeaters. We have already seen that radical inquiry has been defined as that form of inquiry which allows for all possible defeaters except those that are systematically ineliminable, hence ruling out some logical possibilities in the setting up of an inquiry. Hence, we need to develop arguments for scepticism that only require us to engage in radical inquiry.

This will have several consequences, the first of which will be that both generalisation and radicalisation become more difficult. Generalisation from an eliminable defeater is difficult because the number of possible ways available to us for eliminating a possible defeater is directly proportional to the scope of that defeater.¹⁶⁶ For instance the possibility that all the books in my study have been replaced by holographic replicas is of broader scope than that one book in my study has been replaced by a holographic replica, but also far easier to eliminate. Eliminating the possibility that all my books have been tampered with in this way could be accomplished by checking any book in my study to see if it is a replica, as all I require to verify that this scenario does not obtain is only that I find one book which is not a holographic replica. There are thus as

¹⁶⁶ This is clearly not the case for ineliminable possible defeaters.

many ways of verifying that this scenarios does not obtain as there are books in my study. However, eliminating the possibility that one book in my study has been replaced with a holographic replica requires that I check each and every book until either the suspect hologram is found or all books have been checked.

If the ease of determining whether an eliminable possible defeator obtains is linked to the number of ways available to us by which this can be determined, and it seems intuitively plausible that there is such a link, then the generality of scepticism generated by appeal to possible defeators will be linked to the ease with which this scepticism can be dismissed. Hence when one deals with eliminable possible defeators it seems that general scepticism will be easily dismissed. This is another reason why Pyrrhonian scepticism ought to avoid general scepticism. However, we must not confuse radicalness and generality, for at this point they have different structures.

Using the same argument schema we developed for scepticism based on ineliminable possible defeators, we can examine how arguments for scepticism develop when only eliminable possible defeators are allowed into the equation.

- 1) If p, then not-q
- 2) S knows that (if p, then not-q)
- 3) If S knows that p, then S knows that not-q

Let us suppose that:

p = The book-shaped objects on the bookcase are books

q = The book-shaped objects on the bookcase are fake books¹⁶⁷

Inserting these values into the above argument we can ask ourselves what we would normally feel ourselves entitled to claim when we are considering the book-shaped objects on the book-case. Specifically, do we feel ourselves entitled to claim to know that these objects are indeed books? I believe that we do, and that we do so even though we do not normally check to see that these book-shaped objects are fake books used for decorative purposes. Hence, all other things being equal the anti-sceptical *modus*

¹⁶⁷ Such as for instance one might find on a movie set, designed to provide a room with an air of respectability, learning and tradition.

ponens case will seem to be the most appealing. Indeed, someone who customarily examined the books-shaped objects on every bookcase they came across just to make sure that these objects really were books would be thought to be behaving quite strangely, unless they had some good reason of course.

This at least describes our default behaviour as it were, all other things being equal. But what happens when other things are not equal? For instance, what would happen if specific observations come our way indicating that we have ignored a relevant possibility? For instance, imagine that while perusing a bookcase in an unfamiliar house one comes across a book-shaped object with an interesting title, Hobbes' *Leviathan* perhaps, and takes the book-shaped object down from the shelf for a closer look. Knowing that a friend of yours is looking for some literary entertainment you call out to her and say 'Hey, I've found some books to read'. Next, one attempts to open the book-shaped object to see if the editor has retained the original spellings, only to find that the object cannot be opened, and is indeed a fake book. Surprised at the quality of the fake, one looks at the bookcase again, and wonders whether the other book-shaped objects are also fake books. Taking another book-shaped object off the shelf at random, one finds that it too is a fake. At that moment your friend in the other room calls to confirm that you have indeed found some entertaining books to read. In such a circumstance, how would one normally respond?

I believe one would not respond to the query with a strong affirmative statement. Instead one might respond by saying 'Actually, I'm not sure, its all a bit weird' or 'Well, maybe, but I don't really know yet'. That is, the appropriate response would be to distance oneself from making any firm knowledge claim one way or the other. This indicates that the *modus ponens* form has suddenly become less appealing. After all, it is not as if one has verified that all the book-shaped objects are fake books and so it remains an open possibility that some of them might really be books. However the level of confidence we express will reflect our further discoveries. Taking a series of even three or four book-shaped objects at random and finding them all to be fake books

would, I believe, remove all our confidence that the bookcase had any books on it. At this point the *modus tollens* form has become appealing.¹⁶⁸

So what does this indicate? First, it indicates that radical scepticism can be generated about specific targets (such as whether the book-shaped objects on a given bookcase are actually books) by appealing solely to eliminable possible defeaters. Further, such scepticism can be generated fairly easily, provided it is coupled with specific observations. However this creates an immediate problem, for it seems that it is only possible for such scepticism to emerge if highly specific and unusual observations are made first.¹⁶⁹ However it has been consistently argued that one of the defining features of Pyrrhonian scepticism is that it can emerge as a result of reflection alone, and need not rely on any observations for its emergence to be possible. An associated concern we might have here is that as scepticism based on eliminable defeaters requires specific observations be made in order to be motivated, not only will this scepticism be non-general it will actually be severely limited in scope. The only things we could be sceptical about would be those things we can observe not to be the case. This leaves very little space for any interesting scepticism.

A further concern might be that the apparent scepticism generated on the basis of eliminable possible defeaters is merely apparent, being in fact a version of fallibilism masquerading as scepticism. The driver for this concern would derive in part from the connection between radical scepticism and observation. If this scepticism really is as limited in scope as it appears then the only moral we could draw from it of general scope would be that some of our knowledge claims might be unwarranted, and that close observation would confirm or disconfirm this. As a result, when we make knowledge claims we should do so in the full awareness that further observation might show them to be unwarranted.¹⁷⁰ But as we have said, this is clearly a form of fallibilism, not scepticism.

¹⁶⁸ However observe that in this circumstance we may also remain sceptical about whether we have any right to claim to know that the bookcase in question contains only fake books. It would after all be a highly unusual circumstance if this were the case, and we have not actually checked every book in the bookcase. Hence this sequence of events should not lead us to a form of negative dogmatism.

¹⁶⁹ A similar problem was observed to emerge in the case of problematic inquiry.

¹⁷⁰ This objection has been launched against Fogelin's Pyrrhonian scepticism, in particular by Michael Williams. See for instance Williams, "Fogelin's Neo-Pyrrhonism."

The solution to both these concerns can be found by further examining the mechanism that is involved in the move from the observation that things are not what they seem to the conclusion that some of our knowledge claims are unwarranted. As will be shown, this mechanism allows for the possibility that just a few observations of such circumstances obtaining can lead to scepticism emerging which is far broader in scope than the observations which originally motivated in would seem to allow. Appeals to the level of scrutiny play a crucial role in the explaining this mechanism.

v) *Interlude: An objection from Williams*

At this point it is necessary to address a concern regarding Pyrrhonian scepticism that has been raised by Michael Williams. Williams' concern is that Pyrrhonian scepticism is at root nothing more than a version of fallibilism.¹⁷¹ Ultimately I find this objection ungrounded because it applies an unrealistic standard of what it is for some philosophical position to amount to scepticism. To see both the objection and the standard that any position would have to meet to qualify as scepticism that Williams applies we can examine the following statement.

'It is no affront to common sense to point out that there are lots of things we don't know about and never will. The relevant evidence is fragmentary or nonexistent and its defects will never be repaired. Nor will scepticism be a serious threat if its generality consists only in claiming that *any* belief can be called in question, given suitable stage setting. This too is something we can easily live with. A serious form of philosophical scepticism must issue a negative verdict on all our claims to knowledge. It must judge them collectively, not severally.'¹⁷²

The concern at the heart of Williams' objection is not difficult to discern from the above passage. As Williams sees it, for some philosophical position to qualify as being genuinely sceptical it must judge our claims to knowledge 'collectively, not severally'. It is not enough, on this reading, to simply go about questioning this belief or that, this knowledge claim or that. As he says at another point, scepticism targets (and must target) the very possibility of knowledge, and not merely whether any given piece of

¹⁷¹ This is only one of the objections to Pyrrhonism that Williams has, the other important objection for present purposes being that raising the level of scrutiny changes the direction of analysis rather than just alerting us to previously disregarded possibilities of error.

¹⁷² Williams, "Fogelin's Neo-Pyrrhonism," p.3.

putative knowledge is actually knowledge.¹⁷³ It would seem to follow from this that the mere fact that Pyrrhonism is iterative and does not question the possibility of knowledge warrants the claim that it is not genuinely sceptical.

Given his previous attempts at a refutation of scepticism there are reasons for Williams to take such a view. The argument Williams presents in *Unnatural Doubts* relies crucially on the claim that knowledge does not form one coherent subject for philosophical analysis. Instead, Williams favours a contextualist approach to understanding knowledge, arguing that it is not possible to conceive of knowledge as one coherent entity without first accepting some contentious theoretical commitments regarding knowledge itself. However, as Pyrrhonism makes no such commitments it cannot be accounted for by providing this sort of theoretical analysis.¹⁷⁴ Thus another approach must be developed, and Williams arrogates to himself the right of not having to account for Pyrrhonian scepticism by arguing that it is not really scepticism after all. Quite cleverly, Williams argues that the downfall of scepticism is generality and then builds generality into the definition of scepticism.

But are Williams' standards too high? Granted, Williams is surely right that it is 'no affront to common sense that there are lots of things we don't know about and never will'. But why do we have to suppose that in order to generate something that is an affront to common sense we need to question the very possibility of knowledge. Surely common sense consists not just in the claim that we *could* know many things. Common sense tells us that we *actually do* know many things, and this is where Pyrrhonism has some bite provided it can call into question a sufficient number of commitments. Common sense can indeed tolerate ignorance attaining some scope, but there are limits to this toleration.

Does Pyrrhonism content itself with the claim that there are some things we don't know about and never will? I suggest that it does not. Instead, the claim of Pyrrhonism (treating Pyrrhonism, for rhetorical purposes as makings claims, which of course it does not actually do) is that each time our entitlement to any specific knowledge claim has

¹⁷³ Ibid.: p.2.

¹⁷⁴ Williams concedes this point about the lack of theoretical commitment in Pyrrhonism. See Ibid.: p.146.

been examined the result has been that this supposed entitlement cannot be grounded. In fact that entitlement is always undermined. The Pyrrhonian challenges us to take any commitment we like, and try to show that we are entitled to either believe or know it. As it turns out, every time we attempt to provide some warrant for this entitlement we end up undermining this entitlement.

The deeper challenge of the Pyrrhonian then is for us to explain how it is that we have the entitlements we normally take ourselves to have, if we have them. That is, Pyrrhonism challenges our understanding of our own entitlement claims, not the possibility of knowledge as such. For all we know, we may have entitlement to all our regular knowledge claims and there is nothing to stop the Pyrrhonian conceding that knowledge really is possible. The point though is that it is not enough that knowledge be possible, it is not enough that we might actually happen to know things, and it is not enough that we happen to have an entitlement to our knowledge claims. For any philosophically reflective rational agent, satisfying the demands of reason requires that we explain to ourselves how it comes about that we have the kind of everyday entitlements that we commonsensically think we do, and this is what the Pyrrhonian thinks we continually fail to do.¹⁷⁵ Perhaps the moral of the story ought to be that we should avoid philosophical reflection about common sense, but that ship seems to have sailed and we now have no choice but to press on.

In any case, the challenge over entitlement with which the Pyrrhonian presents us is no mere fallibilism. Further, the pressing nature of this challenge also suggests that the standard Williams applies to scepticism needs careful handling. Either that standard does not capture something essential to scepticism or a philosophical position does not need to be sceptical to create the kinds of consequences we normally associate with scepticism. I suggest that given the complications associated with the latter, we ought to choose the former and conclude that Williams has imposed an unfair criterion in his analysis of Pyrrhonism. Pyrrhonism, when correctly understood, is no mere fallibilism.

¹⁷⁵ Granted, this is an explicitly internalist demand and so one that will not convince the externalist. However given the radically different basic intuitions about what is required for entitlement that exist between the internalist and externalist I do not see how an internalist could ever convince the committed externalist or vice versa.

Even so, there is something right about Williams' critique of Pyrrhonism. This is that even though Pyrrhonism does manage to be sceptically problematic it is only so for those who both attribute some *prima facie* authority to common sense and also engage in philosophical reflection on common sense. Yet this need not, and does not, include everyone. There are both people who never engage in philosophical reflection and there are also those who take a revisionary attitude towards common sense. To such as these Pyrrhonism need pose no problems, and will be taken as trading on unnecessary philosophical commitments regarding both common sense and the role of philosophical reflection. Hence when directed towards those not having such ideas about common sense and reflection Williams basic conclusion regarding Cartesian scepticism would also stand against Pyrrhonism. However I take it that much contemporary analytic philosophy does attribute some authority to common sense and takes it that the goal of philosophical inquiry is the refinement of common sense. To such as these Pyrrhonism is problematic.¹⁷⁶

Pyrrhonian scepticism and reflection

i) Reflection and levels of scrutiny

It cannot be argued that Pyrrhonian scepticism can be generated on the basis of reflection alone. Observations of some sort are required. However because of our ability to remember past instances in which observation has pushed us into radical but tightly constrained scepticism, it makes sense to think that these observations could be quite general in their consequence. The mechanism by which the memory of past instances in which observation has pushed into radical but tightly constrained scepticism being reapplied to new circumstances is fairly straightforward. What seems to happen is that in recalling these past instances we also recall that the circumstances surrounding our observations did not indicate that these instances would turn out to be unusual in any way. In the bookcase example above, it is assumed that we have a general familiarity with bookcases and that the specific bookcase with which we are presented appears to be a normal run-of-the-mill bookcase. We only react with surprise and suspicion because nothing warns us that our circumstances are in any way unusual.

¹⁷⁶ This also suggest that Williams criteria that scepticism be 'natural' must be also be applied with case as what is 'natural' is a relative matter.

The circumstances that lead to radical (even if constrained) scepticism do not announce their presence until they are actually upon us. In this regard there is a similarity between the circumstances in which we find ourselves at present and those past circumstances that led us to radical scepticism, and this similarity applies equally to any circumstances in which we might find ourselves in the future.¹⁷⁷ This raises the possibility that our circumstances at present are such that with a moments notice they could lead us down the path to radical scepticism. However if our knowledge claims turned out to be unwarranted in those past circumstances then it is possible that the knowledge claims we make at present could also turn out to be unwarranted.

Granted, unless observations indicating the falsity of some specific knowledge claims have already been made then the emergence of radical scepticism seems to only be a mere possibility. Indeed, the recollection of the similarity between our present and future circumstances and those past instances that sparked off radical scepticism cannot mandate that our current knowledge claims are untenable. At most it warrants a benign form of fallibilism. One cannot present valid deductions from the fact of previous error to the certainty of present error. How then does anyone arrive at Pyrrhonian scepticism in a logically acceptable way? To see exactly how this radical emerges we must look to where our everyday practices actually lead us when we begin to reflect on our past errors, at which point we need to again return to the idea of levels of scrutiny.

As we said earlier, our knowledge claims are entered against a background of possible defeaters which would undermine our knowledge claims if they were realised but which we do not check. The level of scrutiny at which we are operating describes the range of possible defeaters we consider relevant to our ability to coherently enter knowledge claims. That is, we do not feel ourselves entitled to enter knowledge claims unless we have checked to see whether some possible defeaters obtain, where the level of scrutiny describes the range of these relevant defeaters. It is reasonable to suppose that reflection on the ways in which our circumstances have in the past turned out to be

¹⁷⁷ Note that this recollection does not amount to the deployment of the ‘Best Case Scenario’ argument made famous by Descartes and forcefully critiqued by Williams. The conclusion of that argument is that because we lack knowledge in the best possible case, we lack knowledge in all other cases. The argument from recollection does not warrant the conclusion that we lack knowledge presently, as only an observation could show that.

different from what we have supposed could raise the level of scrutiny at which we operate. For instance, reflecting on the ways in which normal seeming bookshelves have deceived us in the past could incline us to be suspicious of previously unencountered normal seeming bookcases in the future. Such suspicion might perhaps manifest itself in us customarily picking one book shaped object at random to see whether it is a genuine book.¹⁷⁸ Looking again at the process which led to radical scepticism first being introduced we can now see that it is actually the heightening of the level of scrutiny which does all the work in opening the door to radical scepticism. In fact if the level of scrutiny is raised sufficiently high then suspicion will always follow as there will be some scenario which we do feel needs to be eliminated but which has not been eliminated.

Hence, if such suspicion did manifest itself in this way then it would be a clear indication the level of scrutiny had been raised to include scenarios that had previously been disregarded. However it must also be emphasised that the level of scrutiny does not rise in this instance as a result of an explicit decision to raise it, due to an antecedent recognition that it ought to be raised. Instead, as a result of recollecting those times at which our circumstances have been other than what we supposed we simply find ourselves considering scenarios that we previously dismissed. Rather than raising the level of scrutiny, we would do better to render this into the passive voice and say that the level of scrutiny is raised for us. Hence talk of the level of scrutiny being raised is actually offering a description of how we are inclined to act after reflecting on circumstances we have previously encountered.

Importantly though, it seems that the level of scrutiny at which we are operating with regard to one knowledge claim has an impact on the level of scrutiny at which we operate with regard to other knowledge claims. The factors that seem to control how much impact is actually exerted are the height to which the level of scrutiny is raised with regard to the knowledge claim originally undermined by observations and the

¹⁷⁸ I say that such previous experiences might lead to such action rather than that they would because the character of the individual having these experiences seems to be an important feature when considering whether scepticism will emerge. Some people seem to be immune to any scepticism, and some are prone to scepticism. As will be argued later in the thesis, epistemology has paid insufficient attention to this personal aspect to the development of scepticism.

perceived similarity of the original knowledge claim to other knowledge claims.¹⁷⁹ Having a number of beliefs undermined by observations in effect increases the scope for judgements of similarity to have effect. That is, having the level of scrutiny raised because of observations about book-shaped objects also can bring along with it a heightening of the level of scrutiny we apply to judgements about car-shaped objects, computer-shaped objects, pen-shaped objects or any other objects we deem to be relevantly similar to books. If a heightened level of scrutiny is extended in this way then finding oneself inclined to verify whether some book-shaped object really is a book will be associated with an inclination to check whether the pens on the desk really are pens.

If this is correct then we have a clear mechanism whereby radical but tightly constrained scepticism generated on the basis of specific observations can be extended to target knowledge claims not originally connected with these observations, This in effect decouples observation from the scope of the resultant scepticism, at least to a significant extent. However observation still retains a pivotal role in providing the impetus for radical scepticism and also in shaping the range of knowledge claims to which this scepticism extends. For instance observations concerning perceptual errors about small objects may not impact our feeling warranted in claiming to know the shape of large objects. Similarly, observations concerning flaws in theoretical constructions in ethical theory need not impugn the entitlement we *feel* have for theoretical constructions in the physical sciences. However, the entitlement any one person will feel themselves to have will vary depending of their previous experiences and so may not track their actual entitlement. What we need to further clarify then is whether felt entitlement always track actual entitlement. Are these perhaps actually the same thing?

What we need to know now is whether the form of reflection involved in recollecting those times when circumstances have deceived us is an imposition on our everyday practices. Specifically, what we require is some account of how the shift to a heightened level of scrutiny can be accounted for in terms of the norms of inquiry that

¹⁷⁹ It is important to recognise that it is perceived (i.e. subjective) similarity which is relevant here. Shifts in the level of scrutiny are highly sensitive to individual psychologies and past experiences. Hence the way the level of scrutiny shifts for one person will not allow us to predict in precise terms what will happen when another person encounters the same observations.

govern our everyday inquisitive practices. But first it is necessary to deal with an objection to this sort of analysis that has again be raises by Michael Williams.

ii) Another objection from Williams, and a partial response

The second major objection Williams raises against Pyrrhonian scepticism, as represented above, is that raising the level of scrutiny does more than just increase the range of scenarios that we find to be salient. According to Williams, raising the level of scrutiny changes the direction of analysis and generates new forms of inquiry. This is indeed a serious objection for if true it would seem to suggest that the radical inquiry that Pyrrhonism requires to generate radical scepticism is after all an imposition on our everyday epistemic practices. Hence if Williams is right then Pyrrhonism is not common sense scepticism, in fact raising no particular problems for common sense at all. In generating radical scepticism, all the sceptic has shown is that certain sorts of philosophical reflection, including radical inquiry, are problematic and not that reflection *as such* in problematic. Williams claims that

‘[t]he sceptic’s fallacy is that he takes the discovery that, in the study, knowledge of the world is impossible for the discovery, in the study, that knowledge is impossible generally. He infers the impossibility of knowledge from what is, at best, its instability.’¹⁸⁰

Williams point is that reflection carried out ‘in the study’ is by no means the same thing as reflection carried out ‘in the street’, and conclusions gained in one context cannot always be applied to another context. Hence even if knowledge turns out to be impossible in one context this cannot be used to ground the more general claim that knowledge is impossible in another context, where this is precisely what the sceptic does. I shall call contexts in which one cannot draw such conclusions as the sceptic needs *epistemically independent*. Note that Williams’ point here cannot be avoided by the Pyrrhonian merely on the grounds that Pyrrhonism does not question the possibility of knowledge in general, as has been explained. Williams’ statements imply that even if our entitlement to some specific piece of knowledge in one context cannot be accounted

¹⁸⁰ Williams, *Unnatural Doubts: Epistemological Realism and the Basis of Scepticism* p.359. Williams makes a great many interesting comments on this matter in the first chapter of that same work.

for this does not mean that we are unentitled to that specific piece of knowledge in another context.

That in some contexts our entitlement to our commitments cannot be accounted for has already been suggested, with the context of radical inquiry providing one such context. For Williams' argument to be made good against the Pyrrhonian then it would have to be the case that everyday inquiry and radical inquiry can be sharply distinguished as different contexts. Without these contextual differences the distinction between the instability of knowledge and the impossibility of knowledge will collapse. So then, can the argument that everyday inquiry and radical inquiry are different contexts be sustained?

In one sense these are clearly different contexts as each considers a different range of questions to be legitimate as each operates at a different level of scrutiny, and this is all that Williams needs for contexts to be epistemically independent. Yet even if the context of everyday inquiry is epistemically independent of the context of radical inquiry (and to reiterate, I think it is not) we do still not get the conclusion that Williams requires. This is because the shift from the context of everyday inquiry to that of radical inquiry is a shift that is mandated by the character of everyday inquiry itself. That is, inquiring commonsensically can in some circumstances lead us into radical inquiry.

Let us suppose that Williams is correct and that radical inquiry does not represent our 'actual' epistemic state in which we are bound by the host of practical concerns that we normally have to consider. Let us also suppose that everyday inquiries can leave us knowing and reasonably believing all sorts of things. From this does it follow that the perspective of radical inquiry represents our 'actual' epistemic state? Indeed it does not. Does it also follow that the perspective of everyday inquiry does represent our actual epistemic state? No it does not. No one perspective represents our 'actual' epistemic state, if by that we mean that that our 'actual' epistemic state is the one that is abstracted from any practical or discipline-specific considerations.¹⁸¹ One of Williams'

¹⁸¹ By discipline-specific considerations I have in mind the considerations that discourage the historian to consider the possibility that the world popped into existence 30 minutes ago, complete with historical textbooks.

central points is that such considerations are always an inherent part of our epistemic state, which is exactly why in his view appeals to raising the level of scrutiny cannot do all the work in generating Pyrrhonian scepticism.

And yet that we can in fact move easily from everyday to radical inquiry is easily shown, and has been shown in the preceding passages. Further, that it is so easy seems to be important. In fact one of the lessons of the preceding account is that radical inquiry appears to be nothing other than everyday inquiry carried out in unusual circumstances. This is not a deceptive impression, although this appearance need not trouble Williams. This is because Williams is still free to reply with the claim that all the ease of this shift shows is that radical inquiry has an almost hypnotic appeal and is *deceptively* commonsensical but not actually so. Thus an adequate response to Williams' objection can only be given by showing that radical inquiry and everyday inquiry present two aspects of what is actually the same form of inquiry. If this can be shown then either we should rename radical inquiry as everyday or everyday as radical, and it doesn't really matter which we choose. The overarching point is that what are apparently two forms of inquiry is actually two aspects of one form of inquiry.

For this to be shown a criterion for distinguishing between forms of inquiry other than by appealing to the level of scrutiny characteristic of that form of inquiry needs to be established. After all, radical and everyday inquiries really do operate at different levels of scrutiny. More precisely, what we need is an account describing how it is that we come to move to higher levels of scrutiny such as has already been provided, for that is only one half of the story. What we also need is an account of how it comes about that we move back down through levels of scrutiny after they have been raised, and of why we are sometimes reasonably resistant to the level of scrutiny being raised at all. What we need is a common feature of both everyday and radical inquiry which accounts for why levels of scrutiny differ in each case without leading to the conclusion that these are quite separate forms of inquiry.

Of course none of this addresses Williams' concern, although it does at least establish what would be required, and these requirements are indeed demanding. Nonetheless they can be addressed, and the following section is dedicated to meeting these requirements by providing a more complete account of inquiry. It will emerge in the

course of this analysis that everyday inquiry and radical inquiry are unified by being responsive to the same norms. In fact each simply gives expression to these norms in different circumstances. This explains why shifting to problematic inquiry is so easy and in part also explains why Pyrrhonian scepticism is also a constant threat without being our constant state.

iii) Levels of scrutiny and norms of inquiry

Reflecting on the fact that some investigations strike us as forced and unserious suggests that our inquiries may be governed by norms that direct us not to engage in some inquiries in some circumstances, even if it is possible for us to begin such inquiries. More precisely, there seem to be norms that control where the level of scrutiny is set and hence tell us which scenarios we are to take into consideration. I believe these should be constructed in something like the following way.

- *The level of scrutiny should be set to include all those scenarios that seem salient, but no higher than this.*
- *Inquiries should be made into any scenarios that do seem salient to ascertain whether or not they actually obtain*
- *Inquiries should not be made into any scenarios that do not seem salient if such inquiry interferes with inquiries into scenarios that are taken seriously, taking opportunity cost associated with inquiry into account.*

The first and second norms carry the same force as Lewis' *Rule of Attention*, rewritten into the terminology of levels of scrutiny and salience.¹⁸² Lewis' deploys this rule as part of a broader strategy of determining what scenarios we are properly allowed to ignore, where part of his answer to this is that we are not allowed to ignore any scenarios to which we are actually paying attention. In my terminology we are not allowed to ignore any scenarios that we actually find salient, where the scenarios that we find salient are just those that capture our attention. However I also want to expand Lewis's comments on this rule such that it explicitly tells us not just what we may not ignore but also what we may ignore. Hence the third norm above states that we may

¹⁸² David Lewis, "Elusive Knowledge," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 74, no. 4 (1996): pp.559-560.

ignore any scenario that we do not find salient, or in Lewis' terminology, we may ignore any scenario to which we are not currently paying any attention.

Does this not mean that we can disarm scepticism by simply paying it no mind, thus ensuring that the scenarios used by the sceptic never actually become salient to us? If so, is this not too easy a victory against the sceptic? In one sense, scepticism can be disarmed just this easily, although this is not ultimately anti-Pyrrhonian point, for the Pyrrhonian will be quick to point out that we can only defeat Pyrrhonism *so long as* we can continue to pay no mind to those scenarios to which the Pyrrhonian appeals. But this, so claims the Pyrrhonian, is not something that we can actually do and here again we can appeal to another of Lewis' rules, the *Rule of Resemblance*.

Lewis' *Rule of Resemblance* states that if one scenario may not be properly ignored then any scenario that resembles this un-ignorable scenario can also not be ignored. The previous description of the way in which the level of scrutiny comes to be raised actually appeals to the same features of our experience that Lewis is appealing to in developing this rule. However there are also differences in the way that Lewis' rule is applied. In particular, Lewis introduces what he admits are entirely *ad hoc* restrictions to the rule that are explicitly formulated to rule out the possibility of scepticism.¹⁸³ By contrast, I do not assume that we can so blithely rule scepticism out of court in such a manner. In fact I believe that we cannot do so and hence have no need of *ad hocery*. Further, Lewis focuses on scenarios which, if realised, would generate Cartesian scepticism; scenarios such as that we are radically deceived by an evil demon for instance.

It must be conceded that when placed in the context of Cartesian scepticism and questions over the very possibility of knowledge then Lewis' *ad hocery* has some limited plausibility. However we do not need forced resemblances with the scenario that we are at the mercy of some deceiving demon to raise the level of scrutiny sufficiently high that we lose any entitlement to knowledge that we may previously have had. On the contrary, the Pyrrhonian has insisted that all we require is

¹⁸³ Lewis goes further and admits that he sees no way of removing the *ad hocery*. I take it that this is the (unrecognised) lesson of scepticism. We believe that it must be possible to avoid scepticism but cannot understand how we are entitled to do so.

resemblances between our current circumstances and those circumstances in which we found ourselves just a moment before Pyrrhonism broke out or could have broken out. In this context *ad hocery* looks far less plausible. It may be *possible* that we could know things, and this is not something that the Pyrrhonian would dispute. What the Pyrrhonian would dispute is whether, given resemblances between our actual circumstances and circumstances in which we would clearly have no entitlement to knowledge, we *actually* have an entitlement to knowledge in our *actual* circumstances.¹⁸⁴

Returning then to the earlier question, do the three norms identified in this section imply that scepticism can be disarmed just by paying it no mind? The answer is yes it does imply this, provided we can actually pull off the feat of ignoring the scenarios relevant to the emergence of scepticism. We *may* be able to do this for Cartesian scenarios, but we cannot consistently do this for Pyrrhonian scenarios. In this respect our epistemic situation is somewhat worse than Lewis supposes, for while Lewis does recognise that there is some instability in knowledge he supposes that we can intentionally avoid this instability. This is because Lewis believes that it is epistemological investigation that reveals the instability of knowledge, and that

'[u]nless this investigation of ours was an altogether atypical sample of epistemology, it will be inevitable that epistemology must destroy knowledge. That is how knowledge is elusive. Examine it, and straightaway it vanishes.'¹⁸⁵

However, if the *Rule of Resemblance* does not require the invocation of any scenarios that we would associate with uniquely epistemological investigation then it will not be only epistemology that destroys knowledge by inviting the emergence of Pyrrhonian scepticism. Everyday musings about resemblances between our current circumstances and circumstances in which we lose our entitlement to knowledge will do. While it is true that such musings will not warrant any general denial of the possibility of knowledge and will be contingent on our actual experiences for their plausibility, this is

¹⁸⁴ As an additional note, I think that everything that Lewis says in this paper can be subsumed under his rules of *Resemblance* and *Attention*. Lewis notes the possibility of redundancy in his analysis. I think that redundancy is more than a possibility.

¹⁸⁵ Lewis, "Elusive Knowledge," p.560.

quite enough to give us pause. Indeed knowledge is elusive, far more so than is often recognised.

This section was originally directed towards answering an objection that was raised by Williams regarding a possible contextualist response to Pyrrhonism. We should now be able to see how this response would develop. Like Lewis, Williams thinks that it is actually an unusual feature of epistemological inquiries that does all the work in generating sceptical problems for us. Yet while this sounds plausible if we think in terms of Cartesian scepticism it is not so obviously true if Pyrrhonian scepticism is our concern.

Cartesian scepticism is most naturally cast as asking questions of us that have a distinctly epistemological ring about them. Questions such as ‘are my first-person present impressions causally related in the right sort of way to whatever objects that cause them’ are an excellent example of this, and if we were to introduce questions of this sort then Williams’ objection that we have changed the direction of the analysis will gain some traction. However, referring to the identified norms (or to Lewis’ rules, appropriately modified) allows us to see that the questions with which the Pyrrhonian presents us are not of the same sort. The Pyrrhonian merely asks ‘Given the resemblance between your current circumstances and other circumstances in which you have turned out to lack knowledge, for what reason do you suppose that you are entitled to knowledge now?’ This question does not come with the same epistemological and metaphysical commitments as we find in Cartesian scepticism. There is no appeal to the priority of first-person present experience and no theory of perception that implies some kind of experiential ‘gap’ between the world and the perceiving agent. In fact all that the Pyrrhonian requires is that the identified norms or rules are the actual rules according to which we conduct our inquiries.

So then, in what way is the Pyrrhonian changing the direction of the inquiry when he presents us with this resemblances and questions which start us on our path to Pyrrhonian scepticism? I suggest that there is no sense in which the Pyrrhonian is doing this, once Pyrrhonism is correctly understood. Take again our example of sitting in a history class. Were a student to ask ‘Teacher, how do you know that the world didn’t pop into existence just five minutes ago’ then the teacher might reasonably respond by

saying that they are studying history, and that when doing so such questions are ruled out of court. That is, they might take the student to be changing the direction of inquiry. But what if the student says ‘Teacher, isn’t it the case that you have drawn conclusions from similar evidence in the past and been wrong? How then can we trust you in thinking that your judgment in this case is correct?’ This does not seem to change the direction of inquiry, as the answer might be given in terms of appealing to issues of historical method, strength of sources etc. That is, the question could be both scepticism-inducing and historical. At least, that is what the preceding analysis of the way in which the level of scrutiny can be raised was intended to show.

Williams’ objection, while powerful when directed against the Cartesian, has no force when directed at the Pyrrhonian because radical inquiry just is a version of everyday inquiry. This is guaranteed to be so because the Pyrrhonian exploits features of our everyday way of going about our inquiries that, in the right circumstances, can lead to our entitlements to knowledge and even reasonable belief being undermined.

iv) Further norms: the judgement of experts

That the norms identified above correctly describe our inquisitive practices can be confirmed by applying them to a further specific example. To be of most use we ought to look at an example in which our normal inquisitive practices break down and see whether the identified norms can account for why this occurs. As we shall see, the identified norms do a fair job of accounting for our everyday inquisitive practices, and certainly do all the work that Lewis’ rules are designed to do, but are not by themselves sufficient. At the end of this section the outlines of a further norm shall be introduced. In the present circumstances it is useful to reapply an example that was originally introduced by Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein’s example is as follows.

‘Imagine that a schoolboy really did ask “and is there a table there even when I turn around, and even when *no one* is there to see it?” Is the teacher to reassure him – and say “of course there is!”?’

Perhaps the teacher will get a bit impatient, but think that the boy will grow out of asking such questions.’ [OC.314]

‘That is to say, the teacher will feel that this is not really a legitimate question at all.

And it would be just the same is the pupil cast doubt on the uniformity of nature, that is to say on the justification of inductive arguments.- The teacher would feel that this was only holding them up, that this way the pupil would only get stuck and make no progress.- And he would be right. It would be as if someone was looking for an object in a room; he opens a drawer and doesn't see it there; then he closes it again, waits, and opens it to see if perhaps it isn't there now, and keeps on like that. He has not learned to look for things. And in the same way this pupil has not learned how to ask questions. He has not learned *the* game that we are trying to teach him.' [OC.315]

'And isn't it the same as if the pupil were to hold up his history lesson with doubts as to whether the earth really...?' [OC.316]

'This doubt isn't one of the doubts in our game. (But not as if we *chose* this game!)' [OC.317.]

OC.315 is of particular interest, for it is here that Wittgenstein notes that the questions the troublesome student asks must strike us as being illegitimate, and concludes from the fact that the student asks such questions that he has 'not learned *the* game we are trying to teach him'. But in order to derive such a conclusion Wittgenstein must take it that regarding such questions as illegitimate is constitutive of *this* game.¹⁸⁶

In this above example the ostensible error of the troublesome student is to raise questions about the past existence of the earth in the midst of a history lesson that presupposes that the earth did indeed exist in the past. The immediate problem with this example however is determining who in this example has made a genuine mistake and why. The troublesome student seems to be asking a perfectly legitimate question that we have no trouble understanding. Taking this question in itself it is unclear why it does not deserve an answer. On the other hand the teacher in this example also seems to be correctly carrying out his duties *qua* history teacher. Were he not to dismiss the troublesome student's question then his other students will learn nothing about history. The question is whether the identified norms can account for this dynamic.

I submit that the identified norms are (partially) sufficient to the task. The norms identified earlier instruct us to inquire into any scenario that we genuinely find to be salient, but no other scenarios. If the troublesome student genuinely finds his question to be salient then the norms of inquiry will instruct him to inquire into the scenario that

¹⁸⁶ This is not to say that Wittgenstein is in any way a foundationalist, as was discussed in chapter 1.

makes this question possible.¹⁸⁷ Let us suppose that the scenario involved here is that the world popped into existence half an hour before the history class started.¹⁸⁸ However the teacher, *qua* history teacher, by definition does not and cannot find this scenario to be salient. To take the troublesome student's scenario seriously would make carrying out his duties as a history teacher impossible, as learning anything about history presupposes that we take it that the world did really exist in the past. From the perspective of the teacher then, the troublesome student's question should definitely be ignored and hence, again from the perspective of the teacher, he acts rightly in refusing to address the question. The reason why we have trouble identifying what has gone wrong in this example is that neither major party here has acted improperly in that both have embodied a respect for the norms that govern inquiry. To this point the identified norms do seem to give the correct account of the structure of our inquisitive practices.

However if these norms tell the entire story then it would seem that we are at an impasse as no inquisitive process can continue as the two relevant agents have both acted correctly and yet call for incompatible inquiries to be undertaken. Yet clearly an impasse would not actually result in this classroom, as those scenarios taken to be salient by the teacher would take precedence and the history lesson would in fact continue. To account for this we need to introduce a further norm (or norms) that can resolve clashes over what is taken to be the most relevant scenario.

Recognised experts may exclude from discussion any scenarios as they see fit, provided that the relevant expert does not find these scenarios to be relevant.

When we consider Wittgenstein's example of the troublesome student we see that ruling a range of scenarios out of consideration is in fact vital if any of our inquiries are to be carried out. The identified norms do a fair job of explaining how the range of these scenarios comes to be set. It also turns out that the breakdown of an inquiry can be accounted for in terms of the violation of these norms. Finally, we see in the above example more clearly than we did earlier that the violation of these norms comes with

¹⁸⁷ Let us suppose that the student does genuinely find this question to be salient. Note that the norm of inquiry identified in chapter 3 would suggest that the troublesome student could even come to find the scenario embodied in this question to be commonsensical. If the troublesome student does not take the scenario that drives his question to be salient then he is clearly in violation of the norms of inquiry and the story stops here.

¹⁸⁸ There are in fact a number of scenarios that our troublesome student could have in mind.

clear sanctions. In the example above were the troublesome student to continue to press his question then the teacher would eventually have to take action, either firmly requiring that he remain silent for the duration of the lesson or, if necessary, asking him to leave the class. That is, not only will the violation of these norms bring with it judgements of irrationality, it will also come with more practical sanctions.

v) *Further norms: memory and scepticism*

Let us take as a brief case-study the following plausible candidate for a general norm of behaviour: *Trust Memory*. Let us also examine this likely candidate to see whether the same sceptical conclusions that have been derived above seem likely to follow from its application. Are we entitled to this norm, and what would follow if we are?

When examining practices the focus needs to fall on the consequences of engaging in some practice. For instance the practice of trusting memory could lead us to believe that the Wallabies had played a brilliantly entertaining style of Rugby against the All Blacks in a Bledisloe Cup match, based on the memory of sitting in the bar with friends and watching the match. If these events really did happen then we might be inclined to say that the practice of trusting memory is justified. If this is so, then we might also be inclined to make the further claim that the natural commitment to practice in such a way so as to trust memory is warranted, or that we are entitled to practice in this way.

And yet circumstances can be found in which it is not entirely obvious that we are entitled to the particular practice of trusting our memory. Put another way, for what reason do we have some entitlement to respect the norm '*trust memory*'. Our memories may well be quite unreliable and we need not refer to 'sceptical' scenarios to recognise this. Differences in first-hand testimonies between different people viewing the same event suggest that our memory does not function as an unbiased record. We seem to remember some events quite vividly whilst other events are not noted at all. Moreover, what we remember is often coloured by an interpretation that we have given to an event, one for instance that reinforces what we already believe to be true; that the Wallabies play an entertaining style of Rugby for instance. Any of these factors could render our memory unreliable in any given instance, and none of them is in any way outlandish. Further, any of these factors could be at work without us being aware of it

or in fact ever becoming aware of it, perhaps even while we are sitting at a bar with friends. However if one is still unconvinced then cases of Alzheimer's or senile dementia, neither of which is uncommon, do most definitely render memory unreliable.¹⁸⁹

For what reason then do we suppose that we are entitled to respect the norm '*trust memory*'? We can grant that we do respect this norm and hence that we do practice in such a way as to trust our memory. We can grant that we do take ourselves to be entitled to practice in this way, and even that we must (psychologically and pragmatically) respect this norm and hence practice in this way. However even granting these points the question of entitlement retains its force, as being psychologically or pragmatically compelled to practice in a given way, as we have already claimed, does not of itself say anything of an epistemic nature. But entitlement is an epistemic matter.

Implications of Pyrrhonism thus understood

i) The force of Pyrrhonism and a challenge for reason

If Pyrrhonism really can be developed from the above norms or rules then this presents a rather interesting challenge to us regarding how we conceive of the authority of reason. This can be brought out if we consider how we would judge those who flagrantly violate these norms, although first a possible misconception must be addressed. It might be supposed that such violation would be impossible because the level of scrutiny will automatically be set to include those scenarios that seem salient. However, to conclude that the level of scrutiny could never fail to be set at exactly this level is to overlook the possibility that we could attempt to shift the level of scrutiny at which we are operating by some sort of post-hoc conscious effort. For instance we could attempt to ignore certain scenarios that present themselves to us in a particularly salient way or we could give full consideration to scenarios that do not present themselves to us in a particularly salient way.

¹⁸⁹ Observe also that it is also not uncommon for someone in the early stages of either of these diseases to be unaware of this.

Take first those who in practice ignore scenarios that actually do seem salient to them by not undertaking the necessary investigations into whether these scenarios obtain. That is, they artificially attempt to set the level of scrutiny lower than it is naturally set. Such people are thought to lack intellectual integrity, in addition to being careless and irresponsible. More forcefully, they can also be thought to be irrational in that they refuse to investigate possible scenarios that they would admit to themselves are highly relevant to their knowledge claims. What is interesting about this though is that the apparent irrationality is only temporary, as Lewis (in a very Humean fashion) observes.

‘If you brought some hitherto ignored possibility to our attention, then straightway we are not ignoring it at all, so *a fortiori* we are not properly ignoring it. How can this alteration of our conversational state be undone? If you are persistent, perhaps it cannot be undone – at least so long as you are around. Even if we go off and play backgammon, and afterwards start our conversation afresh, you might turn up and call our attention to it all over again...You know as well as I do that continued attention to this possibility impedes our shared conversational purposes. Indeed, it may be common knowledge between you and us that we would all prefer it if this possibility could be dismissed from our attention. In that case we might strike a tacit agreement to speak just as if we were ignoring it; and after just a little of that, doubtless it really would be ignored.’¹⁹⁰

At the beginning of the process Lewis describes we are pictured as following the correct norms correctly and would be judged to be rational. Likewise at the end of the process Lewis described. But what is happening in the transition? Are we still acting rationally? I suggest that we are not, for we are ignoring a scenario that does appear salient to us, and we have no warrant for this sort of ignoring. Granted, ignoring this scenario may be required of our shared conversational purposes, and hence not ignoring it is rather inconvenient. Yet why suppose that *these* conversational purposes are the ones to which we ought to be directing our attention? Ought not our conversational purposes be directed by the demands of reason, and do not these demands direct us towards the inconvenient scenarios?

As noted, the interesting feature here is that irrational behaviour, if persisted with for long enough, eventually becomes rational behaviour. This seems rather odd, for how can persistence in irrationality ever become rational? The solution to this puzzle is that reason successively provides warrant for both sceptical and anti-sceptical positions.

¹⁹⁰ Lewis, “Elusive Knowledge,” p.560.

Neither can claim to represent our final epistemic state, and neither can defeat the other as they are equally rational. Exactly how this comes about, and the important role played by common sense in developing the unusual dynamic is the focus of considerable attention in chapter 3.

That deals with those who would attempt to artificially lower the level of scrutiny through some *post-hoc* conscious effort, but what of those who would attempt to artificially raise this level? Such people inquire after scenarios regardless of whether they are ignored, properly or otherwise, and we have (not very nice) terms to describe such as these. We call these pedantic, nit-picking, impractical and engaging in inquiries of a purely ‘academic’ character (in the negative sense of that term). We generally show them little patience and consider their inquiries to be irrelevant. In extreme cases we label this behaviour as neurotic or paranoid and treat it by clinical means. That is, we regard people who undertake such inquiries to be acting irrationally, once again suggesting that there is some connection between the identified norms and the structure of reason.¹⁹¹

With this said, we can now ask whether the shift to a heightened level of scrutiny envisaged here can be accommodated within our everyday practices. I believe that what has been identified above as norms of inquiry partly describe what it is to act rationally in any context. The above norms tell us that once a scenario strikes us as salient, once we cannot in good conscience ignore it, then we have no rational grounds for ignoring this scenario. Indeed, we are under a rational obligation to inquire into the possibility that such scenarios actually obtain and will normally feel ourselves to be unwarranted in claiming entitlement to knowledge (and perhaps reasonable belief depending on the exigencies of the case) until it has been shown to our satisfaction that these scenarios do not obtain. Thus, judging by these norms Pyrrhonism is both rational and commonsensical.

ii) *Irreducible instability*

¹⁹¹ Interestingly, if inquiries into scenarios that do not seem salient are undertaken as an innocent pastime then while odd this would not be irrational. However if such inquiries are undertaken in such a way as to preclude inquiries into scenarios that are taken seriously then it may be reasonable to consider such inquiries to be irrational. Hence, in both cases the violation of the above norm allows for the possibility that the violator of this norm can be judged to be irrational.

The above analysis of Pyrrhonism implies that our entitlement to knowledge and reasonable belief is an unstable matter. In this respect Lewis is quite right, for doing epistemology does rob us of our entitlement to knowledge. However, I have attempted to show above that we need not engage in anything we would recognise as being distinctly epistemological for this to result. Engaging in everyday inquiries is a risky business in this respect, as even it can lead us into Pyrrhonian scepticism.

However we ought not get carried away with these conclusions, for the above analysis does not imply that we ought always to be Pyrrhonian sceptics. Lewis is right again in saying that we can avoid the force of sceptical considerations by ignoring them – so long as we following certain rules that govern when ignoring a scenario is appropriate. In fact, Lewis does not go far enough, for not only are we right to sometimes ignore some scenarios, we are also right not to go searching for sceptical scenarios. This was the force of the third norm I developed above.

This matches rather well with the phenomenology of sceptical doubt. Even those who are prone to feel the full force of scepticism do not do so all the time, although we must accept the reality that they do so sometimes. Moreover, even those who have been prone to feel the full force of scepticism, such as Hume in the *Treatise* for instance, have not come to regard being perpetually trapped in sceptical doubt as a rational stance. Nor have they concluded that being perpetually immune to scepticism is a rational stance. The above analysis suggests why this might be the case. Neither Pyrrhonism nor anti-Pyrrhonism represents our final epistemic position, although both is equally rational.

Thus we are left with the conclusion that sometimes we ought to be Pyrrhonian sceptics, and sometimes we ought not be. However where Lewis is wrong is that the force of this normative consideration derives from the demands of reason and not from pragmatic considerations as he supposes. That is, responding to the demands of reason leads us to both Pyrrhonian scepticism and thoroughly anti-sceptical positions. However what this analysis has not provided is some way of integrating these two quite different perspectives, and this is because there really is no way in which these perspectives can be integrated. Each is, after all, equally rational.

While this might leave us with a certain amount of dissatisfaction I remain unconvinced that this dissatisfaction is reasonable. The dissatisfaction we might feel could reflect nothing more than an unwarranted assumption that we have the ability to understand ourselves, and I see no reason why this must be the case. Indeed, I believe we need to be more Humean on this point, and adopt the perspective on these matters that he expresses in the following way.

‘When we see, that we have arrived at the utmost extent of human reason, we sit down contented; though we be perfectly satisfied in the main of our ignorance, and perceive that we can give no reason for our most general and most refined principles, beside our experience of their reality; which is the reason of the mere vulgar, and what it required no study at first to have discovered for the most particular and most extraordinary phenomenon. And as this impossibility of making any further progress is enough to satisfy the reader, so the writer may derive a more delicate satisfaction from the free confession of his ignorance, and from his prudence in avoiding that error, into which so many have fallen, of imposing their conjectures and hypotheses on the world for the most certain principles. When this mutual contentment and satisfaction can be obtained betwixt the master and scholar, I know not what more we can require of our philosophy.’ [T.xvii]

iii) Conclusion: The challenge of Pyrrhonism

The shift to a heightened level of scrutiny has been legitimised by appeal to a respect for norms of inquiry that do not require any special philosophical commitments to move us to Pyrrhonian scepticism. It turns out that not involving ourselves in these inquiries would in the right circumstances be irrational. We have also provided a mechanism by which raising of the level of scrutiny as a consequence of specific observations can come to have consequences for knowledge claims not originally involved with these observations. It has also been shown that if the level of scrutiny is raised to a sufficiently high level then radical scepticism can result. Together these make it clear that deriving a radical scepticism even while respecting the norms that govern our everyday behaviour is quite comprehensible. Essentially, the argument to this point has been that *if* certain uneliminated but eliminable possible defeators become salient to us then reason demands that we withdraw any claims we have to be entitled to knowledge (or even reasonable belief, depending of the exigencies of the case). To reiterate, if Pyrrhonism emerges in the way described in this chapter then it

will be *radical, serious, rational* and *commonsensical*. If one wishes to defend CSN, then Pyrrhonian scepticism must be taken very seriously. In fact the only obvious way forward at this point would be to concede that CSN is in fact an inherently sceptical position or abandon CSN completely.

CHAPTER 3

Hume's Title Principle and perspectivist scepticism

Outline

This chapter develops a 'perspectivist' account of the place of scepticism in our intellectual lives, inspired in large part by the work of David Hume.¹⁹² Chapter 2 has already established that Pyrrhonian scepticism is radical, serious and commonsensical because the shift to a heightened level of scrutiny is driven by features of our everyday epistemic practices and not by prior dispensable philosophical commitments as Williams supposes. However chapter 2 also raised difficult questions over whether Pyrrhonian scepticism could truly be rational, in that it does not appear to be rationally integrable into a common sense perspective. If Carol Rovane is correct to argue that personhood is derived from our ability to rationally integrate our beliefs, desires, etc, then the presence of legitimate sceptical doubt that cannot be integrated into an overall integrated view offers nothing less than a challenge to personhood.¹⁹³ Some have been tempted to view sceptical doubt as an insertion of irrationality into an otherwise rational life, perhaps thinking of them as moments of temporary insanity.¹⁹⁴ However chapter 2 has already shown why this will not do, in that the Pyrrhonian is simply applying the standard norms of inquiry in generating Pyrrhonism. Thus if we are entitled to the norms that govern common sense, and if we are to judge Pyrrhonism to be an instance of madness, then we must also judge the common sense perspective to be insane. At least, such would be the judgement of the Pyrrhonian and there is no reason yet to favour one perspective over the other. Chapter 3 turns to Hume to better understand the dynamics involved here as he does an excellent job of not allowing these tensions to collapse into a false consistency.

¹⁹² The reason for placing 'perspectivist' in scare-quotes is to indicate that no philosophically loaded account of perspectivism is intended, and especially not any claim invoking the idea that the truth of the matter is relative to the context from which we make truth-claims. Briefly, the reason that the perspectivism here, essentially Hume's perspectivism, doesn't collapse into a philosophically loaded version of perspectivism is it remains uncommitted as to whether there are good reasons to privilege one perspective over another. In the absence of good reasons to privilege one perspective over others the perspectivism here refuses to grant for instance that the objective view is any better than the subjective view, or that the 'philosophical' view is better than that of 'common sense', or *the opposite*.

¹⁹³ Carol Rovane, "Rationality and Persons," in *The Oxford Handbook of Rationality*, ed. Alfred R Mele (Oxford: Oxford Univ Pr, 2004).

¹⁹⁴ This seems to be Reid's view, or at least one of Reid's views. He seems to have had several.

The best way of approaching Hume's account of the place of tension in our intellectual lives is by first examining the best arguments, drawn from Hume, supporting the contention that common sense is normative and anti-sceptical. As it turns out the same arguments that support this thesis would also grant normativity to Pyrrhonian scepticism. However the arguments presented for the normativity and seriousness of scepticism do not overturn arguments to the effect that scepticism is not serious and not normative. Faced with the normativity and seriousness of both scepticism and non-scepticism the second part of this chapter attempts to develop a Hume-inspired perspectivism. This is necessary if we are to make sense of the place of scepticism in our cognitive lives.

An interesting consequence of the analysis that follows is that virtually everything that has been said recently by Don Garrett in his recent paper on this matter can be accepted – everything that is except the claim that Hume is at most a mitigated sceptic.¹⁹⁵ That is, this analysis takes advantages of Garrett's reading of Hume, in particular his attention to the Title Principle as a norm derived antecedent to Hume's initial inquiries. Where Garrett does wrong is not giving the Title Principle a central place. Nor is Garrett wrong to suppose that Hume can reasonably take some beliefs and knowledge claims to be rationally justified. Quite the contrary. Garrett's mistake is thinking that the Title Principle provides warrant only for non-sceptical beliefs, as it provides merit for both sceptical and non-sceptical beliefs and knowledge claims, and that of course is the problem. At least, that is what I shall argue in the reading of the Title Principle that follows. While this reading at several points goes quite a way beyond what Hume strictly argues I would defend the contention that it represents what Hume should have said when pressed on the idea of the normativity of scepticism. Even though Garrett's more recent paper on this matter makes many points that are relevant to this discussion his clearest exposition of the Title Principle remains the earlier paper, at it is to that paper towards which attention shall be directed in the following analysis.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁵ Don Garrett, "Reasons to Act and Believe: Naturalism and Rational Justification in Hume's Philosophical Project," *Philosophical Studies* 132, no. 1 (2007).

¹⁹⁶ It is for much the same reason that less attention is given to Garrett's book than one might otherwise have expected. However for a related exposition of the Title Principle see Don Garrett, *Cognition and Commitment in Hume's Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) especially pp.208-215, 232-237. Much of what I say in what follows in this chapter is in fact guided by exposition of Hume provided in this work, with the exception of the idea that Hume is at most an intermittent, mitigated sceptic.

Hume's 'Title Principle' and natural justification

i) The Title Principle

As read by Don Garrett, Hume presents us with an argument for the conclusion that some of our more important commitments are justified, even though they lack rational justification. Central to Garrett's argument is a distinction between epistemic merit and rational support. A commitment has epistemic merit 'if and only if it deserves or is worthy of belief or assent'.¹⁹⁷ A commitment has rational support "if and only if it has epistemic merit because of the manner in which it is produced by reason".¹⁹⁸ For instance a commitment could have rational support if it resulted from a series of valid deductions from premises known to be true.¹⁹⁹ Garrett is quite clear that if some commitment has epistemic merit then we have some entitlement to it.

Thus far the distinction Garrett has introduced is hardly controversial, as all it amounts to is the distinction between our having an entitlement to a commitment and that commitment being produced through some rational process. After all, to say that a commitment is such that it deserves or is worthy of assent is just to say that we have an entitlement to that commitment. In this sense Garrett's terminology is apt to mislead, as talk of *epistemic* merit is likely to lead us to think in terms of knowledge. However, Garrett does not actually say that a commitment having epistemic merit implies that the commitment is true, and certainly does not imply that the commitment is true in virtue of someone being entitled to it. Hence that we are always dealing with instances of knowledge when dealing with cases of epistemic merit is not assured. If one wished to avoid the misleading impression created by Garrett's terminology then a better term than 'epistemic merit' would be 'doxastic merit', as this does not carry the implications

¹⁹⁷ Garrett, "a Small Tincture of Pyrrhonism': Skepticism and Naturalism in Hume's Science of Man," p.80. Of course, to be acceptable any attribution of epistemic merit must mention who it is that holds the commitments and must specify the circumstances in which they do so. The commitment 'that I am sitting at a table' may well have epistemic merit when I actually am sitting at a table, have my eyes open and such, however the same commitment if held while I am dreaming would not have epistemic merit, even if I happen to be dreaming while sitting at a table. I shall assume that Garrett intended these further specifications.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Garrett of course makes clear that just being produced by reason need not convey epistemic merit as reason can also function erroneously, by making a series of invalid deductions or by accepting both conjuncts of a contradiction for instance.

that knowledge is necessarily intended.²⁰⁰ At times I shall speak instead of rational justification, as often that is the concept that Garrett intends. However, ultimately epistemic merit will be shown to be a broader concept than rational justification, as the presence of rational justified does not exhaust all the ways in which a commitment might come to have epistemic merit.

Garrett insists, as a supporter of CSN would also insist, that having rational support is not the only way in which someone could come to be entitled to a commitment. The inspiration Garrett finds for taking this perspective on the nature of Hume's scepticism derives largely from his interpretation of the Title Principle. This Title Principle is found in the conclusion of Book 1 of the *Treatise* and is as follows.

'Where reason is lively, and mixes itself with some propensity, it ought to be assented to. Where it does not, it can never have any title to operate upon us.'²⁰¹

As understood by Garrett this Title Principle is a prescriptive principle to which we can refer to determine which beliefs to accept and which to reject. That is, it is a norm governing inquiry, in the same general category as those identified in chapter 2. In Garrett's words:

'[t]he solution is that Hume is not a general unmitigated theoretical sceptic; instead he accepts the Title Principle because he finds that it provides a prescriptive epistemic principle which he can both follow and approve...The Title Principle allows for the possibility that some beliefs have epistemic merit and that some of them have this merit as a result of their production by reason.'²⁰²

²⁰⁰ Even 'doxastic merit' can be misleading for if truth is not assured then it remains unclear why such a belief is meritorious at all. We shall return to the question of why Garrett may have been led to introduce such misleading terminology towards the end of the chapter.

²⁰¹ Hume, Selby-Bigge, and Niddich, *A Treatise of Human Nature* I.IV.7, p.270. This principle, under this name, was introduced in chapter 1 in the process of giving a brief outline of an argument for natural justification.

²⁰² Garrett, "a Small Tincture of Pyrrhonism': Scepticism and Naturalism in Hume's Science of Man," 88-89. Unfortunately this statement is somewhat cluttered with terms deriving from Garrett's categorization of Hume's scepticism. This categorization occupies the first half of Garrett's paper. To aid in comprehending what Garrett intends the relevant terms have been explicated below.

1) *Character* – theoretical, prescriptive or practiced. This is the most complex axis, as it has three components, one of which divides into two further sub-components (see 1a below). The essence of categorization along this axis is determining for which regions the scepticism in question carries consequences. So theoretical scepticism carries consequences for theories of knowledge but of itself carries no consequences for our practical lives or our norms of proper conduct. Thus being a theoretical sceptic about the effectiveness of capital punishment as a deterrent of crime for instance does not entail that one takes it that one ought to doubt this effectiveness. Nor does theoretical scepticism entail that one actually doubts this effectiveness. Prescriptive scepticism

about the effectiveness of capital punishment as a deterrent entails thinking that one ought to doubt this effectiveness but does not entail either theoretical support for this prescription or actual doubt concerning the effectiveness of capital punishment as a deterrent of crime. Such practicing scepticism is exhibited perhaps in rote-learned but unthinking obedience to received dogma, often but not exclusively religious. Finally, practiced scepticism entails actual doubt, but neither prescriptions to doubt nor theories supporting doubt and could perhaps be expressed in terms of a 'gut instinct' or some such. Each can obviously appear independently of the others, although in reality they often appear in some combination. 1a) *Theoretical* – rational support or epistemic merit. This sub-categorization further defines what kind of theoretical scepticism is intended. Rational support scepticism, following Garrett's usage, suggests that the target proposition does not have rational support. To have rational support a belief must arise from reason in the correct way, through a series of valid deductions from plausible and accepted premises for instance. To have epistemic merit a belief must be such that it could, in the right circumstances, be reasonable to claim that it amounted to knowledge. Designating scepticism as theoretical will indicate that it meets the conditions of both sub-categorizations. Designating it as only one of these sub-categorizations will indicate that it meets the conditions only for the designated sub-categorization.

- 2) *Domain* – general or limited. General scepticism calls into question all our beliefs, limited scepticism calls into question only those beliefs in a specified domain or domains.
- 3) *Degree* – unmitigated or mitigated. This axis provides a measure of the strength of the scepticism, and is intended to capture how radical scepticism is. Mitigated scepticism towards some proposition argues that the justification for that proposition is less than normally supposed or in some other way falls below what we normally deem to be acceptable. So for instance after finding more research supporting the effectiveness of capital punishment as a deterrent of crime than research against of this effectiveness, but also finding that research against this effectiveness is not negligible I may come to a mitigated scepticism regarding the effectiveness of capital punishment as a deterrent. This does not entail that I think that the proposition that capital punishment is an effective deterrent has no justification whatsoever. It is just that the amount of justification available is not as high as it could be, or as high as I would wish it to be or as high as specified by some other standard because this justification has been undermined by the existence of some justification for the contrary proposition. Were I to conclude that the proposition that capital punishment is an effective deterrent has no justification whatsoever then this would represent unmitigated scepticism with respect to this effectiveness.

Obviously, determining the degree of a given scepticism requires that we first understand what is to count as justification *per se* and also what is to count as an appropriate level of justification. If we stipulate that justification only counts if we can defeat all relevant defeaters then what we deem to count as justification *per se* will be responsive to the level of scrutiny at which we are operating at the time. So at a sufficiently high level of scrutiny, a level for instance at which we cannot defeat all possible defeaters to our knowledge claims, it may turn out that all scepticism is unmitigated since nothing will count as justification. Interestingly this leads to the conclusion that Fogelin's Pyrrhonian scepticism must be, at least at times and towards certain targets, a variety of unmitigated scepticism.

However introducing unmitigated scepticism is not the only way in which scepticism can be made radical. Provided that the standard for what is to count as an acceptable level of justification is made sufficiently strict then mitigated scepticism will also be radical. For instance if justification is only deemed to justify accepting a belief if it provides overwhelming support (using something akin to the ancient Academic's *pro/contra* method of analysis) then radical prescriptive scepticism will result. I may for example conclude that the proposition that capital punishment is an effective deterrent does not have an acceptable level of support on the grounds that only 99 out of every 100 published assessments of its effectiveness supports this effectiveness, which is not enough to warrant a prescription to believe. Note that on this strict standard I ought to doubt a great many other beliefs also, and so the scepticism generated here is quite radical. However I would not conclude that the proposition that capital punishment is an effective deterrent of crime has no justification, just that its justification is not sufficiently high to warrant acceptance, and so the resultant scepticism is still mitigated.

A final complication emerges here if we choose to define the acceptability of justification in terms of the maximum level of scrutiny at which this justification retains its justificatory force. On such a definition acceptability becomes an all-or-nothing affair and an unacceptable level of justification comes to mean no justification at all. Hence mitigated scepticism collapses into

Garrett's description of the Title Principle makes it quite clear that not all the commitments having epistemic merit are meritorious in virtue of finding their source in reason, although some do have such a source. It is also clear that Garrett takes this Title Principle to undercut Hume's scepticism to the extent that some commitments have epistemic merit even though they lack rational support. The full anti-sceptical force of this becomes apparent when we realise that the commitments falling in this category include the commitment to the uniformity of nature, the existence of external bodies, the existence of other minds and the commitment to the coherence of identity claims generally. This is no small thing, as it means that for all his talk about the lack of rational support for many of our most important commitments Hume's sceptical conclusions do not warrant his modifying the propositional attitude he takes to these commitments. On this reading Hume's conclusion that some of our commitments lack rational support reveals an interesting fact about the kind of justification held by some of our commitments but little more than that. On this reading we also encounter the idea that scepticism is vain in attempting to generate doubt by pointing out that some commitments lack a kind of justification that is not in this case required. Only being captured by a false image of what the structure of our commitments ought to be could possibly convince someone that the scepticism Hume does generate is actually serious.

However if this is Hume's view of scepticism some questions remain unanswered. For instance how can Hume reasonably take the Title Principle to be normative? What is it exactly about 'reason being lively and mixing itself with some propensity' that would warrant the normative claims Hume wants to make? After all, 'reason being lively...' looks to be a natural fact, and not an appropriate basis for normative claims on Hume's view. To begin to answer this question we of course need to understand what 'reason being lively...' amounts to, which requires some knowledge of Hume's theory of belief, for as it turns out the Title Principle is a restatement and refinement of this theory of belief.

unmitigated scepticism when using such a definition which is of course undesirable if we wish this categorization to be meaningful. Given this difficulty it is necessary to stipulate that the method intended when determining what is to count as an acceptable level of justification is defined in terms of a *pro/contra* analysis of the justification available at a fixed level of scrutiny rather than in terms of the level of scrutiny at which the justification itself retains its significance.

As is well known, according to Hume a belief is a vivacious idea.²⁰³ However vivacity comes in degrees. Hume's point is that when an idea has a sufficiently great amount of vivacity a belief inevitably results from our considering the idea. This means that for Hume there is a very real sense in which beliefs are forced upon us. That is to say, as Hume sees things the process of belief formation is not one over which we have any control, and not one that needs to be explained by reference to our will. Rationally speaking, Hume conceives of the agent as quite passive in belief formation, at the mercy of their non-rational natural characteristics.²⁰⁴ The point for which Hume seems to be arguing is that for any commitment actually held by someone there are two distinguishing properties. First is propositional content, which determines what the commitment is about. Second is the vivacity attached to this propositional content. It is the vivacity, or more correctly the degree of vivacity, which determines whether the propositional attitude taken towards the propositional content of the commitment amounts to belief. Greater degrees of vivacity result in us taking the propositional attitude of belief to some propositional content. Lesser degrees of vivacity may only lead to us merely entertaining the possibility of this content. So the question is where this vivacity comes from and how its origin warrants normative claims on behalf of the Title Principle. We can go some way to answering this question by placing the Title Principle in its original context, at which point Hume makes the following claim.

'In all the incidents of life we ought still to preserve our scepticism. If we believe, that fire warms, or water refreshes, 'tis only because it costs us too much pains to think otherwise. Nay if we are philosophers, it ought only to be on sceptical principles, and from an inclination, which we feel to employ ourselves after that manner. Where reason is lively, and mixes itself with some propensity...'²⁰⁵

The phrase 'because it costs us too much pains to think otherwise' is indicative of Hume's position that beliefs are forced on us, placing the Title Principle in the context of his general theory of belief. Of equal interest is the reference to inclination, and what activities we may feel like pursuing. Such language immediately calls to mind Hume's description of belief as "more properly an act of the sensitive, than the cogitative part of

²⁰³ Hume also uses the term 'lively' to capture the same property of a belief.

²⁰⁴ See Garrett, *Cognition and Commitment in Hume's Philosophy* pp.208-213. Garrett's analysis of the various means by which some ideas come to have vivacity attaching to them makes it quite clear that reason plays no significant role in this dynamic. Those roles are left to the senses and memory. I follow Garrett in thinking that this all by itself does not warrant any radically sceptical conclusion. See Garrett, *Cognition and Commitment in Hume's Philosophy* p.215.

²⁰⁵ Hume, Selby-Bigge, and Nidditch, *A Treatise of Human Nature* I.IV.7, p. 270.

our natures.”²⁰⁶ That is, a belief is a sensation adopted without any decision being made to have the sensation, in much the same way that we could sense (by sight) that the cover of a book is blue or feel a pain in our leg.

It might be suspected that none of this has much to do with the Title Principle. So far we have been talking about vivacious beliefs, but the Title Principle concerns reason being lively. To counter this objection it should be observed that for Hume liveliness and vivacity are synonymous.²⁰⁷ Further, Hume also argues that reason operates only in one of two ways; either discovering relations between ideas (analytic, *a priori* reasoning) or by discovering matters of fact (synthetic, *a posteriori* reasoning). We also know that Hume shares with Locke and Berkeley the fundamental tenant that all our reasoning is mediated by ideas, and hence that even reasoning concerning matters of fact such as causal claims must be directed immediately to ideas at least in the first instance.²⁰⁸ Further, we also know that reason is incapable of enlivening an idea by itself, meaning that any vivacity or liveliness which is present must have already been present or have been introduced by a source separate to reason.²⁰⁹ Putting these points together leads to the conclusion that reason can only be lively if the idea about which we reason is itself lively. Hence when Hume says ‘Where reason is lively’ this must be equivalent to saying ‘where the ideas about which we reason are lively’, and as we have seen this amounts to saying ‘where we are forced to believe the propositions about which we reason’.

On this reading the Title Principle could be given the following gloss.

“If and only if

- 1) we are forced to take the propositional attitude of belief towards those propositions about which we reason, *and*
- 2) *this reasoning mixes itself with some propensity,*

²⁰⁶ Ibid. I.IV.I, p.183.

²⁰⁷ [T I.iii.vii. p. 97, I.iii.viii. p.98]

²⁰⁸ [T I.i.i. p.1]

²⁰⁹ Indeed, Hume argues that reasoning tends to always diminish the amount of vivacity an idea has. See [T I.iv.ii]. For a complete exposition of Hume’s arguments concerning diminishing probabilities that seem to sit at the heart of his concerns, including the many problems with this argument, see Robert J. Fogelin, *Hume's Skepticism in the Treatise of Human Nature, International Library of Philosophy*. (London ; Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985) pp.15-20, Garrett, *Cognition and Commitment in Hume's Philosophy* pp.222-228.

then a proposition has epistemic merit, and so ought to be believed.”

The highlighted second clause deserves attention, as it is this clause that may be responsible for the normativity Hume believes is warranted by the Title Principle. This can be seen by considering what would happen if the second clause were removed. In this case the Title Principle would state as a necessary and sufficient condition for the normativity of belief that we be forced to so believe. However this is both highly implausible and not an argument we would have expected of Hume. Thus we need to ask what ‘reasoning mixing itself with some propensity’ means, and whether this clause can provide some warrant for normative claims.

ii) Propensity to believe in accord with our telos

Another possible way of reading this propensity would be to take it in a teleological sense, introducing a principle something like ‘you ought to believe (or more generally, commit) in such a way as to progress towards your telos’. The problem with such an approach is that the details of the telos are bound to be metaphysically loaded and hence contentious. Adding to the contention is the fact that there are several plausible ways of understanding what this telos may be. Further, taking such a reading also takes us some considerable way beyond what Hume explicitly says. However, the immediate concern is finding a reading of the telos that is acceptable when placed in the context of CSN. This means that it must imply the minimum of metaphysical commitments and of course must also avoid any implication that the lack of rational justification for a commitment makes that commitment unjustified *simpliciter*.

An explication of the telos acceptable within the context of CSN might be the following:

- The human telos is to hold commitments only if they are rationally justified.

Pursuing such a telos leads to the claim that one ought to adopt a commitment only if it is rationally justified. On the surface this might seem like a poor choice for an acceptable telos, particularly in view of its rationalistic overtones. However this impression can be removed if we were to argue that the adoption of some commitments

is constitutive of the only context in which rational justification is possible by appealing to the transcendental argument, essentially Strawson's argument, for CSN. In that case normativity is assured as rationality is a fundamentally normative concept.²¹⁰ However this does not mean that all commitments lacking rational justification should be jettisoned, as some of these are required for rational justification to be possible. The explication of the telos above should be adapted to reflect this more clearly, resulting in the following reading of the telos.

- The human telos is to hold commitments only if they are either
 - rationally justified, or
 - constitutive of the proper context in which rational justification is possible

More simply, we could say that the human telos is to be rational, where this requires us to adopt some commitments which are not rationally justified. Hence this approach provides us not just with an account of the place of rational justification but also provides us with an account of rationality. As will emerge, providing such an account is crucial for accounting for normativity.

Taking this reading of the propensity mentioned in the Title Principle means that the Title Principle can now be explicated in the following way.

“If and only if

- 1) we are forced to take the propositional attitude of belief towards those propositions about which we reason, *and*
- 2) *either* (rational justification can be provided for these propositions *or* holding commitments with this propositional content is required if rational justification is to be possible)²¹¹

then a proposition has epistemic merit, and so ought to be believed.”

²¹⁰ Precisely because rationality is a more clearly normative concept than is nature, and in this chapter we are directly concerned with normativity, Argument 2 for CSN will be more in focus than will be Argument 1 for CSN.

²¹¹ As should be clear from chapter 1, this idea of reason-constituting commitments is a very Strawsonian point, and for further comments on this idea I direct the reader back to the exposition of CSN given in that chapter.

At this juncture it is interesting to ask what might be the content of those commitments that are in some way constitutive of rationality. In answering this question Reid proves to be surprisingly helpful.²¹² Summarising Reid's position Rysiew makes the following claim.

'My suggestion is that Reid regards the first principles of common sense as constitutive principles – they are constitutive (for us, given our nature) of cognizing at all...And because (for us, given our constitution) the first principles create the very possibility of cognizing at all, there is a very real sense in which (given our nature) we literally cannot imagine creatures for whom those principles are nothing – creatures who do not take their truth-oriented faculties to be reliable on the whole; who do not see life and intelligence in each other; who do not think that the things which they clearly and distinctly perceive really exist; and so on.'²¹³

So according to Reid the content of those commitments constitutive of rationality is the content of the first principles of common sense, and Rysiew's account above indicates the kind of principles Reid had in mind. These principles include that our senses are reliable, that there are other minds and that there is an external world. Reid also includes principles such as that memory is reliable, that there is a correlation between certain kinds of behaviour and certain emotions and that the future will in general conform to the past (the principle of induction).²¹⁴ Note that not everything taken as commonsensical ought to be thought of as a first principle of common sense. What we take as commonsensical can include propositions that are quite open to change. For instance it may have once been taken as commonsensical that werewolves are a serious threat to peasants living near dark forests. Such propositions as this ought not be thought of as first principles of common sense.

This suggests that there are at least two categories within what we commonly call common sense that need to be distinguished. Merely drawing the distinction in terms of what we take for granted blurs the matter, as we could, and people have, taken virtually

²¹² At least, the reading of Reid put forward by Rysiew proves to be quite helpful. Whether this reading really does represent Reid's considered view is debated. See Patrick Rysiew, "Reid and Epistemic Naturalism," *Philosophical Quarterly* 52, no. 209 (2002).

²¹³ *Ibid.*: pp.449-450.

²¹⁴ For the most comprehensive list Reid provides see Reid, *Works Now Fully Collected: With Selections from His Unpublished Letters, Papers, Notes, and Supplementary Dissertations* EIP VI.iv. 441a-452a. Here Reid provides examples of twelve first principles, although he acknowledges that this list is not comprehensive. In fact at no point does Reid attempt to provide a comprehensive list of these principles, although he does say that such provision would greatly benefit philosophy.

anything for granted. We could perhaps attempt to draw this distinction in terms of levels of entrenchment, suggesting that some propositions of common sense are easier to give up than others. No doubt some propositions can be more easily given up than others, particularly when we examine the development of beliefs over long time periods, although if a proposition can be abandoned in this way we might wonder whether it was ever commonsensical. Given the role attributed to first principles by Reid (and Moore also) above it would be surprising if it were actually possible for our attitude to these commitments could change. This is not to say that common sense is defined solely by the attitude we take towards it of course, for that is not something Reid would accept. However even for Reid there are clearly strict limits to the attitude that we can take to this content, and Reid is quick to criticise the sceptics for attempting to maintain impossible attitudes in this regard.

More helpful than thinking in terms of propositional attitudes would be thinking in terms of how, or even whether, this propositional content is learnt. I take it as one of Wittgenstein's greatest insights in *On Certainty* is that we do not actually learn, for instance, that teachers are reliable. We just learn facts about the world from teachers. Nor, I take it, do we learn that our senses are reliable or that other people have minds. We just learn to do things with our senses and how to treat other people. This suggests that the first principles of common sense are seen most clearly as those that make our everyday practices possible, including our practice of providing justification for our commitments. Given that we take these everyday practices to be rational practices, we would also expect that judgements of rationality and irrationality would match instances in which these commitments are respected and disregarded respectively.

There is some sense in taking those commitments constitutive of rationality to be what Reid calls the first principles of common sense. For one, such an approach harmonises with our judgements of irrationality and insanity. Someone who genuinely and persistently took their senses to be chronically unreliable would be judged to be insane as would someone persistently denying the principle of induction be judged to be insane.²¹⁵ Further, there is no obvious instance we can point to in which we learnt that

²¹⁵ At least, that is how we would judge others who acted in this way, although it is not so obvious that we would judge ourselves in this way, provided we made our sceptical arguments for reasons we took to be compelling. Scepticism is much more problematic when shifted into the first-person. Even so, the

the senses are reliable, that there is an external world or that other people have minds. Rather, we need to already have these commitments to learn anything else. Finally, such a view of common sense also explains why attempts to find rational justifications for these commitments have (even when satisfying – and that is not very often) failed to connect up in the right way with the manner in which we actually hold these commitments. That is, presenting reasons for holding common sense commitments never quite seems to capture the actual reasons for which we hold these commitments. Unsurprisingly, such a reading is also consistent with the view found in CSN.²¹⁶

With these considerations in mind we can now make a further refinement to the Title Principle. The Title Principle is now understood to state that:

“If and only if

- 1) we are forced to take the propositional attitude of belief towards those propositions about which we reason, *and*
- 2) *either* (rational justification can be provided for these propositions *or* the propositions about which we reason are first principles of common sense)

then a proposition has epistemic merit and ought to be believed.”²¹⁷

It was noted earlier that taking this reading of the Title Principle provides us with an account of rationality. That observation can now be refined by noting that the rationality considered here is a distinctly human form of rationality. The reason for this is that the commitments constitutive of this rationality are distinctly human commitments, in that they are the first principles of common sense, and while humans naturally adopt these principles there is nothing to say that they are necessary for all

point at present is to develop the strongest anti-sceptical line of attack that can be developed from Hume and see where this takes us. Eventually it shall emerge that even this reading ultimately warrants the claim that we are entitled to Pyrrhonian scepticism.

²¹⁶ For the moment this reading of the place of common sense will be sufficient, however as it will eventually need to be revised something needs to be said about what revisions will be required. First, appealing to Reid makes what we recognise to be the first principles of common sense appear to be static and universal. I will ultimately suggest that this is misguided, as what we recognise as the first principles of common sense is sensitive to the mood we happen to be in when we make this assessment.

²¹⁷ Given the distinction between first principles of common sense and other propositions taken to be commonsensical implies that we ought to regard propositions taken to be commonsensical but not actually first principles of common sense as rationally justified. This is because such commonsensical propositions must have been derived, or at least be derivable, from first principles of common sense.

agents. For this reason the normativity guaranteed by this account of rationality is limited to grounding claims as to what *humans* ought to believe.²¹⁸

This is advantageous for it means that the reading of the Title Principle developed here avoids the heavy metaphysical commitments involved with arguing for an understanding of rationality unconditioned by the unique properties of the rational agent. There is no implication in the understanding of rationality developed here that it is something akin to Descartes' 'natural light' or the view (arguably inherited from Plato but probably much older than the Greeks) that rationality allows us to see the world as God sees it. The rationality of humans is *human* rationality.²¹⁹ Observe that this idea coheres well with the idea that those commitments which have epistemic merit are not made true just on that basis. Indeed it makes sense to think that there is no necessary connection between a commitment being natural for a human to adopt and the content of that commitment being true. In recognition of this Hume exhibits a desire to distance himself from the claim that the commitments we are forced to accept are themselves true.²²⁰ Instead Hume seems to think that the best outcome we could hope for in developing such theories is that they be in some way useful.

However our development of the Title Principle cannot stop here if we wish it to be of use when analysing CSN, as CSN makes it quite clear that it is not enough that we are forced to hold a belief in addition to there just happening to be some rational justification for that belief. CSN only considers rational justification to be relevant if it can be shown that we believe because of this rational justification. Justification must be *our* justification. It was for this very reason that CSN dismissed not just scepticism but refutations of scepticism also, for in neither case are the reasons presented for belief or disbelief our actual reasons for these attitudes.²²¹ As it currently exists the Title

²¹⁸ We see at this point where Argument 1 for CSN might be useful for the present exegesis, unsurprisingly given that Hume developed a version of this argument himself. In fact the constant interplay between these two arguments is an interesting feature of CSN itself.

²¹⁹ However, while *some* humans may have a rationality with structure in which the Title Principle plays an important role, why must we suppose that *all* humans have a rationality so structured? This question cannot be answered until the final revisions are made to the Title Principle itself.

²²⁰ See for instance [T.I.iv.vii. p.272] where Hume says "we might hope to establish a system or set of opinions, which if not true (for that, perhaps, is too much to be hop'd for) might at least be satisfactory to the human mind, and might stand the test of the most critical examination."

²²¹ One would do well to keep in mind however that doubt can also be natural, and while the Title Principle has not yet expanded its range to include doubt it will not be long before we see it put to this use.

Principle does not provide for the right sort of connection between belief and justification, and hence some adaptation is required. In the context of CSN the obvious choice is to require that a rational justification sometimes just is a psychological cause of belief, and that it is only at those times when a rational justification does function in this way that epistemic merit results. This idea is not foreign to Hume, as he explicitly casts the reasons we respect the law of non-contradiction in both logical and causal/psychological terms, where appeal to logic is not sufficient to explain why we revise any of our commitments. Instead this revision is cast in psychological and fundamentally causal terms, although it does begin with the recognition of logical relations. Hume's statement is worth repeating in full, and is found below.

'Nothing is more certain from experience than that any contradiction either to the sentiments or passions gives a sensible uneasiness, whether it proceeds from without or from within; from the opposition of external objects, or from the combat of internal principles. On the contrary, whatever strikes in with the natural propensities, and either externally forwards their satisfaction, or internally concurs with their movements, is sure to give a sensible pleasure. Now, there being here an opposition betwixt the notion of the identity of resembling perceptions, and the interruption of their appearance, the mind must be uneasy in that situation, and will naturally seek relief from the uneasiness.' [T.I.iv.ii. pp.205-206]

With this in mind we must replace the conjunction connecting the first and second clauses of the Title Principle with a causal term. We should also adapt the Title Principle to more explicitly reflect the recognition of logical entities as the starting point for this causal process. Hence, the Title Principle can now be given its final revision.

“If and only if

- 1) we are forced to take the propositional attitude of belief towards those propositions about which we reason, *because*
- 2) *either* (**we recognise that** rational justification can be provided for these propositions *or* **we recognise that** the propositions about which we reason are first principles of common sense and so constitutive of rationality)

then a proposition has epistemic merit and ought to be believed.”

With this final revision in place we may well ask a question that was earlier deferred. Why is it that *all* humans have to respect the Title Principle? This question has been

made more difficult to answer than it might otherwise have been by the fact that the perspectivism developed here needs to avoid philosophical commitments, and particularly metaphysical commitments, wherever possible. It might strike one as rather odd then that the solution would be found in again appealing to the idea of the human telos. Nevertheless, a teleological approach can prove to be quite helpful. It must simply be asserted that the human telos includes taking the correct propositional attitudes, where correctness is measured not in terms of truth but in terms of epistemic merit.²²² According to this teleological reading of the Title Principle, being attentive to the demands of rationality can aid us in achieving this telos as there exists in humans a mechanism whereby the recognition that a proposition is either rationally justified or a first principle of common sense leads to a more correct (in terms of epistemic merit) distribution of propositional attitudes.²²³ The ‘deep’ reason why the commitments granted epistemic merit by the Title Principle are then normative is because they allow us to achieve the human telos.

Of course this just pushes the question of normativity further back, by inviting the question of why we ought to pursue this human telos, and even whether this telos is appropriate to all humans or just some. However, no justification for the pursuit of the telos can be given as the concept of a telos is a foundational term in the system developed here. To ask why we ought to pursue this telos is to fundamentally misunderstand what a telos is, for the concept of a telos is an inherently normative concept. In order to answer both the question of whether all humans must respect the Title Principle and the question of why *this* telos ought to be *our* telos we must dogmatically assert that *this* is the *human* telos.

iii) Interlude: A Pyrrhonian assessment of our epistemic situation

²²² Remember that epistemic merit does not guarantee truth, which is why it was argued earlier that the terms ‘epistemic merit’ is in fact misleading.

²²³ The reader should be aware that little if any support for an explicitly teleological reading of the Title Principle in the *Treatise*, and hence this reading cannot be considered to be Hume’s considered view. I would argue however that Hume does definitely want to collapse the rational and the psychological, and is right to hold that the recognition that a proposition has rational support can itself be a cause of belief. I would also argue that Hume did think that the resulting beliefs were normative. Further, I would also argue that Hume should have augmented his position with the teleological line of thought presented here, for without some augmentation normativity remains a mystery. Hence I take it that the view presented here is not Hume’s view but is what Hume should have said when pressed on the normative question.

Lest confusion immediately result, it must be emphasised that the Pyrrhonian knows full well that dogmatic assertions of this sort cannot be appropriate for the proper grounding of any idea. Hence making dogmatic assertions is never a Pyrrhonian activity. However pointing out that any claims to normativity in the Title Principle rely on nothing more than dogmatic assertion is a very Pyrrhonian activity, and I take it that this is what the Pyrrhonian would do. The Pyrrhonian would point out that that at some point we cannot continue to provide any reasons to think that we must accept the Title Principle. Exactly the same move would be made regarding the norms of inquiry identified in the previous chapter. Granted, in each case the norms of inquiry and the Title Principle capture how we actually go about our everyday epistemic practices but the Pyrrhonian wants more than an accurate description of what we actually do. He wants an account of why we are right to do it. His point is that whenever we reflect on our everyday practices with the aim of explaining how we are warranted to practice in this way we fail, falling prey to a dilemma. That dilemma is that either we have no warrant to our everyday epistemic practices or that if we do then we have an equal warrant to Pyrrhonian scepticism. Chapter 2 demonstrated to us the strength of the second horn of the dilemma. The above observations on the necessity and dogmatic character of a teleological reading of the Title Principle shows us the problems associated with the first horn of this dilemma.

iv) Hume's possible confusion: Psychology and Reason

We must finally ask whether the Title Principle is a rational or a psychological principle, to which the Humean reply must be that the question imposes a false dichotomy. Rational justifications are, sometimes, psychological causes. Thus far Hume is quite correct. However, Hume may be going further than this and attempting to provide for normativity by collapsing the rational and the psychological, possibly as part of an overarching strategy of naturalising reason. Yet psychology and rationality are different concepts, and so how can this collapse be possible? We have already seen in chapter 1 and the analysis of McDowell some good reasons to be suspicious of any such moves. Must we not conclude that Hume is confused at this point? If we take Hume as saying nothing more than that it just happens to turn out that *for humans*, the recognition that a proposition is rationality justified sometimes leads to the formation of a commitment with an associated propositional content then we need not make any

such negative appraisals. However, if Hume is attempting to ground normativity then such a negative appraisal is appropriate. My view is that we ought to read Hume as presenting a dilemma for anyone who would appeal to common sense, in fact as presenting the same dilemma with which the Pyrrhonian is concerned. That at least seems to capture the force of Hume's picturing us as trapped 'betwix a false reason and none at all' towards the end of Part 1 of the *Treatise*. I shall return to this theme in the conclusion of this chapter.

Scepticism and epistemic merit

While I believe that the above explication of the Title Principle is the best available way of making sense of the Title Principle, and particularly the difficult relationship between that principle and normativity, even granting that the Title Principle is normative raises some interesting questions concerning scepticism. In particular we might ask whether scepticism could have epistemic merit, understanding that epistemic merit can be determined by referring to the Title Principle.²²⁴ Garrett clearly thinks that scepticism cannot be granted epistemic merit in this way, as the Title Principle was initially introduced as a way of avoiding sceptical conclusions. This section argues that in fact the Title Principle grants epistemic merit to scepticism. However before this can be explored further some points from chapter 2 need to be introduced.

As we have seen, Garrett argues that Hume's scepticism does not have any epistemic merit as it does not fall under the governance of the Title Principle. This is a mistake, as good arguments can be presented to support the idea that at least on occasion Hume's scepticism does meet the conditions established in the Title Principle for the attribution of epistemic merit. Chapter 2 has already shown that Pyrrhonian scepticism can be derived from common sense, once the scope of common sense is expanded to include norms of inquiry. Hume provides us with an excellent case study of exactly just such a derivation of radical and serious scepticism from common sense. In numerous passages throughout the *Treatise*, and particularly in the closing sections of Book 1, we find Hume caught in what appears to be a genuine sceptical crisis that seems to be making a

²²⁴ More correctly of course we need to ask whether any propositions we normally take to express scepticism could have epistemic merit, as epistemic merit accrues to propositions. I shall assume that when I speak of the epistemic merit of scepticism I mean the epistemic merit of those propositions we take to be characteristic of scepticism.

serious impact on the structure of his commitments. Here are two paradigmatic examples in which Hume is explicitly sceptical of both our senses and our broader cognitive faculties.

‘This sceptical doubt, both with respect to reason and the senses, is a malady, which can never be radically cur’d, but must return upon us every moment, however we may chace it away, and sometimes may seem entirely free from it. ‘Tis impossible upon any system to defend either our understanding or senses; and we but expose them farther when we endeavour to justify them in that manner. As the sceptical doubt arises naturally from a profound and intense reflection on those subjects, it always encreases, the farther we carry our reflections, whether in opposition or conformity to it.’

[T.I.iv.ii. p. 218]

‘My memory of past errors and perplexities, makes me diffident for the future. The wretched condition, weakness, and disorder of the faculties, I must employ in my enquiries, encrease my apprehensions. And the impossibility of amending or correcting these faculties, reduces me almost to despair, and makes me resolved to perish on the barren rock, on which I am at present, rather than venture myself upon that boundless ocean, which runs out into immensity. This sudden view of my danger strikes me with melancholy; and as ‘tis usual for that passion, above all others, to indulge itself; I cannot forbear feeding my despair, with all those desponding reflections, which the present subject furnishes me with in such abundance.’ [T.I.iv.vii. p. 264]

Further, looking back at these passages it is clear that at these times reason is very lively and, consistent with Hume’s theory of belief, is forcing him to adopt the proposition attitude of belief to the propositions into which he is inquiring. Indeed, these passages and others like them display Hume’s beliefs at their most vivacious, particularly the latter passage. Hence the first clause of the Title Principle is fulfilled. So then are Hume’s sceptical beliefs also the result of recognising the presence of some rational justification for these beliefs? That is, are these beliefs the result of exposure to arguments? Quite clearly they are. In each of the above passages a reference is made to the outcome of his previous inquiries, and when placed in their broader context these inquiries can be easily shown to include numerous arguments to the effect that our cognitive faculties are chronically unreliable. Given that we are dealing here with beliefs being forced on Hume as the direct result of recognising the presence of rational justification it is difficult to see why these passages ought to be excluded from falling under the scope of the Title Principle and hence as having epistemic merit.

If this is correct then the Title Principle has a significantly broader application than Garrett allows, in that it provides epistemic merit to both sceptical and non-sceptical beliefs. However there is no particularly good reason to think that either the sceptical or the anti-sceptical recommendations of the Title Principle are to be given precedence. Certainly the Title Principle itself could give us no guidance in this regard, as both the sceptical and anti-sceptical arguments meet its requirements equally well. Thus we are left with a somewhat uncomfortable and unsatisfying perspectivism as we are unable to reject any of the recommendations of the Title Principle if we accept some. Looking back at the Title Principle as constructed here this should be expected, as there is no reference in this principle itself to the content of the propositions given epistemic merit. In this sense the Title Principle is blind to scepticism.

Earlier it was stated that it would be important to argue that the recognised content of common sense is mood-sensitive. We now see exactly why this is, as the argument presented here is open to the objection that the justification for scepticism must be illusory. This is because this rational justification, to be legitimate, must exist within the context provided by the first principles of common sense. Yet as introduced so far these first principles include propositions that contradict those given rational justification. Hence scepticism cannot possibly be serious, or if it is must be illusory since the recognition of rational justification on which it rests cannot possibly be genuine. However, if we take Hume seriously then we are forced to concede that not only does rational justification exist for propositions contradictory to the first principles of common sense but more importantly that Hume genuinely includes these propositions among his commitments. That is, taking Hume seriously forces us to recognise that scepticism is serious.

This reveals a tension in the explication of the Title Principle given to this point. As explained so far it is impossible that the Title Principle could ever grant epistemic merit to scepticism, and equally impossible that scepticism could be serious. However if Hume teaches us anything it is that scepticism actually is serious. If we are to hold onto Garrett's insight that the Title Principle is central to Hume's exposition of what we ought and ought not to accept, as I think we should, then the Title Principle requires serious revision. The most promising approach is to further clarify what we take to be a first principle of common sense. Ultimately it will be argued that what we recognise to

be the content of common sense is not static, but is instead sensitive to the mood we are in when we make this assessment. However before this argument can be deployed we need first to map out in general terms how mood makes an appearance in the way Hume deals with scepticism.

Unstable beliefs, common sense and mood

Interestingly, the conclusion that scepticism can have epistemic merit takes advantage of another distinctive feature of Garrett's interpretation of Hume's scepticism. Garrett is correct to argue that Hume's scepticism in Book 1 of the *Treatise* is consequent rather than antecedent. By this Garrett means that Hume's scepticism results from his discoveries concerning the origin of many of our beliefs and so emerges only after these inquiries have been conducted. Antecedent scepticism on the other hand emerges before any inquiries have been undertaken, usually by thinking in general terms about the possibility of meeting the standards required for knowledge or justified belief. Be that as it may, the point is that the scope of Hume's scepticism is contingent on the outcome of his actual inquiries. Early in Book 1 of the *Treatise* it looks as if Hume is going to have no particular difficulties with scepticism. Garrett has convincingly shown that even Hume's conclusions regarding induction are not genuinely sceptical in the context in which they first emerge, as at this point all these arguments show is that inductions are not performed by reason. It is only later in the *Treatise* that these conclusions are put to sceptical purposes.²²⁵ However in the early stages of the Conclusion to Book 1 it appears as if Hume will conclude exclusively with a potent form of scepticism, as the previous quotes demonstrate. It is only several pages into the conclusion that the Title Principle emerges to force us to recognise the epistemic merit of some beliefs.

Garrett is right to emphasise the consequent nature of Hume sceptical conclusions. Where I diverge from Garrett is over whether or not Hume's inquiries ultimately lead him past the potent form of scepticism we see in the conclusion of the *Treatise* and to a stable non-sceptical (or only moderately sceptical) point. Garrett summarises his position as follows.

²²⁵ Garrett, "a Small Tincture of Pyrrhonism': Skepticism and Naturalism in Hume's Science of Man," pp.73-74, 81-82. See also Garrett, *Cognition and Commitment in Hume's Philosophy* p.91-95.

‘Thus, naturalism leads naturally to a crisis of unmitigated practicing skeptical doubt, and the psychological defeat of that unmitigated practicing doubt incorporates the adoption of the only principle of epistemic merit that can now sustain a return to naturalism [i.e. the Title Principle]. This return to naturalism can occur, however, only in conjunction with a prescriptive and epistemic merit skepticism that is both constant and general – but mitigated.’²²⁶

It is not as if there is no support for taking the view that potent scepticism is merely a phase through which we move in our evolution towards a more settled naturalism.²²⁷

Particularly important in developing this reading is the passage towards the end of Book 1 of the *Treatise* where Hume seems to express precisely this view. Here Hume seems to say quite clearly that his inquiries will eventually lead him to a position from which it will be quite proper to make non-sceptical pronouncements, as we see below.

‘Nor is it only proper that we shou’d in general indulge our inclination in the most elaborate philosophical researches, notwithstanding our sceptical principles, but also that we should yield to that propensity, which inclines me to be positive and certain in *particular points*, according to the light, in which we survey them in any *particular instant*. It is easier to forbear all examination and enquiry, than to check ourselves in so natural a propensity, and guard against that assurance, which always arises from an exact and full survey of an object. On such an occasion we are apt not only to forget our scepticism, but even our modesty too; and make use of such terms as these, *it is evident, it is certain, it is undeniable*; which a due deference to the public ought, perhaps, to prevent.’²²⁸

However if scepticism can equally well be granted epistemic merit by the Title Principle, as has been argued above, then statements such as this cannot be used in any straightforward way to support an evolution beyond potent scepticism. At this point appealing to Garrett again becomes interesting. He makes the following point.

‘Because of these ultimate epistemic norms, those who rely on approvable forms of reasoning—at least when reasoning from approvable uses of memory or the senses, or when reasoning demonstratively—have epistemic reasons for the resulting beliefs and so have reasons-based status-justification; and in

²²⁶ Garrett, “a Small Tincture of Pyrrhonism’: Skepticism and Naturalism in Hume’s Science of Man,” 90.

²²⁷ This is in fact precisely what Garrett concludes in his more recent paper. See Garrett, “Reasons to Act and Believe: Naturalism and Rational Justification in Hume’s Philosophical Project.”

²²⁸ Hume, Selby-Bigge, and Nidditch, *A Treatise of Human Nature* I.IV.7, p.273. Italics original. This quote is particularly important if we take the reference to a propensity to be an implicit reference to the Title Principle.

holding beliefs as the result of such approvable reasoning, they are justly or appropriately responsive to epistemic reasons, and so have reasons-based process-justification.’²²⁹

The problem the preceding analysis proposes is that the identified norms do not themselves guarantee that we will always be led in an anti-sceptical direction. This is not to say that there are no norms or that they do not provide us with justifications. To repeat, Garrett is correct on both these points. However if scepticism also has epistemic merit in addition to non-sceptical positions then rather than an evolution away from scepticism in Hume’s we ought to speak of continual revolutions.

To support the idea of an evolution beyond potent scepticism we would need to establish that our propensities will always eventually lead us away from scepticism rather than towards it. Only then will reference to the Title Principle be able to grant epistemic merit to non-sceptical propositions but not to sceptical propositions. I do not believe our propensities always function in this way and nor can I find any evidence to think that Hume thought that they did. In fact there is every reason to think that Hume thought this was not the case, as there are several occasions in which Hume appears to be caught in scepticism. We see in the following passage that Hume’s scepticism emerges out of his inquiries, in this case his inquiries into the nature of our cognitive faculties.

‘For I have already shewn that the understanding, when it acts alone, and according to its most general principles, entirely subverts itself, and leaves not the lowest degree of evidence in any proposition, either in philosophy or common life. We save ourselves from this total scepticism only by means of that singular and seemingly trivial property of the fancy, by which we enter with difficulty into remote views of things, and are not able to accompany them with so sensible an impression, as we do those which are more easy and natural. Shall we, then, establish it for a general maxim, that no refined or elaborate reasoning is ever to be received?...If we embrace this principle, and condemn all refined reasoning, we run into the most manifest absurdities. If we reject it in favour of these reasonings, we subvert entirely the human understanding. We have therefore no choice left, but betwixt a false reason and none at all.’
[T.I.iv.vii. p.267]

It is out of conclusions of this sort that a higher-level scepticism develops, where this scepticism targets not specific propositions such as that there are other minds but

²²⁹ Garrett, “Reasons to Act and Believe: Naturalism and Rational Justification in Hume’s Philosophical Project,” p.15.

instead calls into question the value of inquiries into the reasons why we believe one thing rather than another, as all such inquiries lead to is further doubts. Hume notes that

‘[t]his sceptical doubt, both with respect to reason and the senses, is a malady which can never be radically cured, but must return upon us every moment, however we may chase it away, and sometimes may seem entirely free from it. It is impossible, upon any system, to defend either our understanding or senses; and we but expose them further when we endeavour to justify them in that manner. As the sceptical doubt arises naturally from a profound and intense reflection on those subjects, it always increases the further we carry our reflections, whether in opposition or conformity to it. Carelessness and inattention alone can afford us any remedy.’ [T.I.iv.ii. p.218]

However nor is it the case that our propensities *always* take us towards scepticism, and there are many occasions on which Hume displays a high degree of confidence that philosophical activity will produce something of value, and not always lead to further doubts. He describes these times of confidence in the following personal language.

‘At the time, therefore, that I am tired with amusement and company, and have indulged a *reverie* in my chamber, or in a solitary walk by a river side, I feel my mind all collected within itself, and am naturally *inclined* to carry my view into all those subjects, about which I have met with so many disputes in the course of my reading and conversation... I feel an ambition to arise in me of contributing to the instruction of mankind, and of acquiring a name by my inventions and discoveries. These sentiments spring up naturally in my present disposition; and should I endeavour to banish them, by attaching myself to any other business or diversion, I *feel* I should be a loser in point of pleasure; and this is the origin of my philosophy.’ [T.I.iv.vii. p.271]

Observing that we are at times led to respond in different ways to the very same inquiries naturally calls us to attempt some explanation of the source of the variability of these responses. Here again Hume proves to be helpful, for he points out that the response we make to the outcome of our inquiries is sensitive to mood we are in when we make that response.²³⁰ So for instance Hume’s inclination to abandon all inquiry is attributed to his being at that time under the influence of a ‘splenetic humour’, and in these moods he resolves

²³⁰ Hume also speaks of mood in a rarely extended way in the appendix, in a section appended to p.123 of the *Treatise*. Here however he is quite negative about the influence of mood, and this would seem to contradict the argument about to be introduced. This is a matter for extended discussion, and I will argue that the thrust of Hume’s argument is correct as presented in the Appendix but does not contradict the argument derived below from the body of the work. However further discussion will have to wait until chapter 5.

‘never more to renounce the pleasures of life for the sake of reasoning and philosophy. For those are my sentiments in that splenetic humour which governs me at present... No: if I must be a fool, as all those who reason or believe any thing *certainly* are, my follies shall at least be natural and agreeable. Where I strive against my inclination, I shall have a good reason for my resistance; and will no more be led a wandering into such dreary solitudes, and rough passages, as I have hitherto met with. These are the sentiments of my spleen and indolence; and indeed I must confess, that philosophy has nothing to oppose to them, and expects a victory more from the returns of a serious good-humoured disposition, than from the force of reason and conviction.’ [T I.iv.vii. p.269-270]

Glancing back at the statements that express this more positive attitude towards inquiry we see a similar theme emerge. Hume states that the periods during which he looks favourably on inquiry come directly after a period of calmness and meditation during which his mind is ‘all collected within itself’. Note however that the evidence to which Hume is responding when he makes these disparate responses is the same in each case. This raises the possibility, one which I believe we ought to accept, that as Hume sees things our mood decisively effects our judgement of the evidence, and even what we take to be commonsensical.

Garrett is to be commended for paying some attention to the influence of moods, as not all commentators give it this special attention. Further, as far as it goes what Garrett says is quite correct. That is, Garrett notes that Hume’s more strongly sceptical statements come under the influence of a specific mood, and we can do no better than restating his own summary;

‘[i]n this splenetic state of mind, the positive cultivation of reason through philosophy appears to be a way of torturing oneself to no good purpose, and hence something best avoided.’²³¹

Garrett is also quite right to point out that this splenetic mood is also quite unstable, although what we ought to conclude from this instability remains unclear. We should not be too hasty in dismissing a mood just because it is unstable, for all moods display some instability. Were this not the case we would never shift from one mood to another. In fact it should be fairly clear from what has been said above that I take it that Garrett has paid insufficient attention to the instability of what we might think of as more positive moods such as curiosity and optimism. If it genuinely is the case that

²³¹ Garrett, *Cognition and Commitment in Hume's Philosophy* p.233.

Hume's attitude to his conclusions is decisively shaped by his mood then this raises another way of reading those statements which are commonly taken to support the evolutionary view of his position. It would be helpful to repeat these claims.

'Nor is it only proper we should in general indulge our inclination in the most elaborate philosophical researches, notwithstanding our sceptical principles, but also that we should yield to that propensity, which inclines us to be positive and certain in *particular points*, according to the light in which we survey them in any *particular instant*. It is easier to forbear all examination and enquiry, than to check ourselves in so natural a propensity, and guard against that assurance, which always arises from an exact and full survey of an object. On such an occasion we are apt not only to forget our scepticism, but even our modesty too; and make use of such terms as these, *it is evident, it is certain, it is undeniable*; which a due deference to the public ought, perhaps, to prevent.' [T I.iv.vii. p.273]

Earlier it was possible to read this statement as supportive of the idea that Hume's robust scepticism evolves into a more settled anti-sceptical (or only minimally sceptical) naturalism. However given the considerations presented above this no longer seems possible. In fact there is every reason to think that Hume's sceptical conclusions have epistemic merit if anything does, as we have seen. So then, when Hume at the end of Book 1 of the *Treatise* makes obviously non-sceptical pronouncements these cannot be understood to derive from the conclusion of his inquiries. These conclusions are thoroughly sceptical in nature. Rather we must attribute these non-sceptical pronouncements to the mood Hume is in when he makes these pronouncements. It just so happens that when Hume writes the final passages of the conclusion of Book 1 he is in a confident and calm mood. However we must keep in mind that there is nothing to suggest that he will always remain in this mood. Indeed, his own experience should teach him otherwise.

Mood and perspectivism

i) Clarifying mood

To date the term 'mood' has been used in a fairly loose sense, and no effort has been made to provide a definition for this term or to distinguish it from other closely related terms like feelings and emotions. An attempt will now be made to remedy this situation, although the reader should be aware that the correct analysis of moods is

contentious and so any suggestion is bound to meet resistance. In the present analysis I shall distinguish between moods and emotions, and shall also distinguish between moods and feelings. The reason for distinguishing between moods and emotions is twofold. First, there is the commonly raised observation that emotions are intentional while moods are not. That is, emotions are directed towards or about some specific object, for instance my anger could be directed towards, or be about, the drunken hooligans yelling abuse at each other outside my house at night and stopping me from getting to sleep. While I might be in a bad mood *because* of these circumstances I am not in a bad mood about or towards the hooligans. Moods do not take any specific object, in that a mood biases the view we take of every object which happens to come to our attention. We know this well, for instance when we find ourselves snapping at our wife just because we have been put in a bad mood by the noisy hooligans.²³²

The second reason for distinguishing between moods and emotions is related to the first, in that moods often survive over long periods of time, whereas emotions do not. In general, emotions disappear or at least diminish in strength when the object towards which they are directed disappears from view. This is not the case with moods for the simple reason that moods do not take any particular object and so can survive any particular object disappearing from view. For this reason it is reasonable to talk of someone being in a certain mood even when they are not focused on any object. So for instance we can and do speak of someone being in a bad mood even when at that moment they are not snapping at anyone, breaking furniture or showing any other signs of their mood. What we mean when we say someone is in such a mood is not that they are responding negatively to someone or something right now, but that they will be inclined to respond negatively to whatever next comes to their attention.

Implicit in this second reason for distinguishing between a mood and an emotion is a further distinction between a mood and a feeling. Because a mood can be present without focusing on any object and without exhibiting itself in any behaviour it is also

²³² Granted, DeLancey has recently argued that moods are very weak basic emotions partly on the grounds that sometimes emotions either do not have an object or that the object is so unclear that it cannot be determined. See Craig DeLancey, "Basic Moods," *Philosophical Psychology* 19, no. 4 (2006). The other reason DeLancey finds for arguing that moods are emotions is that it appeals to his sense of parsimony, and does not require any further theories of the mind to make it convincing. However I do not see why viewing moods as different to emotions would not by its very complexity lead to a positive research agenda. In such cases adhering to parsimony can be stifling of advancement.

conceivable that a mood could be present without there being any associated feeling. For instance we can be in a bad mood without feeling angry or irritated, just as long as we aren't focusing on any object which would elicit such a response. Further, Sizer has convincingly argued that appeals to feelings and moods (and emotions also, although the focus here is on moods) perform different explanatory roles. An appeal to moods (and emotions) is made in order to explain our behaviour, in that it plays a causal role in determining our behaviour. However feelings do not have such a causal role to play, as they are better understood as being consequences rather than causes.²³³ Sizer states the essence of this argument in the following way.

‘Consider a case where a friend comments that you have been irritable all day. You object (angrily) at first, but then agree upon further consideration of the facts. What are the relevant facts? What is it that you examine to make this determination? It is not your feelings; you do not search about in your conscious experience for an irritable sensation. If you did, you would not find one that is uniquely indicative of irritability. Irritability and anxiety, for example, tend to feel very similar. But they are certainly very different moods. The relevant facts here are the pattern of thoughts and behaviors you have exhibited throughout the day. You realize that you have snapped at anyone who came near you, broken a few pencils and even now resent having your irritability pointed out to you. In other words, you recognize your mood by examining the patterns of thoughts and behaviors, by reflecting on how you have thought about and approached the world today, not by considering how you feel.’²³⁴

With these distinctions in place we now have a fairly clear idea of what a mood is not, in that mood is neither an emotion nor a feeling. We also know that moods bring about more global changes than do emotions, in that they do not focus on any particular object, and hence moods shape the way we respond to any and every object that comes to our attention. The question then is how far the influence extends, and what light an appeal to mood can shed on the place of scepticism in our intellectual lives. More immediately though we need to understand how mood effects the attitude we take towards common sense.

²³³ This is easier to demonstrate in the case of strong emotions such as fear. Reserving talk of emotion to psychological states and feelings for conscious awareness of those states, we can say that the emotion of fear is the psychological state, which in turn causes a heightened heart rate, hairs on the back of the neck to stand up etc. The feeling is the consciousness awareness of having a heightened heart rate, hairs standing on end etc. But then the emotion causes the feeling and subsequent actions and not the other way around. Following Sizer, we can then view the feeling as being a mental alert to the presence of an emotion which allows us to reflect on the circumstances which give rise to this state and hence allows us to learn something useful about these circumstances. Without this alert we would be in a position to learn anything from our emotions.

²³⁴ Laura Sizer, “What Feelings Can't Do,” *Mind and Language* 21, no. 1 (2006): p.132.

ii) Mood and common sense

Recall that in chapter 1 it was argued that, according to the perspective taken by CSN, there is such a thing as natural commitment, and these natural commitments, even if contingent, are also common to all humans. These common natural commitments are what each of Sextus, Hume, Reid and Strawson identify as common sense, Reid more explicitly than the others. Second, all four also take it that appealing to the naturalness – in the sense in which each understands nature – of common sense explains why justificatory inquiry directed towards common sense is vain.²³⁵ As it turns out, our taking common sense to be commonsensical is insensitive to the outcome of justificatory inquiry into common sense. It also emerged in this chapter that while the content of common sense is in fact fixed, it was not due to the content of these propositions alone that it counts as commonsensical.

To repeat some further claims from chapter 1, it is accurate to say that it is commonsensical to take such-and-such an attitude to specifiable content. In this way CSN sidesteps debates over whether common sense is to be defined in terms of content or in terms of attitude. In fact both attitudinal and content-based appeals are required to do justice to common sense. Appealing exclusively to attitude is inadequate as the natural attitudes important for common sense cannot be maintained when directed towards just any proposition. Some propositions really do have a special place in our cognitive economy, as we have seen above in the exposition of the Title Principle. However simply listing these propositions is also inadequate as it leaves unexplained why these propositions are special.

The present analysis of moods makes some sense when placed in the context of this broader understanding of common sense. Moods, analysed above, produce global effects in the way we respond to the world. However, earlier work on the Title Principle has already suggested that how we respond to the world is shaped by common sense. To bring these ideas together we might suggest that our mood decisively effects what we take to be commonsensical. We see here the importance of including an attitudinal

²³⁵ Detail of what each takes to be the relevant description of nature/natural is found in chapter 1.

component in common sense is important as moods is sensibly taken to have some immediate impact on our attitudes. However, it would be implausible to give to our mood a free reign in determining what we take to be commonsensical, for it does seem that there are some things that no one can take to be commonsensical. This is why an exclusively attitudinal account is inadequate. An appeal to the importance of specifying in advance the range of possible contents that common sense could have places an important limit on what moods can do.

One outcome of this way of bringing together the importance of both the Title Principle and common sense is that it emerges that common sense must play a mediating role in our cognitive economy, standing between our mood and our other beliefs and actions. According to this way of understanding moods they do not directly effect our normal beliefs and actions. It is via altering the content of what we take to be commonsensical that mood attains this efficacy and it only does so because common sense has been revealed to constitute the proper context for the application of reason.

There are certain benefits to this idea of a mediating role for common sense, in that placing common sense between moods and beliefs allows for a clearer way of explaining how it is that moods can impact on propositional contents. We have said above that moods are neither feelings nor emotions and do not target any particular object. The same observations also warrant the claim that moods are not beliefs. However if moods are neither feelings, emotions or beliefs then it remains a mystery how it is that they have any effect. The solution is that a mood is adequately described by specifying that unique content of common sense that the mood activates. That is, being in a bad mood is the same thing as having a set of commitments taken to be commonsensical with such-and-such a structure. Hence what distinguished one mood from another is only secondarily the different behaviours and reactions that we can observe. The primary distinguishing feature of one mood against another is actually the structure of common sense particular to that mood.

Taking this view of the relationship between mood and common sense carries several implications for how we ought to understand common sense in particular. First, the content of common sense cannot be fixed, or at least not in its entirety. In order for the influence of mood to have any real importance then different moods must be allowed to

influence the attitude we take towards common sense, and in turn lead to the restructuring of common sense itself. However if the content of common sense is variable, then since this content structures rationality (at least for us) then we can no longer speak of rationality in a univocal sense. There will in fact be as many rationalities as there are moods, and hence the set of propositions for which rational justification can be provided may be broader than we initially realised.

Note also that if we abstract away from the influence of any particular mood and consider the complete set of propositions for which rational justification can be given we see that this set may contain contradictions. There is no guarantee that what is recognised as commonsensical under one mood is consistent with what is recognised as commonsensical under all other moods. Recognising this takes us one step closer to a better understanding of the rather unsatisfying perspectivism that originally emerged at the close of chapter 2. We now see that coming to a sceptical perspective is comprehensible even if we start from a commonsensical perspective by suggesting that the sceptical mood changes what we take to be commonsensical and hence allows rational justification to be provided for scepticism without contradicting the first principles of common sense. Those principles have now changed, and so allow scepticism to be possible.

iii) Another brief comment on Williams' objection to Pyrrhonism

The above comments should not be read as providing any succour to Williams regarding the idea that there really is a difference between Pyrrhonism and common sense. It is not the case that a change in our mood changes the details of the norms of inquiry identified in chapter 2, and it is important to the argument here that these norms do not change. These norms must capture our everyday epistemic practices such that in developing Pyrrhonism on this basis it is developed from common sense. However, what does change is our perception of what are the appropriate conditions in which these rules are to be applied. From an everyday perspective we do take ourselves to be entitled to ignore some scenarios, excluding these scenarios from the range of possibilities into which we feel ourselves obliged to inquire. That is, we take it as commonsensical at these times that some possibilities are not worthy of our attention. Yet when our mood changes, and thus when what we take to be commonsensical is

restructured, it can happen that scenarios that were previously ignored are now not so. We now take it as commonsensical that these scenarios are relevant. However the basic rules that we apply in each case remain constant throughout.

The only way of supporting the conclusion that Pyrrhonism is not genuinely commonsensical would be to show that it invokes different application conditions for common sense rules than does actual common sense. However, this would require building a particular set of application conditions into common sense and for what possible reason should we favour this set of application conditions rather than another? Only a bald-faced dogmatism can recommend one set of applications without presenting reasons for the recommendation. Chapter 2 has shown that despite very good attempts being made it has not yet been shown that there is a reason to favour one set of application conditions over another. Thus even though common sense can undergo changes in its structure this does not endanger the claim that Pyrrhonism is commonsensical.

Common sense, norms and natural commitment.

i) Common sense and mood

Allowing mood to play the role designated here, and hence to shape what we take to be commonsensical, has a certain amount of explanatory power. For instance altering what we take to be commonsensical could explain why moods other than the one we happen to be in at a given time sometimes strike us as irrational and even incomprehensible at that time. For instance, someone in deep depression fails to comprehend how any rational person could ever be in an ebullient mood, and visa versa. For someone in deep depression the world just isn't an attractive place, and that it isn't attractive is taken as commonsensical. Hence when they encounter someone in an ebullient mood such a person must strike them as being under the influence of drugs or some such, or just as completely idiotic. As a result, when someone trapped in deep depression hears someone else say 'cheer up, it's ok' that phrase must just sound hopelessly question-

begging. Why should they cheer up? Not because the world is a happy wonderful place, as they must take it that it is commonsensically not so.²³⁶

Mood shaping what we take to be rational via influencing what is taken to be commonsensical could also explain why arguments against scepticism have consistently failed to impress those actually caught in scepticism. Typically, such arguments have struck genuine sceptics as hopelessly question begging. What these anti-sceptical arguments consistently fail to take account of is that our senses/reason cannot be relied upon until it has been proven to be reliable, since for sceptics the necessity of proof regarding this reliability is itself commonsensical. Similarly, arguments for scepticism strike non-sceptics as deeply misguided by demanding that we prove what we already *commonsensically* know; that our senses and reason can be relied upon at least generally. Yet while judgements of rational justification are relative to the mood we are in when we make these judgements this does not mean that all judgements of rational justification are on an equal footing. It may well be the case that there is a privileged mood which when occupied allows one to make judgements of rational justification that are privileged against judgements made when in other moods. Of course it may not turn out this way as well, however no position one way or the other has been taken regarding that question.

However, even if everything which has been said here about the influence of mood on common sense is correct, the representation of common sense itself is still misleading. Mood exercises an influence at a global level. The sceptical mood for instance effects our attitudes to all the first principles of common sense identified by Rysiew (in turn expounding Reid) all at once. Recall that the propositions forming this content include that there are other intelligent beings like me in the world, that my senses are reliable, that the future will in general conform to the past, etc. When in the sceptical mood we come to regard none of these propositions as first principles of common sense. In general doubting this kind of proposition is an all-or-nothing affair, in that we either doubt all of them or none of them, more often doubting none of them of course. Yet this

²³⁶ We might even want to suggest that perspectives structured by radically different conceptions of common sense and different moods are in fact incommensurable, taking our cue from Taylor in understanding incommensurability. See Charles Taylor, "Rationality," in *Rationality and Relativism*, ed. Martin Hollis (Cambridge: Mit Pr, 1982).

is difficult to account for if we think of the content of common sense in terms of discrete propositions towards which we adopt the propositional attitude of belief.

I would argue that we need to think of the content of common sense as coming pre-packaged into a large and perhaps nebulous collection. This would explain why scepticism is generally an all-or-nothing affair when targeting what are here being called the first principles of common sense. Further, I would also argue that this content includes not just propositions but also includes emotional responses, desires, inclinations to act in certain ways and disinclinations to act in other ways.²³⁷ Hence when mood alters common sense it alters not what just what we take to be true but also alters our emotional state and motivates us to undertake certain activities.²³⁸

ii) Towards an account of common sense

Towards the conclusion of chapter 2 it was noted that the first principles of common sense emerge most clearly in our everyday practices in that they make these practices possible. We can now see more clearly why this is so, in that the content of common sense includes motivations, emotions, inclinations and commitment to various fundamental propositions such as that reference books can be relied upon. That is, this content will become evident when we engage in the specific practices a given mood inclines us towards. When we are in a sceptical mood one of these practices will be to go about saying that nothing is certain, coupled with a strong aversion to any engagement in inquiry and an intolerance to anyone claiming to know anything. When in a non-sceptical mood we will be motivated to engage in inquiry and to accept with generosity the claims of others to know various things.

Common sense provides the proper context for our everyday practices. Yet to determine the structure of common sense we have seen above that we need to look to our everyday practices. Hence it is not surprising that one would sometimes encounter the claim that inquiries (as one of the everyday practices in which we engage) find their

²³⁷ That emotions and feelings could be included as part of a pre-packaged common sense, itself shaped by mood, is part of why it was important to distinguish between mood and emotion.

²³⁸ These themes will become very important in chapter 4.

terminus in our practice rather than in any foundational premises of the sort Reid identifies. For instance Wittgenstein makes the following points.

‘Giving grounds, however, justifying the evidence, comes to an end;- but the end is not certain propositions’ striking us immediately as true, i.e. it is not a kind of seeing on our part; it is our *acting*, which lies at the bottom of the language-game.’ [OC 204]

‘If someone is taught to calculate, is he also taught that he can rely on a calculation of his teacher’s? But these explanations must after all sometime come to an end. Will he also be taught that he can trust his senses – since he is indeed told in many cases that in such and such a special case you cannot trust them?
–

Rule and exception.’ [OC 34]

‘In certain circumstances, for example, we regard a calculation as sufficiently checked. What gives us a right to do so? Experience? May not that have deceived us? Somewhere we must be finished with justification, and then there remains the proposition that *this* is how we calculate.’ [OC 212]

‘Our talk gets its meaning from the rest of our proceeding.’ [OC 229]

Wittgenstein’s point in speaking in this manner is to point out that it is our practice that ultimately provides the ground for our justifications and not any sort of first principles. That is, our justifications come to an end when we act on our beliefs, and not when we find a solid foundation for those beliefs. This is why Wittgenstein says that our talk (i.e., our justificatory procedures) gets its meaning from the rest of our proceeding, that is, it gets its meaning from our practice. Wittgenstein’s intent is to change the direction of analysis by giving priority to appeals to practice over appeals to theories of justification. We see this attempt to change the perspective from which the debates over justification are normally carried out in the following statement.

‘We are asking ourselves : what do we do with a statement “I know...” For it is not a question of mental processes or mental states.

And *that* is how one must decide whether something is knowledge or not.’ [OC 230]

From this perspective the following claims also makes a great deal of sense.

‘If the true if what is grounded, then the ground is not *true*, nor yet false.

For actions are not true or false, propositions are. But the ground is the actions, not the propositions.’
[OC 205]

Yet while it might make perfect sense for Wittgenstein to say this I suggest that this is not quite right. It is not practice but common sense that ultimately grounds our justificatory efforts. What we need is a final account of exactly what the content of common sense is.

Given what has been said to this point it is now possible to make the claim that the content of common sense is provided by norms of which those identified in chapter 2 and the Title Principle are excellent examples. Yet even though this claim does follow from what has been argued above it is nonetheless a complex and contentious claim and thus requires some clarification. Perhaps the best way to draw out this idea is to again turn to some of Sextus’ observations as these were taken in the preface. Recall that part of Sextus’ project was to poke fun at his dogmatic opponents for attempting to come to the defence of a common sense that did not require their support. In Sextus particular version of the response of ridiculing his opponents rather than debating them we find the idea that in the face of apparently logically sound arguments, ordinary people

‘set out on journeys by land and sea, and construct ships and houses, and produce children, without paying any attention to the arguments against motion and coming into being.’ [PH II.244]²³⁹

We should be sensitive at this point to what Sextus does not say. He does not say that the man of common sense believes that objects come into being or believes that movement is possible. Sextus says that normal people generate objects and move about. That is, Sextus shifts the focus from what the man of common sense (and remember this is supposed to include the Pyrrhonian) *believes* to what the man of common sense *does*. What does this change of focus tell us about the structure of the natural commitments that Sextus has identified?

²³⁹ Sextus may have borrowed this response from the Cynics and so it might be more accurate to describe this response as Cynical rather than Pyrrhonian. Either way, it is an interesting response. One should also keep in mind when considering this statement that for Sextus ‘ordinary’ = ‘non-philosophical’ = Pyrrhonian.

I suggest that Sextus' insight at this crucial point is to suggest that the everyday response to apparently sound arguments against some special targets is to *practice in a certain way*. The everyday response is not to dogmatically insist that some commitments are known with certainty or presupposed by the original argument and certainly not to present countervailing arguments in support of these natural commitments. The first thing to note is that Sextus has shifted ground from the epistemic to the psychological. Being presented with apparently sound arguments against our knowledge claims presents us with questions over our entitlement to make these claims and hold these commitments, and these questions can only be answered with further claims of an epistemic nature, for instance by appealing to the concept of justification. However Sextus has no interest in making any epistemic claims. The claims that Sextus does make are of a psychological and pragmatic nature. That is, Sextus is speaking about what commitments we must adopt and what actions or practices in which we are forced to engage.

In keeping with this shift in perspective we can take Sextus' idea even further and suggest that what Sextus identifies as natural commitments are commitments to *practice* in a certain way. Further, our commitment to these practices overrides the effect of any arguments with which we are presented which would indicate that we actually have no entitlement to practice in this way. One reason why this is a helpful approach for us to take is that taking such a view allows us to incorporate an insight we earlier found in Wittgenstein, although perhaps not in exactly the sense in which Wittgenstein intended this to be taken. To recapitulate, in that statement Wittgenstein said the following.

'Giving grounds, however, justifying the evidence, comes to an end;- but the end is not certain propositions' striking us immediately as true, i.e. it is not a kind of seeing on our part; it is our *acting*, which lies at the bottom of the language-game.' [OC 204]

'If the true if what is grounded, then the ground is not *true*, nor yet false' [OC 205]

If our natural commitments are commitments to practice in a certain way then it is apparent why Wittgenstein's statements are true. Practices, for instance, are not technically the kinds of things that could be either true or false. This is of course not to

say that practices are completely beyond the scope of examination, for while they cannot actually be true or false themselves they have attributes or consequences which are beneficial or damaging, warranted or unwarranted. Practices of a certain sort can even lead to outcomes that are true or false, in that there could be practices that govern belief formation. Practices could then be examined and critiqued in the sense that the consequences and outcomes of following these practices could be examined and critiqued.

While Sextus is in a sense correct to suggest that there are certain practices to which we have a natural commitment, the reason we have just this natural commitment rather than some other commitment to so practice derives from a prior natural commitment to respect certain norms. While for Sextus the relevant sense of ‘natural’ is here something akin to ‘scientific’ we are not wedded to such a conception. It could be that these norms are a condition for the possibility of reason instead. Indeed, given the problem that were noted in the Humean/Sextan view explained in chapter 1 this would seem to be a better approach.

It is in fact these norms which are fundamental and explain why our practices have the structure that they have. For instance the common practice of taking our memory to be reliable is engaged in out of respect for the norm which directs us to respect our memory. Put another way the practice is ‘trusting memory’ whereas the norm is ‘trust memory’.²⁴⁰ While practices are only one step removed from the ground they are not themselves the ground. Certain norms are the ground. However, like a practice, a norm cannot be true or false and so meets the Wittgensteinian requirement above.²⁴¹

But in what sense would it be appropriate to use the language of grounding when speaking of these norms or these practices? In what sense can a norm or a derivative practice, which cannot itself be true or false, be a ground for something else? If we are

²⁴⁰ That is, the difference between a practice and a norm is reflected in the grammatical form we use to express the two concepts. Norms are standardly expressed in statements of the form ‘you ought to do x ’ or by a simple imperative ‘do x ’. For instance one might describe a norm as introducing the injunction ‘you ought to trust memory’ or just ‘trust memory’. Note that due to having such a form norms are freestanding grammatical entities, that is, they present themselves in complete sentences. Practices on the other hand are best expressed in participial form. For instance, one might describe a practice as ‘trusting memory’. As such, practices unlike norms do not take the form of freestanding grammatical entities.

²⁴¹ Like a practice though a norm can be rationally critiqued and examined, in this case in terms of the fitness of the practices in which we would be led to engage were we to respect this norm.

thinking of the ground in epistemic terms then indeed using the language of grounding is at best misleading. We have already seen that practices (and hence norms also, at least implicitly) were only introduced after an epistemic framework had been abandoned in preference for a psychological or pragmatic one. That we have a commitment to practice in a certain way does not all of itself provide us with an entitlement to so practice. In terms drawn from chapter 3, that we are committed to a given practice does not confer any epistemic merit on the outcomes of this practice, even if those outcomes are the kinds of things which could be true or false, such as the content of a belief. Given the arguments presented by Sextus so far this would not change if norms are brought into the picture, for the reason why we respect these norms is the same as that for which we engage in certain practices; psychological compulsion or pragmatism. However in a non-epistemic sense we could speak of norms – and the practices to which they lead – as being at the ground in the sense in which we cannot go any further than an appeal to these norms when we analyse the source and foundation of human knowledge. In this non-epistemic sense, we can suggest that the ground is that point beyond which we can carry our inquiries no further. If it turns out that this point confers no epistemic merit on those commitments of ours that are built on this ground, for instance certain practices or beliefs, then so be it. In this non-epistemic sense, arriving at the ground was precisely what David Hume achieved (or at least thought he had) in the *Treatise*, and it is useful here to revise his comments in the introduction to that work regarding this very point.

‘When we see, that we have arrived at the utmost extent of human reason, we sit down contented; though we be perfectly satisfied in the main of our ignorance, and perceive that we can give no reason for our most general and most refined principles, beside our experience of their reality; which is the reason of the mere vulgar, and what it required no study at first to have discovered for the most particular and most extraordinary phenomenon. And as this impossibility of making any further progress is enough to satisfy the reader, so the writer may derive a more delicate satisfaction from the free confession of his ignorance, and from his prudence in avoiding that error, into which so many have fallen, of imposing their conjectures and hypotheses on the world for the most certain principles. When this mutual contentment and satisfaction can be obtained betwixt the master and scholar, I know not what more we can require of our philosophy.’ [T.xvii]

Taking the ground of our commitments not to confer any epistemic merit on those commitments is of course a highly sceptical point to make. Such a conclusion may also

be deeply unsatisfying for those committed to the idea that philosophical analysis can tell us not just what we actually do but what we ought to do, as Hume anticipates in the preceding quote. Nonetheless, this dissertation did not set out to show that scepticism could be answered or even dissolved. Ultimately though we shall see in the final sections of this chapter that indeed we do have an entitlement to respect these norms. The problem is that respecting these norms leads us directly to Pyrrhonian scepticism, as chapter 2 has established.

iii) Advantages of taking the content of common sense to be norms

Thinking of our natural commitments in terms of norms and norm-directed practices does have some advantages in addition to what might be perceived as some to be the disadvantages mentioned above. The main advantage is that norms are exactly the kinds of things that we might expect to be directly influenced by moods, in that both operate on the global scale and neither are limited to taking particular objects. In this respect it would make at least as much sense to describe a mood by listing the norms that being in that mood would lead you to respect as it would to describe a mood by listing the things that being in that mood leads us to take to be commonsensical. It is for the same reason that the behavioural differences to which variations in mood lead, for norms are by their very nature behaviour-guiding.

It is clear that mood has decisive effects on the kinds of activities in which we are inclined to engage, even leading us to engage in activities that in other circumstances we would find completely unmotivated and unproductive. It is also clear that some activities are associated with the presence and absence of some moods. Re-examining Hume's various responses as being attributed to the various moods we find in the *Treatise* alerts us to this, and is particularly noticeable when we consider why Hume wrote the second and especially the third book of the *Treatise*. To explain this we need to know how Hume could have any confidence that further inquiry would lead to anything other than further doubts. Interestingly, Hume does not seem to think that there is any great risk of this. At the opening of the third book Hume explains his confidence in the following way.

‘I am not, however, without hopes, that the present system of philosophy will acquire new force as it advances; and that our reasonings concerning *morals* will corroborate whatever has been said concerning the *understanding* and the *passions*. Morality is a subject that interests us above all others; we fancy the peace of society to be at stake in every decision concerning it; and it is evident that this concern must make our speculations appear more real and solid, than where the subject is in a great measure indifferent to us. What affects us, we conclude, can never be a chimera; and, as our passion is engaged on the one side or the other, we naturally think that the question lies within human comprehension; which, in other cases of this nature, we are apt to entertain some doubt of. Without this advantage, I never should have ventured upon a third volume of such abstruse philosophy, in an age wherein the greatest part of men seem agreed to convert reading into an amusement, and to reject every thing that requires any considerable degree of attention to be comprehended.’ [T.III.i.i. pp.455-456]

Hume’s confidence here seems to derive not from any special features of discussion on moral topics but from the fact that we are not generally inclined to fall into a sceptical mood when engaged in moral reflection (or at least he is not thus inclined). As a result we more reliably take as commonsensical that philosophical inquiry will prove useful in resolving our questions when engaged with moral topics than we do when philosophical inquiry turns to more abstract topics.²⁴² However, note that Hume does not argue that it is impossible that sceptical arguments could be presented against the result of moral reflection. The point is just that we are not generally inclined to take arguments like this seriously, which in Hume’s view is fortunate indeed as for him much of practical value hangs on these investigations.

The second advantage of this approach is that taking the content of common sense to be a collection of norms is that it allows for the inclusion of both the attitudinal and content-based aspects of the earlier attempts at the clarification of common sense. Norms do have a content and it is right that specifying the content of common sense be given due attention. However, this content is not one that is straightforwardly true or false. Hence representing common sense as a series of propositions to which any rational agent must always give their assent is in fact a misrepresentation of common sense. On the reading given here there is a great difference between saying, for instance, the command ‘trust your memory’ and the proposition ‘that memory ought to be trusted’. Only the former content is commonsensical. Further, the importance of an attitudinal component is also clear, in that even if we can correctly specify the content

²⁴² Where Hume takes it that metaphysical and epistemological topics are abstract, as are those in what we would not call the philosophy of mind.

of common sense we have not thereby explained why common sense has *this* content rather than another. To explain that we need to account for how our attitude comes to pick out this content, and as we have seen this is not something that can be explained by appealing to the content itself.

The final advantage that this approach to common sense has is that taking the recognised content of common sense to be sensitive to mood does not require that we adapt the current explication of the Title Principle in any way. The Title Principle only requires that a proposition be recognised as a first principle of common sense. It does not itself explicitly state that these first principle will either be insensitive to mood or will be recognised to be so. Nor does taking the content of common sense to be a collection of norms require any modifications, and for the same reasons.

With mood-sensitivity in mind we can now read the Title Principle as explaining not just how scepticism could be normative (*if* the norms upon which it is based are themselves genuinely normative) but also why we ought sometimes to continue our inquiries, if we are in an appropriate mood. The problem of course is that it turns out that a very wide range of commitments could have epistemic merit, if we can find an appropriate mood and there is no guarantee that the set of commitments that find epistemic merit will be consistent. However if anything can have epistemic merit then one wonders what kind of merit is involved here, in that being meritorious usually implies being better than the alternative. Yet it seems to this point that all alternatives are equal, in the right circumstances. So not only is speaking of *epistemic* merit misleading, it is also misleading to speak of epistemic *merit*.

It turns out then that not only does our talk get its meaning from the rest of our proceeding (as Wittgenstein taught us) but our rationality itself emerges only in the context of the rest of our proceedings, or more correctly from the norms that govern those proceedings. It thus follows that a necessary condition of becoming rational is that we first practice in a certain way, where these practices in turn derive their structure from the norms towards which they are directed. Hence to say that being rational is a matter of having the correct beliefs or deriving the correct conclusions from given premises seriously misrepresents the order in which such matters need to be

discussed. Being rational is first and foremost being respectful of certain norms and exhibiting this respectfulness in practice.

iv) 'Fictional' grounds

What then is the status of those propositions that express principles such as 'that our memory is reliable', 'that there are other minds' etc? Clearly, such propositions cannot properly capture the ground of our beliefs. That ground, as we have just said, is a commitment to respect certain norms, which in turn leads us to engage in specific practices. While more shall be said about these norms and practices shortly, enough has been said for the moment to examine the status of principles such as 'that there is an external world' or 'that there are other minds'.

If what has previously been said regarding practices and natural commitments is accurate then this implies that casting our natural commitments as beliefs of the form 'that the external world exists' and 'that there are other minds' is quite inaccurate. Such a form is not appropriate to accurately capture a commitment to respect certain norms.²⁴³ In turn this implies that propositions such as 'that the external world exists' or 'that there are other minds' play no grounding role in relation to our everyday way of interacting with our environment. That grounding role, such as it is, is played by our commitment to respect certain norms and hence practice in a certain way. That being said, we might well wonder whether we need to suppose that anyone actually has a commitment with a propositional content of the sort 'that there is an external world' or 'that there are other minds'. It certainly does not appear that such a commitment would play any significant role in our cognitive economy, which removes any necessity of appealing to these commitments. For instance if we are operating under a norm such as 'trust the senses to connect you to external objects' then it is unclear why we would also need to refer to the proposition 'that there is an external world'. Any work that such a proposition might do is already being done by the specified norm. Here we should appeal to a doxastic version of Occam's razor and suggest that we should not attribute to anyone more commitments than are required to explain the functioning of their cognitive economy. Given that establishing the truth of commitments such as 'that

²⁴³ What form would be required will be considered in some detail in a following section.

there is an external world' or 'that there are other minds' has proven to be philosophically contentious it would be best if we did not suppose that propositions such as these form part of the content of our commitments.

Accepting the claim that propositions such as 'that there is an external world' or 'that there are other minds' do not form part of the content of our commitments has implications for the coherence of refutations of scepticism directed at such propositions (i.e., Cartesian scepticism). If such propositions do not actually appear among our commitments then refuting Cartesian scepticism is uninformative of the structure of actual human knowledge. However, this does not prove that refuting Cartesian scepticism is impossible in this tightly restricted sense, as it only shows that such refutation would take us no distance towards a better understanding of actual human knowledge. Hence the motivation for refuting Cartesian scepticism remains unclear. Further, the history of epistemology has surely demonstrated that providing such a refutation is extremely difficult and I suspect that the prospects of such a proof are not encouraging to say the least. Nonetheless it must be conceded that nothing here implies that a refutation of Cartesian scepticism, understood in this restricted sense, is actually impossible as it only shows that such a refutation would be uninformative.

At this point both a convergence and divergence can be discerned between the arguments presented here and those presented by Strawson. To reiterate, Strawson makes the following important (although subtly wrong) claim.

'The correct way with the professional sceptic doubt is not to attempt to rebut it with argument, but to point out that it is idle, unreal, a pretense; and then the rebutting arguments will appear as equally idle; the reasons produced in those arguments to justify induction or belief in the existence of body are not, and do not become, *our* reasons for these beliefs; there is no such thing as *the reasons for which we hold* these beliefs. We simply cannot help accepting them as defining the areas within which the questions come up of what beliefs we should hold on such-and-such a matter.'²⁴⁴

Strawson rightly thinks that there is something incoherent in attempting to refute scepticism by presenting justifications for certain propositions. However he is wrong to think that the reason that refuting scepticism is incoherent has to do with the connection

²⁴⁴ Strawson, *Skepticism and Naturalism: Some Varieties* pp.19-20.

between the targets of scepticism and any reasons that might be brought forward on their behalf. Attempting to refute scepticism is futile, according to Strawson, because the beliefs for which these propositions provide the content do not take reasons. That is why he says that ‘there is no such thing as *the reasons for which we hold* these beliefs’. However the important point is not the connection between the targets of Cartesian scepticism and reasons, it is the connection between the targets of Cartesian scepticism and us. Strawson’s mistake is to suppose, incorrectly, that the sceptic has been targeting a commitment that we actually hold, for instance a commitment with a content such as ‘that there is an external world’ or ‘that there are other minds’. In fact it might be possible (although history should teach us that it is extremely unlikely) that such commitments could be justified. However even if they were, such justification would tell us nothing about our knowledge because commitments of this sort are not *our* commitments. It is not that there is no such things as the reason for which we hold these commitments. It is that there are no commitments which we hold.

Granted, when directed towards our actual commitments Strawson’s transcendental style of argument *might* provide us with entitlement to these commitments. Yet this in turn reveals a deeper point at which Strawson is mistaken, in that he supposes that showing that the fact that we are committed to some commitments as ‘defining the area in which questions come up’ is somehow an anti-sceptical claim. If the argument of this dissertation is correct then indeed we are committed to some natural commitments, and indeed these commitments do provide a context for the proper application of reason. However, because the content of these natural commitments can shift in such a way as to lead to radical Pyrrhonian scepticism appealing to these natural commitments cannot possibly be anti-sceptical. Pyrrhonian scepticism is internal to the commitments to which Strawson would appeal. But precisely because these natural commitments can in certain contexts lead to scepticism it cannot be said that we have any entitlement to these commitments. Paradoxically, appealing to these natural commitments as something to which we are entitled is exactly what ultimately leads us to withdraw any such claims to entitlement.

v) *Mood and perspectivism*

The analysis of Hume's position as presented here has led us to the point where we must say that scepticism must be taken seriously, in that its believability leads to significant revisions being made in the structure of our commitments. This must be the case as we are as well entitled to scepticism as we are entitled to other more familiar anti-sceptical perspectives. We also must conclude that scepticism is granted normativity by the Title Principle. However, Hume's position also leads us to the conclusion that scepticism should not be taken seriously, in that it cannot be believed and leads to no revision of our commitments. Nor is scepticism granted normativity by the Title Principle. That is, Hume's position seems to contain a contradiction. Stated more technically, Hume's position supports both of the following claims:

- Scepticism is both serious and normative (asserted from a perspective shaped by the sceptical mood)
- Scepticism is neither serious nor normative (asserted from a perspective shaped by the non-sceptical mood)

Worse still, this contradiction is at the very heart of Hume's position as it derives directly from the Title Principle and so cannot be dismissed as unimportant. A philosopher of Hume's stature cannot have missed the presence of this contradiction, and hence something must be said. I believe that the best way of accounting for this contradiction is to follow Fogelin in suggesting that Hume supports a radical perspectivism when it comes to the place of scepticism in our intellectual lives.²⁴⁵

Fogelin identifies three different 'Hume's', each of which could be classified by appealing to what I am here calling a mood. The Gentlemanly Hume is Hume in a mood which inclines him to be dogmatic and uncritical, and also who flatly refuses to take scepticism seriously. The Wise Hume is Hume in a mood in which he recognises that some of our beliefs cannot be rationally justified but can be believed nonetheless. This Hume is critical and thoughtful, and does not accept at face value everything the Gentlemanly accepts. However like the Gentlemanly Hume, the Wise Hume is also opposed to taking scepticism seriously. Finally there is the Pyrrhonian Hume, who is caught in a sceptical mood and does take scepticism seriously, significantly revising his

²⁴⁵ Robert J. Fogelin, "Garrett on the Consistency of Hume's Philosophy," *Hume Studies* 24, no. 1 (1998): pp.164-167.

commitments in the light of scepticism. In Fogelin's judgement the Gentlemanly Hume takes the Wise Hume to be wasting his time in frivolous and excessive studies of no value. In turn the Wise Hume takes the Gentlemanly Hume to have uncritically accepted numerous falsehoods. A similar dynamic exists between the Wise Hume and the Pyrrhonian Hume.

Faced with such relationships the natural question to ask is whether any of these three Hume's is actually correct to judge the other Hume's to be mistaken. Answering this question requires that we grant one of the moods involved here a privileged place relative to the other moods, and hence say that this privileged mood is the one we ought to occupy. But on what grounds could we make such a judgement? Certainly, the Title Principle does not warrant any such claim as sceptical and non-sceptical moods can equally be normative. As we have seen, the Title Principle takes no account of mood in determining which beliefs we ought to hold. However as Hume does not seem to give any other direction regarding how we could reasonably prefer one perspective over another we must conclude that an appeal to the Title Principle is his final answer on this topic. Hence Hume provides us with no way of answering the question of which mood is the right one. We are thus forced to agree with Fogelin that Hume's position does lead to a radical perspectivism to which the above account of common sense is uncommitted because it leaves it as an open question whether there is a coherent way of favouring one perspective over others. In fact for all that has been said above there may be further as yet unspecified common sense norms that would allow one perspective to be favoured over others. That I cannot imagine what these norms would look like ought not stand against their possible existence.

Recall that the potential for perspectivism can be traced to mood influencing our judgement in such a way that what we recognise as the first principles of common sense is not static. For the moment no position is taken regarding the plausibility of the move to radical perspectivism, as it is left an open question whether there is or is not a privileged perspective from which judgements of superiority can be made.²⁴⁶ Hence for the moment the only kind of perspectivism that is argued for the more modest

²⁴⁶ As it turns out, Strawson does actually embrace a version of radical perspectivism, although for different reasons than those described here. The point however is that such a move is not essential to CSN, although it is common.

perspectivism described at the beginning of this chapter. As will emerge shortly however it may not be necessary for such a privileged perspective to be found in order for recommendations in favour of occupying one mood rather than another to be coherent.

vi) Mood and rational unity

Leaving aside radical perspectivism for a moment, we can observe that even a modest perspectivism faces some challenges if no privileged perspective can actually be identified. The most serious challenge concerns the reputed attributes of a rational individual implied in Hume's position even given a modestly perspectivist reading. Recall that moods influence what we take to be first principles of common sense, and that the first principles of common sense structure what we take to be rational. This raises the possibility that someone acting rationally could come to accept contradictory beliefs. We have already seen how this is possible when examining the grounds on which we can accept and reject scepticism. Yet avoiding contradiction has traditionally been a hallmark of the rational individual.

Granted, at no point does the rational individual pictured here actually adopt contradictory beliefs *at the same time*. However he does successively accept beliefs which are contradictory to each other. Hume states this quite clearly in the passage below, in this instance having in mind the acceptance that the objects of perception are both interrupted and uninterrupted.

‘Another advantage of this philosophical system is its similarity to the vulgar one, by which means we can humour our reason for a moment, when it becomes troublesome and solicitous; and yet upon its least negligence or inattention, can easily return to our vulgar and natural notions. Accordingly we find that philosophers neglect not this advantage, but, immediately upon leaving their closets, mingle with the rest of mankind in those exploded opinions, that our perceptions are our only objects, and continue identically and uninterruptedly the same in all their interrupted appearances.’ [T I.iv.ii. p.216]

The feature of his system which saves him from accepting a flat-out contradiction is, I believe, that we are never in a sceptical mood and a non-sceptical mood simultaneously. In fact it is difficult to comprehend what such a mood would be. The

closest we can come is to appeal to what Nagel has called ‘double vision’, which he described as

‘...the fate of creatures with a glimpse of the view *sub specie aeternitatis*. When we view ourselves from the outside a naturalistic picture of how we work seems to be unavoidable. It is clear that our beliefs arise from certain dispositions and experiences which, as far as we know, don’t guarantee their truth and are compatible with radical error. The problem is that we can’t fully take on the scepticism that this entails, because we can’t cure our appetite for belief, and we can’t take on this attitude to our own beliefs while we’re having them. Beliefs are about how things probably are, not just how they might possibly be, and there is no way of bracketing our ordinary beliefs about the world so that they dovetail neatly with the possibility of skepticism. The thought “I’m a professor at New York University, unless of course I’m a brain in a vat” is not one that can represent my general integrated state of mind.’²⁴⁷

However on closer inspection the view Nagel identifies is not simultaneously sceptical and non-sceptical. Rather, the view Nagel is here pointing us towards is a high-order view, or a non-mood perhaps, which recognises the coherence of both without deciding on which, if either, is correct. If Nagel is right then there is a perspective we can occupy in which we can reflect on both scepticism and non-scepticism simultaneously, and this looks promising in terms of rational integration. However Nagel also points out that this promise is deceptive, as the perspective which encompasses scepticism and non-scepticism is rationally *disintegrated* and also unstable because it is unsustainable.

While we may not be able to accuse the position Hume has developed with allowing a rational person to hold contradictory beliefs there does still seem to be some error here. The problem here emerges more clearly if we analyse this dynamic in terms of consistency rather than contradiction. As used here the term consistency cannot be reduced to meaning the absence of contradiction. Rather, consistency requires that we think of rationality in diachronic terms, and ask whether we ought to call the overall shape of a life lived according to the above understanding of rationality truly rational. One useful way of pursuing this question is to ask whether the life is pictured as moving to rational unity, following Carol Rovane in understanding the rationality of

²⁴⁷ Thomas Nagel, “The View from Nowhere (Selections)” in *Skepticism: A Contemporary Reader*, ed. Keith DeRose and Ted A. Warfield (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 289. It is because he holds this highly concessive view towards scepticism that Nagel has been named as one of the ‘Neo-Humeans’ who have done much to repopularise scepticism in recent years.

persons.²⁴⁸ Thus understood, rational unity is the result of effort and will and exists for the achievement of some end. This does not seem to require that we privilege one mood over all others any more than it requires that we spend all our time in only one mood. However in order for the move towards such rational unity to be possible we must be able to reflect on our moods in order that they be organised so as to further the achievement of some goal, yet this is where problems have been shown to emerge.

The above analysis suggests that if we are to attain rational integration then this achievement will only come about through the lack of reflection. If so, then perhaps engaging in philosophy is not such a good idea after all, at least to the extent that philosophy is a reflective activity. This is a possibility that the Pyrrhonians have been raising for some time now and it should come as no surprise that a dissertation drawing inspiration directly from the Pyrrhonian tradition would at least raise such a possibility. For myself, I do not see any clear way of showing that this possibility cannot be realised, and the preceding analysis indicates that at least it might be. Perhaps the best we could do is adapt Hume's 'solution', and distract ourselves from the problems of reflection and wait for a more comfortable mood to emerge. That would certainly not be an un-Pyrrhonian thing to do.

Conclusion: the inevitability of Pyrrhonian scepticism

i) Natural commitments

To summarise the argument of this thesis regarding our natural commitments, it turns out that we have a natural commitment to respect certain norms of behaviour, and particularly norms of inquiry. These norms in turn constitute part of the content of common sense and so partially constitute the proper context for the application of reason. However, the content of common sense (and thus the content of our natural commitments) has also emerged as being mood-sensitive. As a result a perspectivist account of common sense was developed. One important consequence of this is that it is possible that there is more than one proper context in which reason can be applied, where the results of this application are not guaranteed to be consistent. Such were the

²⁴⁸ Rovane, "Rationality and Persons," pp.334-339.

conclusions of chapter 3. In themselves the conclusions are not actually sceptical except insofar as they might incline us to scepticism about the claim that only one set of activities correctly answers to the description 'rational'. Chapter 2 established that respecting the norms that govern everyday inquiry could in certain circumstances lead to the development of Pyrrhonian scepticism and went some way to establishing what these everyday norms are. However when the conclusions of chapter 2 and chapter 3 are taken together distinctly Pyrrhonian scepticism does emerge.

Recall from the Preface that the essence of Pyrrhonism is to present a dilemma for any adherent of common sense who wishes to appeal to common sense as part of a broader anti-sceptical strategy. This dilemma runs as follows. Either we have an entitlement to common sense or we do not. If we do not have such an entitlement then we cannot appeal to common sense to refute scepticism. If we do have such an entitlement then this entitlement also entitles us to Pyrrhonian scepticism. So again, we cannot appeal to common sense to refute scepticism. So we cannot appeal to common sense as the basis for a refutation of scepticism. In addition to providing an account of our natural commitments, Chapter 3 supports the claim that indeed we do have an entitlement to common sense, explaining how we come to have entitlement in terms of the Title Principle. This rules out embracing the first horn of the dilemma, although it does raise further questions about which common sense we mean when we say that we have an entitlement to common sense. After all, Chapter 3 suggests that common sense can take more than one form. Chapter 2 supports the claim that an entitlement to common sense brings with it an entitlement to Pyrrhonian scepticism, whether we welcome this or not. This means that we cannot avoid the second horn of the dilemma any more than we can embrace the first.

ii) A Pyrrhonian response to the Pyrrhonian dilemma

What then is the Pyrrhonian response to the dilemma with which they present the anti-sceptical adherent of common sense? I suggest that one of the more interesting features of Pyrrhonism is that no response to this dilemma is required and hence no response is given. That is, the Pyrrhonian does not as a result of the arguments presented in chapters 2 and 3 embrace the claim that we have both an entitlement to common sense and to Pyrrhonian scepticism. Nor will the Pyrrhonian claim that we actually have no

entitlement to common sense. For the Pyrrhonian the dilemma stands as a dilemma, unresolved because there is no necessity of resolution.

But why does the Pyrrhonian not feel that this dilemma must be resolved, one way or another? Surely this is an unusual way of reacting to philosophical problems. The reason is that the Pyrrhonian does not adhere to the deeper position that we ought to be able to understand the commitments that we commonsensically take ourselves to have. In addition, the Pyrrhonian is certainly not committed to the idea that reflection on our commitments would be a productive of coming to understand either how we gained any entitlements we might have or why it is that we take ourselves to have entitlements that we do not actually have. That is, for the Pyrrhonian the structure of our entitlements (both actual and merely felt) is simply mysterious. Had we asked him Sextus may have told us that our commitments are *atopos* – unclassifiable.

Where does this leave Common Sense Naturalism? As defined in chapter 1, CSN is seriously flawed precisely because it attempts to use an appeal to common sense as part of a broader anti-sceptical strategy. Chapter 2 has shown that such a use of common sense is untenable as common sense turns out to be inherently sceptical. However, CSN is not hopelessly flawed. It is correct that there is such a thing as a natural commitment, and it is also true that reasons do not connect up with these commitments in the sort of way that would be required for us to provide rational justification for these natural commitments. Recall, our natural commitments are commitments to respect certain norms, especially norms of inquiry and so are quite unlike commitments to propositions such as ‘that there is an external world’. Further, for all that has been said it is possible that the central tenet of CSN, that we can have an entitlement to a commitment in the absence of rational justification, may well be true. In fact the arguments of Chapters 2 and 3 are predicated on the reality of entitlements that bypass rational justifications. Hence there is much that is true in CSN. In fact all the central claims of CSN are true except the claim that scepticism is never serious and the claim that our entitlement to common sense can be used as the basis for a refutation of scepticism. However, were CSN modified such that it no longer made any anti-sceptical claims we would be left with a viable philosophical position.

iii) Endemic Pyrrhonian scepticism

If the account given above of the structure of our natural commitments is correct then the conclusion that radical scepticism is not a serious problem is unwarranted. In fact the idea that scepticism is unserious gets things quite backwards. Rather than being a buttress against scepticism, our natural commitments turn out to be inherently sceptical. This is because respecting the norms with which those natural commitments provide us can lead us, in certain specifiable circumstances, to Pyrrhonian scepticism. This means that the threat that at some time in the future we shall begin to feel the force of radical scepticism can never be entirely done away with, because the source of that threat lies within us. Whenever we ask ourselves what entitlement we have to common sense we court Pyrrhonian scepticism. Let us return to Hume's central insight, with which we began.

We have, therefore, no choice left but betwixt a false reason and none at all.

It should now be quite clear why Hume is exactly right. Reason is false in that following its rules sometimes leads us onto the path to scepticism, but as these rules are genuinely rational we have no choice but to follow them, and so without them we would have no reason at all. But it is precisely because it is reason that is false that scepticism is both an endemic and persistent problem. Scepticism cannot be done away with for exactly the same reason that reason cannot be done away with. As Hume might have said, the uncouth monster that is the sceptic can never be killed, he can only be temporarily evaded, as any one of us can become the uncouth monster at but a moments notice.

The only way to avoid scepticism would then be to commit something akin to rational suicide, turning our back on inquiries into the structure of our own commitments. This is why the theme of the untrustworthiness of reflective activity is recurrent in Pyrrhonian thought, and it is also why the Pyrrhonian refusal to engage with the Pyrrhonian dilemma can seem to be tantamount to turning one's back on reason. It seems that way because it is that way. The final lesson that the Pyrrhonian teaches us is that while scepticism is a persistent and endemic threat, the price we pay for avoiding that threat is far higher than the threat itself. Rational activity may be dangerous, but it is better than the alternative.

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