HINGE EPISTEMOLOGY:
AN ANTI-SKEPTICAL SKEPTICISM?

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I present and criticize three influential anti-skeptical proposals inspired by Wittgenstein´s *On Certainty*. I argue that these proposals are either ineffective anti-skeptical strategies or, more importantly, might lead us to another, subtle form of skepticism

1 THE CARTESIAN SKEPTICAL PARADOX.

The feature of Cartesian style arguments is that we cannot know certain empirical propositions (such as 'Human beings have bodies', or 'There are external objects') as we may be dreaming, hallucinating, deceived by a demon or be "brains in the vat" (BIV), that is, disembodied brains floating in a vat, connected to supercomputers that stimulate us in just the same way that normal brains are stimulated when they perceive things in a normal way.[1] Therefore, as we are unable to refute these skeptical hypotheses, we are also unable to know propositions that we would otherwise accept as being true if we could rule out these scenarios.

Cartesian arguments are extremely powerful as they rest on the *Closure principle for knowledge*. According to this principle, knowledge is "closed" under known entailment. Roughly speaking, this principle states that if an agent knows a proposition (e.g., that she has two hands), and competently deduces from this proposition a second proposition (e.g., that having hands entails that she is not a BIV), then she also knows the second proposition (that she is not a BIV). More formally:

The "Closure" Principle

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[1]   See Putnam (1981).

If S knows that p, and S competently deduces from p that q, thereby coming to believe that q on this basis, while retaining her knowledge that p, then S knows that q.[2]

Let's take a skeptical hypothesis, SH, such as the BIV hypothesis mentioned above, and M, an empirical proposition such as "Human beings have bodies" that would entail the falsity of a skeptical hypothesis. We can then state the structure of Cartesian skeptical arguments as follows:

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

Considering that we can repeat this argument for each and every one of our empirical knowledge claims, the radical skeptical consequence we can draw from this and similar arguments is that our knowledge is impossible.

2 WITTGENSTEIN ON SKEPTICISM; A MINIMAL READING

A way of dealing with 'Cartesian style' skepticism is to deny the premise S1) of the skeptical argument, thus affirming *contra* the skeptic that we can know the falsity of the relevant skeptical hypothesis.

For instance, in his "*A defence of commonsense*" (1925, henceforth DCS) and "*Proof of the external world*" (1939, henceforth PEW), G. E. Moore famously argued that we can have knowledge of the 'commonsense view of the world', that is, of propositions such as, 'Human beings have bodies', 'There are external objects' or 'The earth existed long before my birth' and that this knowledge would offer a direct response against skeptical worries.

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

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2   This is essentially the formulation of the Closure principle defended by Williamson (2000, 117) and Hawthorne (2005, 29).

Malcolm[3]. As I have briefly mentioned *supra*, according to Moore, it is possible to provide a direct refutation of Cartesian-style skepticism, thus claiming *contra* the skeptic that we can know the denials of skeptical hypotheses. But, Wittgenstein argues, to say that we simply 'know' Moore's 'obvious truisms' is somewhat misleading, for a number of reasons.

Firstly (OC 349, 483), because in order to say 'I know' one should be able, at least in principle, to produce evidence or to offer compelling grounds for his beliefs; but Moore cannot ground his knowledge-claims with evidence or reasons because (OC 245) *his grounds aren't stronger than what they are supposed to justify*. As Wittgenstein points out, if a piece of evidence has to count as compelling grounds for our belief in a certain proposition then that evidence must be at least as certain the belief itself. This cannot happen in the case of a Moorean 'commonsense certainty' such as 'I have two hands' because, at least in normal circumstances, *nothing* is more certain than the fact that we have two hands (Pritchard 2014b). As Wittgenstein writes in OC:

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

Imagine, for instance, that one attempted to legitimate one's claim to know that p by using the evidence that one has for p (for example, what one sees, what one has been told about p and so on). Now, if the evidence we adduced to support p was less secure than p itself, then this same evidence would be unable to support p:

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

Moreover, Wittgenstein argues, a knowledge-claim can be challenged by, for instance, the appeal to evidence and reasons; more generally, when we challenge a knowledge claim we can recognize what and if something has gone wrong in the

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agent's process of knowledge-acquisition. Things are somewhat different in the case of the denials of Moore's 'obvious truisms of the commonsense'; if, for instance, I believe that I am sitting in my room whilst I am not, there are no *grounds* on which this belief could be explained as a mistake, as an error based on negligence, fatigue or ignorance. On the contrary, a similar 'false belief' would more likely be the result of a sensorial or mental disturbance (OC 526). As Moyal-Sharrock points out (2004, 74), in fact, for Wittgenstein if someone was holding seriously a denial of Moore's 'truisms' (i.e., she believed she had no body or that both her parents were men) we would not investigate the truth-value of her affirmations, but instead her ability to understand the language she is using or her sanity (OC 155).

If Moore's 'commonsense certainties' are still not knowable, argues Wittgenstein, they are immune from rational doubt. This is so (OC 310) because doubts must be based on *grounds*; that is, they have to be internal to a particular practice and must be in some way or another *justified*. If they aren't, they are constitutively empty. To illustrate this point, Wittgenstein gives the example (OC 310) of a pupil who constantly interrupts a lesson, questioning the existence of material objects or the meaning of words; far from being a legitimate intellectual task, the pupil's doubt will lack any sense and will at most lead to a sort of epistemic paralysis, for she will just be unable to learn the skill or the subject we are trying to teach her (OC 315).

Accordingly, as per Wittgenstein, all reasonable doubts presuppose *certainty* (OC 114-115); that is, the very fact that we usually raise doubts of every sort at the same time shows and implies that we take something for granted. For example, a doubt about the real existence of an historical figure presupposes that we consider certain an 'obvious truism of the commonsense' such as, 'The world existed a long time before my birth'; a doubt about the existence of a planet presupposes the absence of any doubt about the existence of the external world and so on (OC 114-115, 514-515).

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

The question that we raise and our doubts depend on the fact that some

propositions are exempt from doubt, are as it were the hinges on which those turn [….] that is to say, it belongs to the logic of our scientific investigations that certain things are in deed not doubted [...] If I want the door to turn, the hinges must stay put.

That is to say, 'hinges' are just apparently empirical contingent claims; on closer inspection, they perform a different, more basic role in our epistemic practices.

3 WITTGENSTEINIAN CONTEXTUALISM

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

An influential 'Wittgenstein-inspired' anti-skeptical position is Williams´s 'Wittgensteinian contextualism', which he has proposed in his book *Unnatural Doubts* (1991) and in a number of other more recent works (2001, 2004a, 2004b, 2005).

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

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

PGR1: Our justification in believing that p must be earned via an epistemically responsible behavior;

PGR2: We are not entitled in believing that p is true when our grounds to believe that p are less than adequate;

PGR3: grounds are evidence: that is, in order to be justified in believing that p there should be a proposition, or a set of propositions, that count in favor of the proposition believed;

PGR4: in order to believe that p, the believer must possess, and make proper   use

of, evidence that makes p likely to be true (2001, 147).

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

Still, Williams argues, PGR is not the only model available for epistemic justification or the most compelling. Recall that in some passages of OC (OC 114, 115, 315, 322) Wittgenstein argues that any proper inquiry presupposes *certainty*, that is, some unquestionable prior commitment; in these remarks Wittgenstein also alludes to the importance of the context of inquiry, hence stating that without a precise context there is no possibility of raising a sensible question or a doubt.

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

According to this model,

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

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

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

Crucially, for Williams to take for granted the 'hinges' of a given epistemic practice is a *condition of possibility* of an ordinary inquiry;

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

That is to say, for Williams to seriously doubt 'hinges' such as 'Human beings have bodies' or 'There are material objects' will not result in a more scrupulous approach to our everyday epistemic practices, but will on the contrary preclude any engagement in these practices at all. And this is not a reflection of the limits of our enquiries but a reflection of the constitutively 'context-dependent' (hence 'Wittgensteinian contextualism') nature of our enquiries.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

As per Williams, by doubting the 'hinges' of our most common epistemic practices the skeptic is simply leading us from a context in which it is legitimate to hold these 'hinges' fast without question toward a philosophical context in which everything can be doubtable. However, the skeptical move cannot affect our everyday knowledge, for in ordinary contexts it would be irrational to doubt Moore's 'obvious truisms of the commonsense' such as 'The earth existed long before my birth' or 'Human beings have bodies'. At most, what the Cartesian skeptic

is able to show us is that in the more demanding context of philosophical reflection we do not know, strictly speaking, anything at all. Quoting Williams:

> The skeptic takes himself to have discovered, under the condition of philosophical reflection, that knowledge of the world is impossible. But in fact, the most he has discovered is that knowledge of the world is impossible *under the conditions of philosophical reflection* (1991, 130).

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

As has been pointed out by Pritchard (2005a) there is a crucial tension in Williams' account; from one side, Cartesian skepticism would be based on a misleading way of representing the structure of reason; from another, there is a philosophical context in which the skeptic is right and in which our knowledge is *de facto* impossible.

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

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

4 PRITCHARD ON THE STRUCTURE OF REASON

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

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

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

> The question that we raise and our doubts depend on the fact that some propositions are exempt from doubt, are as it were the hinges on which those turn [....] that is to say, it belongs to the logic of our scientific investigations that certain things are in deed not doubted [...] If I want the door to turn, the hinges must stay put (OC 341-3).

As per Pritchard, here Wittgenstein would claim that the same logic of our ways of inquiry presupposes that some propositions are excluded from doubt; and this is not irrational or based on a sort of blind faith, but rather belongs to the way rational inquiries are put forward (see OC 342)[4]. As a door needs hinges in order to turn, any rational evaluation would require prior commitment to an unquestionable proposition/set of 'hinges' in order to be possible at all.

A consequence of this thought (forthcoming, 3) is that any form of universal doubt such as the Cartesian skeptical one is constitutively impossible[5]; there is simply no way to pursue an inquiry in which nothing is taken for granted. In other words, the same generality of the Cartesian skeptical challenge is based on a misleading way of representing the essentially *local* nature of our enquiries.

A proponent of Cartesian skepticism looks for a universal, general evaluation of our beliefs; but crucially there is no such thing as a general evaluation of our beliefs, whether positive (anti-skeptical) or negative (skeptical), for all rational evaluation can take place only in the context of 'hinges' which are themselves immune to rational evaluation.

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4   Cf. OC 342: it belongs to the *logic of our scientific investigations* that certain things are indeed not doubted.
5   See OC 450: "A doubt that doubted everything would not be a doubt".

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

This is so because, argues Pritchard', this "über-hinge' commitment express a fundamental *a-rational relationship* toward our most basic certainties, a commitment without which no knowledge is possible. Crucially, our basic certainties are not subject to rational evaluation: for instance, they cannot be confirmed or disconfirmed by evidence and thus they are *non-propositional* in character (that is to say, they cannot be either true or false). Accordingly, *they are not beliefs at all.* This can help us retain both the Closure principle and our confidence in our most basic certainties. Recall the reformulation of the Closure principle we have already encountered *supra*:

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

The crucial aspect of this principle to note (Pritchard, forthcoming, 14) is that it involves an agent *forming a belief* on the basis of the relevant competent deduction; the idea behind Closure is in fact that an agent can came to acquire new knowledge via competent deduction, where this means that the belief in question is based on that deduction. Accordingly, if we could not rule out a skeptical scenario such as the BIV one, we would be unable to know Moore's 'obvious truisms of the commonsense' such as, 'Human beings have bodies' or 'There are external objects' and thus, given Closure, we would be unable to know anything at all.

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

A first concern that can be raised against this proposal goes as follows. Recall that, following Pritchard's account, the skeptical challenge is based on a misleading way of representing the nature of our epistemic inquiries; as there is nothing like the kind of general enquiry put forward by a Cartesian skeptic, we should rule out skeptical worries for they are at odds with the ways in which rational inquiries are put forward.

However, a skeptic can surely grant that our everyday enquiries are essentially *local* in nature and that our ordinary knowledge claims are made within a background of 'hinge-commitments'; but this is just a reflection of what epistemic agents do in normal circumstances, and can at most tell us how our psychology works whenever we are involved in any given epistemic practice. Still, the mere fact that ordinarily we take for granted several 'hinge commitments' does not necessarily exclude as illegitimate the kind of general, theoretical inquiry put forward by a proponent of Cartesian skepticism; for the Cartesian skeptical challenge is first and foremost a philosophical *paradox*, which cannot be dismissed on the basis of pragmatic reflections about the essentially local nature of our everyday epistemic practices.

However, even if we agree with Pritchard that a general evaluation of our beliefs is somewhat impossible and self-refuting there is still another deep concern that the 'hinge commitment strategy' has to face. Recall that following this proposal, all our epistemic practices rest on unsupported commitments. If this approach can help us to block the skeptical challenge it will nonetheless have a cost: under skeptical scrutiny, we will be forced to admit that all our epistemic practices rest on ungrounded presuppositions which are not open to epistemic evaluation of any sort. When skeptical hypotheses are in play, we are then forced to admit that all our knowledge rests on nothing but *a-rational* presuppositions such as habit, instinct and social or cultural commitments. Accordingly, Pritchard's 'hinge-commitment' strategy leads to a more subtle form of skepticism which undermines the *rationality* of our ways of inquiry: a conclusion which is no more reassuring than skepticism itself.[6]

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[6] Pritchard has explicitly addressed this issue, stating that even if his proposal blocked the skeptical challenge it would nonetheless lead to what he names 'epistemic angst' or, more recently, 'epistemic vertigo'. See Pritchard & Boult (2013). Moreover, it should be noted that Pritchard's reflections on 'hinges' are only a part of a more complex anti-skeptical framework.; the other part is called epistemological disjunctivism (Pritchard, forthcoming b) . As in this work I am focusing only on 'Wittgenstein inspired' anti-skeptical proposals, to present and discuss the merits of Pritchard's epistemological disjunctivism would go beyond the scope of this essay and is thus not a task I shall set

5 THE FRAMEWORK READING

A third influential ´Wittgenstein-inspired anti-skeptical proposal is the ´framework reading, which has been firstly proposed by McGinn (1989) and more recently, by Coliva (2010, 2015; see also Salvatore, 2015) according to which 'hinges' are 'judgments of the frame', that is, conditions of possibility of any meaningful epistemic practice.

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

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

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

According to McGinn, we should read Wittgenstein's remarks on 'hinges' in light of his views about mathematical and logical truths. In the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (henceforth TLP) Wittgenstein held what we might call an 'objectivist' account of logical and mathematical truths, for which they were a description of the *a priori* necessary structure of reality. In the later phase of his thinking, Wittgenstein completely dismissed this view, suggesting instead that we should think of logical and mathematical truths as constituting a system of *techniques* originating and

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developed in the course of the practical life of human beings. What is important in these practices is not their truth or falsity but their technique-constituting role; so, the question about their truth or falsity simply cannot arise. Quoting Wittgenstein:

> The steps which are not brought into question are logical inferences. But the reason is not that they "certainly correspond to the truth-or sort-no, it is just this that is called "Thinking", "speaking", "inferring", "arguing". There is not any question at all here of some correspondence between what is said and reality; rather is logic antecedent to any such correspondence; in the same sense, that is, as that in which the establishment of a method of measurement is antecedent to the correctness or incorrectness of a statement of length (RFM, I, 156).

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

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

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

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

More recent versions of the framework reading (Coliva, 2010, 2015; Salvatore, 2015) have developed McGinn´s strategy as follows. Moore's 'commonsense certainties' are a condition of possibility of any meaningful inquiry; as Wittgenstein puts the matter, 'about certain empirical propositions no doubt can exist *if making judgments is to be possible at all*' (OC 308, my italics) In other words, even if ´hinges´ resemble empirical propositions or their origin is empirical, within our practices they are used as *rules* which enable us to make sense. of reality, thus drawing a line between sense and nonsense rather than between truth and falsity.

As such, Wittgenstein's ´hinges´ are non-propositional in character, thus they cannot be either true or false; accordingly (Salvatore, 2015) , their 'negation' is not false but senseless, that is, an illicit combination of signs which is excluded from the practice called 'rational epistemic inquiry', as the putative statement v*) 12x12= 1212 is a move excluded from the language-game called 'arithmetic'.

According to the proponent of the framework reading, the non propositional nature of the ´hinges´ will block the skeptical challenge. Recall the feature of Cartesian-style arguments:

(S1) I do not know not-SH

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

(SC) I do not know M

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

A consequence of a non-propositional account so construed is that it will not affect the Closure principle and at the same time will not lead to skeptical conclusions.

Consider the formulation of Closure proposed by Williamson (2000) and Hawthorne (2005) which we have encountered throughout this work:

The Competent Deduction principle

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

The idea behind this version of Closure is in fact that an agent can come to acquire new knowledge via competent deduction where this means that the belief in question is based on that deduction. Accordingly, if we cannot rule out a skeptical scenario such as the BIV one, given Closure we would still be unable to know anything at all.

According to the proponents of the ´framework reading´, however, the non-propositional nature of Wittgenstein's account of 'hinges' help us to positively address this issue. As we have seen while presenting Pritchard's 'hinge-commitment' strategy, the crucial aspect to note about Closure is that it involves an agent *forming a belief* on the basis of the relevant competent deduction. But crucially, 'hinges' are not the expressions of a propositional attitude such as a *belief in*; rather, they are the expression of non-propositional *rules*.

Accordingly, the negations of 'hinges', that is, skeptical hypotheses such as 'I might be a disembodied BIV' or 'I might be deceived by an Evil Demon' *are not beliefs either*; rather, they are just nonsensical combinations of signs, from which no valid inference or deduction (e.g. 'If I do not know not-SH, then I do not know M') can be made. That is to say, if skeptical hypotheses are not propositional beliefs but rather, senseless negations of non propositional rules, then from the fact that we don't know whether we are victims of a skeptical scenario we cannot infer or deduce that we don't know everyday empirical propositions ; we are thus in a position to retain Closure (which can be applied only to propositional beliefs, and not to nonsensical negations of non propositional rules) and our confidence in our everyday knowledge claims.

Even if more promising than the other anti-skeptical strategies we have already encountered, there are nonetheless many problems that the ´framework reading have to face in order to be consider a viable anti-skeptical strategy. A first problem is what DeRose (1995) calls *the problem of abominable conjunctions*. Recall that following this account, ´hinges´such as 'Human beings have bodies´or ´The earth existed long before my birth´are not propositional belief but rather non propositional *rules*; hence, they would be strictly speaking, unknowable. Thus, this account would lead to the following paradoxical, if not completely absurd, claims:

a) I know I have a body but I don´t know that human beings have bodies

b) I know that Napoleon lost the battle of Waterloo in 1815 but I don´t know whether the earth existed long before my birth

There is another, related problem that stems from the alleged non propositional nature of Wittgenstein´s ´hinges´. Recall that following this account Moore´s commonsense certainties are not propositional beliefs, hence cannot be supported by evidence or justified. It is hard to see why a statement of the form ´The earth existed long before my birth´ could not be supported by evidence, as we do have indeed got evidence in support of this and of many other ´hinges´ mentioned by Wittgenstein throughout OC. Also, other hinges mentioned by Wittgenstein, such as ´No man has ever been to the moon´, have simply lost their ´hinge´ status, and some ´hinges´ are indeed the focus of some criticisms, for instance by the proponents of ´Young earth Creationism´ for which the universe, Earth and all life on earth are less than 10000 years old.

Moreover, even granting to the proponents of the ´framework reading´ that hinges are a condition of possibility of every sensible inquiry and are thus outside epistemic evaluation of any sort, there are other problems that can be raised at this point . For instance, a proponent of Radical skepticism can well agree that we need to take for granted our ´hinges´in order to ´play´ the language game called ´rational epistemic agency´. However, a skeptic could nonetheless argue that to take these ´hinges´for granted is nothing but a matter of *linguistic convention;* thus, under the focus of skeptical scrutiny, the ´certainty´accorded to Moore´s ´commonsense certainty´would look totally arbitrary and epistemically unjustifiable. Similarly to Pritcchard´s úber hinge commitment´strategy, then, the ´framework reading will lead us to, at most, a sort of *Pyrrhic victory;* while it might show the nonsensicality of skeptical hypotheses, it will nonetheless show that our epistemic practices are groundless , unjustified and, more importantly unjustifiable.

Moreover, even if we agree with the ´framework reading´ on the 'nonsensical' nature of skeptical hypotheses, this nonetheless has no strength against Cartesian style skepticism. Recall the feature of Cartesian skeptical arguments: take a skeptical hypothesis SH such as the BIV one and M, a mundane proposition such as, 'This is a hand'. Now, given the Closure principle, the argument goes as follows:

(S1) I do not know not-SH

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

Therefore

(SC) I do not know M

If we stress the fact that ´hinges´ are non propositional rules, hence are unknowable, while claiming that Cartesian skeptical hypotheses have no strength whatsoever against our knowledge claims, we will be forced to reject a very intuitive principle such as Closure.[7]

If, on the other hand, we do not want to reject Closure, it is hard to see how the framework reading can help us to solve the skeptical problem. For the conclusion we can draw from this proposal is that Cartesian skeptical hypotheses are combination of signs excluded from our epistemic practices ; but still, given Closure and the fact that we cannot know ´hinges´ such as ´Human beings have bodies´ or ´There are external objects´, it will be impossible to escape skeptical conclusions.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Despite the recent popularity of ´Wittgenstein-inspired´ anti-skeptical proposals, it will seem that all these strategies are unable to properly address, let alone to refute or ´dissolve´ the Radical skeptical challenge. Moreover, even if some of these proposals can at least block skeptical arguments, this will nonetheless lead to some very paradoxical, if not completely absurd, consequences and will lead to another, more subtle form of skepticism, that will question the very rationality of our epistemic practices.[8]

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7   This line has been most notably proposed by Dretske (1970,1971, 2005a, 2005b) and Nozick (1981). Coliva (2010, 2015) proposes a limitation of the Closure principle (2015, 86; a similar view is defended in Avnur, 2011), which stems from her views on warrant and epistemic justification that will be impossible to summarize here (2015). For a criticism of Coliva's reading of OC and its anti-skeptical implications, see Moyal-Sharrock (2013) and Pritchard & Boult (2013).

8   For a general introduction to OC see also Morawetz (1978) and Stroll (1994). Other influential 'OC inspired' anti-skeptical strategies are Conant (1998), Wright (2004a, 2004b),Williams (2004a, 2004b, 2005) and Moyal Sharrock (2004, 2005).For a critical evaluation of these proposals, see Salvatore (2013,2015, 2016).

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