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Certainty and Normativity
from a Phenomenological Point of View

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Introduction

The central claim of this Dissertation is that the constitutive aim of cognition is to discover the truth with certainty. The Dissertation as a whole is an attempt to clarify and justify this claim, and to draw some important consequences for epistemology and our understanding of the human mind. The dialectic of the Dissertation is complicated by the fact that in trying to justify the main claim I also attempt to make other important points that are connected to the methodology to be used when inquiring about the nature of the mind. In this Introduction I will briefly distinguish the main claims made in each chapter, and isolate some of the debates with which I interact throughout the Dissertation.

The object of study of this Dissertation is cognition. By cognition I mean the conscious and reflective activity of asking questions and answering them in the form of judgments based on alethic grounds, that is considerations to take the content judged as true. It will be a task of the next chapters to argue that this activity is of fundamental importance for philosophy of mind and epistemology. Its most important feature is its dialectical inescapability[1], namely the fact that in order to evaluate cognition we should engage in cognition. Cognition so defined is of fundamental importance because it is the *only* activity which is dialectical inescapable. Its dialectical inescapability will be important in order to draw significant consequences for epistemology, and for the theory of alethic and epistemic normativity.

The dissertation as a whole defends a philosophical project that we might call *transcendental constitutivism*. Transcendental constitutivism is the name of a very general project whose aim is to ground the validity of norms and/or the truth or justification of some judgment on constitutive features of cognition. In very general terms, this is a useful way of visualising the steps of a transcendental constitutivist strategy:

Constitutivity step: it is argued that some properties are constitutive of cognition.
Inescapability step: it is argued that cognition is suitably inescapable.
Transcendental step: some conclusion is drawn on the basis of the constitutive claims made at the constitutivity step.
Explanatory step: an explanation is provided of why the constitutive claim made at the first steps are true.

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1   I take the expression 'dialectical inescapability' from Ferrero (2009; ms).

As already indicated, at the inescapability step I will argue that cognition is dialectically inescapable. In order to illustrate the other steps of this strategy I will now present three transcendental constitutivist strategies that I will defend in this Dissertation.

Constitutivism about alethic normativity. At the constitutivity step I will argue that truth is the constitutive aim of cognition in three ways: 1) to judge that *p* is to present *p* as true; 2) only alethic grounds can be used as grounds for judging; 3) to ask a question is to posit a true answer as its form of satisfaction. On this ground, at the transcendental step I will argue that the truth-norm – a judgment that *p* is (alethically) correct only if it is true – is a valid constitutive norm of judgment. At the explanatory step I will argue against views which explain why truth is the constitutive aim and norm of cognition by claiming that this feature of cognition depends on the fact that our conceptual scheme takes truth to be such a constitutive aim and norm of cognition.

Constitutivism about epistemic normativity. At the constitutivity step, I will argue that when we judge we commit ourselves to the possession of certainty, and that when we raise questions and doubts we posit certainty as their form of satisfaction. On this ground, at the transcendental step I will argue that the certainty-norm – a judgment that *p* is (epistemically) correct only if it is certain – is a valid constitutive norm of judgment. At the explanatory step I will again argue against views which relativise the source of epistemic normativity to our conceptual scheme.

These applications of the strategy focuses on *norms,* and attempt to ground their validity on what is constitutive of the sole dialectically inescapable activity, namely cognition. At the transcendental step, these two constitutivist views put forward *ambitious* transcendental arguments, as contrasted with *modest* transcendental ones[2]. From the fact that some feature is constitutive of cognition they do not modestly conclude that some norm is (inescapably) constitutive of cognition, but they rather ambitiously conclude that the norm is in fact valid.

There is a third transcendental constitutivist view which I defend in this Dissertation. This view doesn't concern constitutive norms, but rather alethic commitments, that is, commitments to take further propositions as true or to refrain from taking further propositions as true. Whereas the previous constitutivist views about normativity attempt to build an ambitious transcendental argument, this view goes modest

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2   See Stroud (1999), Stern (2000).

at the transcendental step.

Transcendental Hinge Epistemology. At the constitutivity step I will argue that some alethic commitments (the hinges) are constitutive of cognition: e.g., to judge that *p* commits to there being grounds for judging *p* to be true, and to judge that *p* commits to *p*'s being certain. On this ground, at the transcendental step I will argue that even though we can't ambitiously conclude that these commitments are true, we can modestly conclude that these alethic commitments are immune from doubt. At the explanatory step I will tentatively suggest that we can't understand the existence of these constitutive commitments as dependent on contingent factors like evolution and history.

These are the three main instances of transcendental constitutivist views which I will defend in this Dissertation.

As the title of the Dissertation suggests, the work conducted here heavily relies on phenomenological descriptions of the structure of cognition.

Phenomenological evidence is of central importance in order to vindicate the claims I will make at the constitutivity step of the transcendental constitutivist strategies. Phenomenological evidence will settle that truth and certainty are the constitutive aims of cognition, and that the fundamental cognitive act of judgment triggers some constitutive alethic commitments.

Since the claims defended at the constitutivist step are modal claims about what is constitutive of cognition, phenomenological evidence should provide evidence for making claims about the necessary features of the experience of cognition. In order to gather this evidence I will rely on the so-called method of eidetic variation, a method described and largely used by Edmund Husserl. It will be the task of next chapters to vindicate the employment of that method and to show how it can be used in order to discover the structural features of cognition.

The claims defended in the three transcendental constitutivist views introduced above have highly significant consequences for epistemology. The most important one is the fact that the problem of certainty should be put at the centre of our epistemological agenda. I will defend the view that fallibilist and externalist views of justification are ultimately untenable, because they can't be stably held given the constitutive commitments of our cognition. Also, I will argue that contemporary hinge epistemologies that appeal to Wittgenstein's work in *On Certainty* do not have the hoped anti-sceptical weapons to silence

the corresponding sceptical attacks.

In Chapter I, *Absolute Certainty*, I offer an analysis of absolute certainty and present what I take to be the most formidable challenge to the possibility of possessing absolute certainty. The challenge is arguably responsible for the absence of any serious attempt in contemporary epistemology to construct one's epistemology around the Cartesian and Husserlian aim of discovering absolute certainties. Yet, if I am right in claiming that certainty is the constitutive aim of cognition, then certainty can't be left out of the agenda of epistemology, but should rather be put at its centre.

Chapter II, *Eidetic Phenomenology* focuses on three aims. First (§2.1), it introduces some terminological distinctions that are important in order to individuate the phenomenon – cognition – which I am going to focus on throughout the Dissertation. Second (§2.2, §2.3), it introduces the method of eidetic variation and some of the most significant objections that can levelled against this method. Finally (§2.4), it offers an argument in favour of the thesis that we need to engage in phenomenology if we want to answer the first-personal epistemological question: what should I believe?

In Chapter III, *Judgment*, I begin a systematic study of the normative profile of cognitive acts. This chapter is entirely devoted to judgment, that is, the conscious act of taking some proposition as true. I argue for the highly controversial claim that by judging that p we commit ourselves to the possession of certainty-conferring grounds for p – the sort of grounds for absolute certainty that I have explicated in Chapter I. The claim is grounded on phenomenology with the help of the method of eidetic variation. The phenomenological ground consists in the fact that it is impossible, and not only irrational, for us to judge at the same time that p and that p (epistemically) might be false.

In Chapter IV, *Suspension of Judgment*, I explore the notion of suspension of judgment and argue that there is no sui generis mental act that deserves to be so called. To suspend judgment about p is reducible to a judgment about the grounds for judging that p. This claim is important in order to argue, in Chapter VII, that we can't be Pyrrhonian sceptics.

Chapter V, *Doubt*, is a very important chapter for the economy of the overall argument I pursue in the Dissertation. There I explore the normative profile of doubt – that is a question as to whether p is true – and explain the connection between doubt, judgment and certainty. A doubt with respect to p is possible so long as p is uncertain, and in this sense doubting that p commits us to take it that p is uncertain, that is, that it might be the case that p is false. Since we want to remove doubts in order to give peace to our

mind, and since we remove a doubt by taking a stance about the truth value of the doubted proposition, this chapter provides the ground (constitutivity step) on the basis of which I will then argue (transcendental step) in Chapter XI that certainty is the norm of judgment. In this chapter I also partially discuss a condition that must be fulfilled in order to solve the problem of certainty introduced in Chapter I. I also explain how the problem of certainty emerges because of the nature of doubt. This is an important result because it shows that the problem of certainty and the desire to have it are rooted in the very structure of our inquiring mind.

Chapter VI is on *Phenomenology and Constitutive Normativity*. This chapter contains a very important discussion (§6.1, §6.3, but especially 6.4) that is meant to provide a motivation for the overall project pursued in this Dissertation. One of the central contention of the present work is the following thesis:

> *Claims about constitutive norms of cognition need phenomenology*: if one wants to claim that some norm is constitutive of cognition, then one needs to rely on phenomenology in order to show how the normativity is exhibited in the very phenomenology of cognition.

The archenemy of the overall spirit that animates the present project is what we might call *conceptualism about constitutive norms*, or *conceptualism* for short:.

> *Conceptualism*: the view according to which our conceptual scheme is the source of some putatively constitutive norms of cognition.

Conceptualism comes in many varieties in philosophical discussions. One prototypical way of being a conceptualist (within the analytic literature) is to claim that some norm is constitutive of some phenomenon (like judgment), because our *concept* of that phenomenon is such that the relevant norm is constitutive of it. To illustrate with an example which will occupy us a lot throughout the whole Dissertation, some think that the truth-norm is constitutive of judgment *because* our concept of judgment is such that the truth-norm is constitutive for judgment. A conceptualist view might come in many forms, and in general it is a view which relativises the source of some putatively constitutive norm on factors that in some way or another depend on our human condition – it might relativises the source of constitutive normativity to factors which are shaped by evolution,

history, socialization, culture, education, and so on. This is a methodological chapter in which I argue that the claim that some norm is constitutive for cognition is defensible only if it relies on phenomenology by showing that the relevant constitutive norm of cognition can be evinced from the phenomenology of cognition itself. In order to illustrate my point I rely on constitutivism about logical normativity, that is, the idea that some logical laws are constitutively normative for cognition either by being laws which we can't fail to respect (strong constitutivism) or by being laws such that to be evaluated according to them is constitutive of cognition (weak constitutivism)[3]. I argue that the latter view doesn't have the resources to silence a sceptic about the relevant logical laws, whereas I try to defend strong constitutivism about the law of non-contradiction in order to bring it out how hard it is to be strong constitutivist about logical laws. I further argue against conceptualism that both strong and weak constitutivism are plausible only if they are grounded on phenomenological features of our cognitive agency. This chapter is strategical in order to motivate the need of phenomenology if one wants to be a constitutivist about normativity.

Chapter VII is entitled *Global Scepticism and Pyrrhonian Scepticism as Untenable*. I argue that given the normative profile of cognition explored in the previous chapters, it is impossible for us to hold in a stable and coherent manner the view that there is no justification for our beliefs, and the view that purports to remain silent (or to suspend judgment) about all propositions. The former is untenable because by endorsing it one is committing oneself to the existence of good grounds for judging, whereas the latter is untenable because there is no such a stance as the one that the Pyrrhonian sceptic is trying to occupy.

Chapter VIII, *Fallibilism and Externalism as Untenable*, argues that fallibilism and externalism are untenable. We can't hold that at best our judgments are only fallibly justified, for by so judging we are both committing ourselves take it that fallibilism is both certain and uncertain. Moreover, by the fallibilist own lights, the fallibilist doctrine can be doubted, and when one does so one is ipso facto abandoning fallibilism (for doubting whether p is true and judging that p is true can't occur at the same time, as argued in Chapter V). The same problem arises for externalism. Since the externalist view is adopted on the basis of beliefs whose justification is secured by the presence of some relevant external condition which is beyond the (internalistically understood) access of the subject, from the subject's own perspective externalism might be unjustified – this happens if the relevant external conditions do not really obtain. By so judging, one is in a position to doubt the very externalist doctrine, and by so doubting one looses the judgment in

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3   See Leech (2015).

externalism. The conclusion of the chapter is that the sole tenable standpoint is the one that countenances the existence of absolute certainties – we can't consistently hold an epistemology that denies the possibility of absolute certainty. Moreover, and surprisingly, it is argued that the sole tenable standpoint also has to make room for the possibility that one's own belief in the fundamental epistemological theory is absolutely certain. In order to satisfy this condition, I would have to show that through the phenomenological investigation of the normative profile of cognition we discover normative truths with certainty. In other words, I would have to show that the method of eidetic variation delivers absolutely certain knowledge. This is a difficult task which I don't explore in this Dissertation but leave for another occasion.

In chapter IX, *Truth as the Constitutive Aim of Cognition,* I explain in what sense truth is the horizon of intelligibility of our cognitive life. I offer a minimalist view of truth as the aim of judgment according to which truth is the aim of judgment in the basic sense that to judge that p is to regard p as true. I contrast this minimalist view with other existing views. Then I extend minimalism to questioning and claim that a question aims at truth because it posits a true answer as its form of satisfaction. Finally, I explain and defend exclusivity, the fact that only alethic considerations can be used as grounds for judging.

Chapter IX provides the starting point for a constitutivist argument to the effect that alethic normativity is grounded on the very structure of cognition by being constitutive of it. In Chapter X, *Constitutivism about Alethic Normativity,* I discuss this constitutivist inference – that is, the ambitious inference from the fact judgment aims at truth by regarding its content as true to the fact that truth *is* the norm of cognition – and partially defends it from objections. The aim of the chapter is to show that we should distinguish different normative layers, as it were, one of them being what I call the transcendental layer of normativity. This is not a sort of normativity that can ask our practical (what should I do?), evaluative (what is good/valuable?), and existential (is there anything really meaningful?) questions, but rather it is the normativity that structures the very activity that we should use in order to answer these questions.

In Chapter XI I extend the constitutivist strategy to the realm of epistemic normativity. In Chapters III-V I have offered a description of the committal nature of judgment and questioning. This is a description of the premise of a constitutivist strategy whose aim is to show that certainty is the norm of cognition because it is constitutive of cognition to be committed to the possession of certainty-conferring grounds for the propositions that one takes as true. I offer several arguments for drawing this conclusion,

but the central one relies on the nature of doubt: since a doubt about *p* is possible if *p* is uncertain, and since when doubting whether *p* is true one can't at the same time judge that *p* is true, a judgment that *p* is true is epistemically fine only when it is certain, for if it is not certain then it is hostage to doubt. This is, in a nutshell, what I regard as the best argument for the claim that certainty is the norm of cognition. Finally, I discuss the question whether it is possible to argue, as many contemporary epistemologists do, that certainty is not a valuable aim to be pursued in our inquiry. I explain that any attempt to so argue is bound to be dialectically ineffective, and conclude that certainty can't be shown to be valueless.

In Chapter XII I conclude the Dissertation by discussing the notion of transcendental hinges. Empirical hinges of the sort that Wittgenstein was concerned about are propositions to which we are committed when we engage in particular dialectically *escapable* practices. Thus, it might be true that in our ordinary practices we are unavoidably committed to take the external world as existing. Yet, these practices are not dialectically inescapable because it is possible to doubt these empirical hinges. These empirical hinges should therefore be contrasted with transcendental hinges, that is, propositions to which we are committed *whenever* we engage in cognition. I argue against contemporary so-called hinge epistemologies that only transcendental hinges can be used in modest transcendental arguments, for the appeal to empirical hinges is not enough to silence the sceptic (empirical hinges can be coherently doubted), whereas the appeal to transcendental hinges is effective in silencing the sceptic (they can't be coherently doubted, for by doubting them one is displaying a commitment to their truth). Finally, I conclude this last chapter by summing up the mains claims made in the previous chapters, and by briefly explaining a topic which is largely neglected in this Dissertation, namely the explanatory step of the transcendental constitutivist strategy.

The initial plan of the Dissertation was to argue for the following four main claims:

1) Truth and certainty are the constitutive aims of cognition;

2) We do possess some absolute certainties (hence the problem of certainty discussed in Chapter I can be solved);

3) We do possess absolute certainty that certainty is the norm of cognition (that is, the phenomenological investigation about the structure of cognition delivers absolutely certain modal phenomenological knowledge – that is, knowledge about what is constitutive of our cognitive acts);

4) Given the previous claims, if a naturalistic understanding of cognition entails that there are no certainties, then it follows that a naturalistic understanding of cognition is

untenable (given (1) and (3)) and *false* (given (2)), and that only some form of transcendental idealism can make sense of the aim of cognition and its capacity to satisfy it. Unfortunately, I didn't succeed in pursuing this complex strategy. I only tried to defend (1).

The argument for (4) is briefly discussed in the concluding section of the last chapter in order to explain to the reader the importance of the explanatory step. The argument is the following. A naturalist understanding of the mind takes the structure of cognition to be dependent on contingent factors (evolution, nature, society, history, …). Given the contingency of these factors, we must judge that our cognition might have been structured otherwise. It seems that we can't exclude the possibility that if it were structured otherwise it would have delivered different results, that is, different propositions taken as true, and/or an altogether form of cognition. But if we think so, then we can't consistently regard our *actual* judgments as absolutely certain. Yet, not only we are committed to there being certainties (1), but some truths actually are known with absolute certainty (2) (the sum and the cogito, for instance). Thus, to the extent that a naturalistic understanding of the mind has the consequence that our actual cognition isn't capable of absolutely certain knowledge, a naturalistic understanding is untenable (given (1) and (3)) and false (given (2)). It is untenable because we can't but be committed to the existence of certainties (1) – when judging that there might be no certainties, we are committing ourselves to it being certain that there might be no certainties – and it is false because it entails that there are no certainties, but there *are* certainties (2). This is a very powerful challenge to our contemporary philosophical and intellectual climate, and represents an interesting argument in favour of (some forms of) transcendental idealism. Unfortunately, I didn't succeed in providing a detailed defence of this argument. But it is useful to have it in mind when approaching the Dissertation, for this is the central philosophical agenda that I had in mind when working on these issues.

Chapter I
Absolute Certainty

In this chapter I will characterize the notion of absolute certainty and explain why it seems impossible for our judgments to possess this kind of justification. I will call *the problem of certainty* what I take to be the strongest argument for the conclusion that absolute certainty is impossible.

§1.1   *Absolute certainty*

We might start to introduce what we are looking for by noticing two ways in which we speak about certainty.

Psychological certainty. Ascription of certainty as a mental state. I can say 'I am certain that *p'* in order to ascribe to myself a psychological state, namely the state of being certain. The sort of conviction that I am self-ascribing when I speak about me *being certain* about *p* is such that I think that I can't be mistaken about whether *p* is true[4].

Epistemic certainty or *absolute certainty. Ascription of certainty as an epistemic property of propositions or mental states.* I can say that 'the truth of a proposition is certain' or that 'this proposition is certain' or that 'it is certain that *p'* or that 'that *p* is a certainty' or that 'the judgment/belief that *p* is certain' meaning that, roughly, given the evidence that I possess, the possibility[5] that I am wrong about the truth of that proposition is excluded[67].

In this chapter I am concerned with epistemic certainty or absolute certainty, but not with psychological certainty. Psychological certainty is a mental state. It is an open

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4 In the phrase '*p* is true' '*p'* should be understood as referring to the proposition that *p*. So, strictly speaking, instead of saying '*p* is true' I would have to say 'the proposition that *p* is true'. However, for stylistic purposes, I will not use this precise formulation.

5 The possibility is epistemic. Necessary truths satisfy the condition that it is impossible for them to be false. Yet, I might or might not know them with certainty, that is, I might or might not possess the evidence which puts me in a position to exclude the possibility that they are false.

6 Compare with Stanley (2008) (by 'subjective certainty' he refers to what I call 'psychological certainty'). "Though the term "certain" is ambiguous between subjective and epistemic certainty, there are constructions in which it only can be read as the former than the latter, and vice-versa. When one speaks of a *person being certain of a proposition*, it is subjective certainty that is at issue. In contrast, when one speaks of a *proposition being certain*, it is epistemic certainty that is at issue. So, in a sentence such as "John is certain that Bush is president", it is subjective certainty that is at issue, whereas when one says "It is certain that Bush is president", what is at issue is the epistemic certainty of the proposition that Bush is president, relative to one's own body of evidence". pp. 36-7.

7 These of course are not the only ways in which we speak about certainty. Moreover, these two ways of speaking need not have the rigid meanings I have attached to them. The same expression could be used to express different things. What matters here are the distinctions between the two phenomena they refer to, not the way in which we refer to them.

question whether it is a *sui generis* mental state that should be distinguished from other mental states like beliefs and judgments. In the Chapter *On judgment* I will consider the question whether psychological certainty is a *sui generis* mental state and I will answer negatively: it is reducible to belief and judgment. In this chapter I will proceed on the assumption that this reductivist claim is true[8]. If psychological certainty were a sui generis mental state it could be, along with belief and judgment, a bearer of absolute certainty. Since I proceed under the assumption that it is reducible to belief and judgment, I will consider the latter as the bearers of absolute certainty. To a first approximation, by judgment I refer to a *conscious* act, wheres by belief I refer to a *dispositional unconscious* state. Since this Dissertation focuses on the phenomenology of cognition, I am concerned with conscious phenomena only, and so I will concentrate on judgment only as the bearer of certainty[9].

It is useful to think of absolute certainty as the sort of justification for judgments that Descartes was after in his *Meditations*. Descartes begins his *Meditations* by noticing that he holds many opinions, then he points out that for all he knows (or thinks he knows) his opinions might be wrong. Since he wants to have opinions that can't fail to be wrong, he then looks for a suitable kind of justification that will give him what he wants. To possess this sort of justification is to possess absolute certainty.

The task of this chapter is to individuate principles that capture the conditions that must be satisfied in order to possess absolute certainty[10]. The task is to see what are the conditions that Cartesian certainties, if any, would have to satisfy[11]. Along the way I will explain the way in which contemporary epistemology relates to these principles. Moreover, I will argue that if these principles are true, then certainty is impossible to obtain.

I do believe that there are absolute certainties. So, I do believe that the account of absolute certainty that I will give in what follows is wrong. Yet, the purpose of this chapter

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8   Nothing substantial will hinge on that. If one thinks that psychological certainty is not reducible to judgments and beliefs, then one can take psychological certainty as being a *further* possible bearer of absolute certainty.

9   Nothing substantial will hinge on that. The analysis of absolute certainty that I offer here can take beliefs as bearers as well.

10   From now on, unless when specified, whenever I speak about certainty I am speaking about absolute certainty.

11   Descartes didn't explicitly offer an analysis of the sort of absolute certainty he was looking for. I don't mean to be capturing here exactly the sort of epistemic status that Descartes was after in his *Meditations*, though we might refer to absolute certainties as Cartesian certainties, since Descartes is (I think correctly) regarded as being engaged with a paradigmatic search for the most perfect knowledge status, absolute certainty. The present analysis can be used in order to read Descartes and check the relevant differences, if any. Since the analysis I offer here entails that absolute certainty is impossible to achieve, and since Descartes did offer us genuine instances of certainties, it is useful to have the present analysis in mind while looking at Descartes's achievements. Descartes's instances of absolute certainties should be kept in mind in order to find the relevant putative condition for absolute certainty that must be denied in order to make for the existence of certainties.

is to convince ourselves that it is very difficult to understand what is wrong in the following account. If we try to characterise the most demanding kind of epistemic justification – the sort of epistemic justification that puts us in a position to claim that we can't be wrong about the truth value of a given proposition – then we plausibly end up with the following principles. Any attempt to deny them that I will consider here will prove to be wanting in one way or another. Most such attempts clearly change the subject matter of the analysis, rather then being competing analysis of absolute certainty itself. Since we *do* understand what it means to have absolute certainty[12], I will suggest that we also do understand when a given account is changing subject-matter rather than offering a competing articulation of absolute certainty.

§1.2   *The Ground Principle*

This is the first principle about certainty.

Ground Principle: I am absolutely certain that *p* only if I have a ground for judging that *p*.[13]

We can sum it all up in a catch phrase: there cannot be ungrounded certainties. Grounds for judging that *p* is true are grounds that speak in favour of the truth of *p*[14]. If I judge that nothing whatsoever speaks in favour of the truth of *p*, then I can't rationally take *p* to be true, and *a fortiori* I can't take it to be certain. Similarly, if I am open minded as to whether there is any ground in favour of the truth of *p*, I can't rationally take it to be true, nor *a*

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12 The best evidence that we possess absolute certainties is provided by citing instances of absolute certainties, like *I exist, There is something rather nothing*, *I am having an experience*. In fact, given the problem of certainty described below, the *sole* possible evidence of the existence of absolute certainty can't come from inferential sources, but rather consist in the particular absolute certainties that we happen to possess.

13 Less loosely, every principle should be intended as having the following form: Necessarily, a subject is absolutely certain that *p* only if … Hereafter I will take for granted that they are taken as necessarily true. Also, I will take for granted that they apply to any human subject, though I will give them a first-personal formulation because it helps us to consider the issue first-personally, rather than third-personally.

14 A terminological note (which will receive substantial philosophical vindication in Chapter IX, §9.10). There are three notions that I keep firmly distinguished in the Dissertation: evidence, reason, and ground. Reasons are only reasons for *action,* and judging is an act, not an action. Thus, given my own terminology, there are no reasons for judging. Grounds are only grounds for judging, namely, as said in the main text, considerations that speak in favour of the truth of a proposition.. By evidence I loosely refer to all sorts of considerations that *can* be taken as grounds for judging. Thus, I might *judge* that something is evidence for judging that *p*, but in my own terminology this is not an actual *ground* for judging that *p*, but only a potential one: it becomes a *ground* once it is taken as the basis for judging that *p*. This act of *taking something as a ground* for judging is therefore not reducible to mere judgment about what counts as evidence for a given proposition.

Sometimes in the main text I will speak loosely of grounds while intending to refer to *potential grounds*, that is, considerations that will be strictly speaking transformed in grounds once they are taken as such by the subject. Since when I do so proceed nothing hinges on this point, I leave to the context the task as making it clear when I am speaking about potential grounds (evidence) and actual grounds.

fortiori can I take it to be certain. If I am certain I take it that I can't be wrong about the truth of *p*. But I can't rationally take it that I can't be wrong about the truth of *p* if I have no grounds whatsoever for taking *p* to be true.

The same point can be noticed if we think about doxastic deliberation. Suppose I wonder whether I should judge that *p* or not. Can I resolve my doubt by coming to judge that *p* without taking myself to have any ground for judging that *p* rather than not judging it, and at the same time regard *p* as certain? No, for the resolution of the doubt will not appear as a resolution at all if I am incapable of articulating the grounds for my choice. Even if I can make sense of the process of coming to judge that *p* without needing to believe to have reasons for that choice (maybe some fancy subliminal process could do the trick), I can't make sense of that judgment as being absolutely certain. If I have no ground for choosing *p* over not choosing it, why would I ever judge that *p*?

Of course the relevant notion of ground here has to be understood along internalist lines. One has a ground only if the following conditions are met. First, one should be aware of the ground. If in the morning I read in a reliable newspaper that today the train stations in my town will be closed, but then I forget that I have read this piece of news and yet keep the judgment that the train stations will be closed, then there is a sense in which my judgment is well grounded and a sense in which it is not. According to an externalist notion of ground what I read in the newspaper can be regarded as some sort of ground for my belief even if I am no longer capable of appealing to it in order to consciously endorse what I have read. But there is a clear sense – the only one relevant for certainty – in which I no longer have a ground for my judgment. Surely, the failure to remember the ground for judging that the train stations will be closed is a failure to possess a ground for being absolutely certain that the train stations will be closed. I might believe it, but as soon as I wonder 'are they really closed?', unless I am capable of articulating a ground for judging that they are, I am not in a position to be absolutely certain that they are, even if my disposition to judge that they are is sustained in the proper causal way from my previous acquaintance with the news in the newspaper. The point is that if I am to be absolutely certain that *p* then from my own perspective I must be in a position to tell whether *p* is the case. To be in such a position is at least to be aware of some considerations that speak in favour of the truth that *p*. Otherwise, from my perspective, it is completely arbitrary to judge that *p,* rather than to judge any other proposition incompatible with *p*.

Awareness of ground is not enough though. One should be aware of the ground *as*

such. That is, one should be aware of the ground as a ground for judging that *p*. Suppose I am aware of all the relevant considerations that would make it absolutely certain that *p* is true but I fail to take them as grounds for judging that *p* is true. Then I can't be absolutely certain that *p*, because if I were to wonder why *p* is true I would not be capable of appealing to the relevant grounds, since I don't cognize them as grounds. Thus, to illustrate, many people who have never run into Descartes's Cogito might never have considered the question whether they know that they exist, and the question whether they know that they think when they do. However, even before reading the *Meditations*, they have been aware of the relevant grounds (their own experience) that are sufficient to be absolutely certain of the Cogito and the Sum. But it is only when one is aware of the grounds *as such* that one is in a position to be absolutely certain of the Cogito and the Sum. There is a way in which we can intelligibly speak such that it makes sense to say that people who never considered the Sum and the Cogito are already certain of them. But what we mean, really, is that they are *in a position* to become absolutely certain of them, for they are already aware of the relevant grounds, they just must recognize that they are grounds for these propositions.

To sum up, for one to possess a ground for judging that *p* in the relevant internalist sense is at least for one to be aware of the ground and to take it as a ground for judging that *p*[15]. This notion has to be contrasted with more externalist notions of ground which typically don't require awareness of the ground in order to have a ground for one's judgment.

There are various positions in the literature that might be understood as rejecting the Ground Principle. In *On Certainty* Wittgenstein argues that what he calls hinge propositions are at the same time (kind of) certainties and yet don't need to be grounded – but rather are some sort of presuppositions that make it possible to ask and give evidence

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15 There would be much more to be said about the proper characterization of internalist grounds. E.g., what does *taking* a ground as such amounts to? For the purposes of this Chapter, however, we need not to go into these details. I will give a richer account of the act of taking something as a ground in Chapter IX. For an articulation of this internalist understanding of ground, see Leite (2008). For a general overview of different understandings of what it means to ground (or to base) a belief on a ground, see Korcz (2015) and the sources mentioned therein.
Let me add that one need not choose one account of ground as the only correct account of ground, for we might allow the existence of different important notions of ground. I don't want to be committed to the claim that the internalist notion is the only correct one. My commitment is weaker, namely that it is *one* notion that captures some important phenomenon that might be reasonably and recognizably conceptualised as involving the basing of one's judgments and beliefs on grounds. This is in principle compatible with a form of pluralism about grounds. If one doesn't like this form of pluralism because, for instance, one is a monist about justification and knowledge and thinks that there is only one correct notion of ground (which is not internalist) that is the one required for her own preferred account of justification and knowledge, then, for this person, all I am claiming is that the right notion of ground *for the epistemic status of absolute certainty* is the one which is captured along internalist lines.

for judging by remaining in the background of that activity. This might be read in at least two ways. One way is to say that a person can judge these hinge propositions as being true even if she doesn't have *any* ground to judge them. Another option is to say that even if one might have some sort of ground for judging them, the ground doesn't play any justificatory role, but a mere psychological one, since hinge propositions elude the realm of propositions that can be justified (or they might simply not be in need of justification).

The first reading is implausible. Of course we might have the *disposition* to accept hinge propositions as true even if we don't consciously take ourselves to have some ground to take them as true. But as soon as the issue of whether a hinge proposition is true or not is consciously raised, then in order to give a conscious assent to their truth one needs grounds that speak in favour of their truth. Thus, if I consciously raise the question whether it is true 'there is an external world', I might of course be immediately disposed to answer affirmatively, without considering explicitly the question whether I have any ground for so judging. But if I raise the more specific question: 'am I *absolutely certain* that there is an external world?' then it won't be intelligible for me to answer affirmatively if I don't at least take myself to have some ground for so judging. The ground might also be the appearance that there is an external world, even if the appearance is not a sufficient ground for having absolute certainty. The point here is about the psychological conditions for claiming to possess an absolute certainty, not about the normative ones: in order to be in a position to claim to possess absolute certainty I must have grounds, but of course my grounds might be not enough to have what I claim to possess.

This point is however independent from the second reading of the Wittgensteinian claim, namely the reading according to which regardless of what we psychologically need in order to consciously endorse a proposition as certain, there is a point to be made about the epistemic status of hinge propositions. Even though their conscious endorsement might require grounds, one might try to claim that they elude what we might call the logical space of reasons[16], namely the space to which there belong those propositions that can be evaluated as justified/unjustified, known/unknown. These are the specific sort of certainties that Wittgenstein calls hinge propositions. There is much more to be said about these sorts of certainties[17]. The point we need to bring home here is simply that Wittgensteinian certainties are not the same thing as Cartesian absolute certainties. They simply are two different sort of things. Among the many respects in which they differ,

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16 Sellars (1956).
17 There is a growing interpretative literature on Wittgenstein's *On certainty*. See for instance Coliva (2010), Hamilton (2008), Stroll (1994), Moyal-Sharrock (2004).

Cartesian certainty is characterised by the Ground Principle whereas Wittgensteinian certainty is not. The interesting point is whether there could be any Wittgensteinian strategy that shows that it is wrong to suppose that to look for Cartesian certainty is valuable or intelligible at all. In Chapter XI I argue that there can't be any such successful strategy.

The same general observations apply to contemporary Wittgensteinian accounts of justification. Crispin Wright[18] argues that there are some propositions that are not in need of evidential justification (i.e., roughly, justification based on the possession of internalist grounds), but can possess a special kind of epistemic warrant he calls *entitlement*. These are what he calls 'cornerstone propositions' (Wright's version of Wittgenstein's hinge propositions), propositions like 'there is an external world'. The view is motivated by the aim of responding to the sceptical challenge while maintaining a form of internalism about justification. Again, this and similarly structured views[19] need not (though they might independently want to) deny the descriptive point that in order to be psychologically certain one needs to have a ground for one's conviction. They will add, however, that this ground is not what confers the positive epistemic status (in Wright's case, the entitlement) to the cornerstone propositions.

Now, in order to characterise the sort of absolute certainty that is central for Cartesian epistemology one needs not deny Wright's contention that there is some sort of positive epistemic status like entitlement. The only thing that needs to be noticed is that entitlement differs from Cartesian certainty. We might possess entitlement for such propositions like 'there is an external world', but this doesn't answer in any way the question whether we have absolute certainty for believing that there is an external world. One can however argue that it is unintelligible to look for Cartesian certainty about hinge (or cornerstone) propositions. Alternatively, one can argue that even if it is possible to look for Cartesian certainty about these propositions, it is not desirable, or anyway not required: that is, we can calm our sceptical anxieties even if we accept that we can't have absolute certainty for most of our beliefs. Both arguments will be responded to respectively in Chapter XII, and XI. For now, our sole aim is to elucidate what it takes to possess absolute certainty.

Another potential objection to the Ground Principle – which might also be used in order to support a Wittgensteinian take on certainty – comes from the realization that there seems to be cases of ungrounded certainties. There are cases in which we are strongly

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18 Wright (2004).
19 Coliva (2015).

inclined to claim to possess absolute certainty even if, upon reflection, we are apparently incapable of pointing to any ground for having them. Logical, mathematical, and analytic truths seem to be cases in point. Are we certain that 2+2=4? I think so. In fact, we are so certain of this truth that it provides a paradigm for understanding the phenomenon of certainty. But how do we know that 2+2=4? Is there a ground for believing so? If so, what sort of ground is it? Or consider cases of very simple logical inferences like the inference from *p and q* to *p*. Or the case of candidate analytic truths like the following: *p iff p is true*. Or: *a bachelor is an unmarried man*. What are the grounds for taking these truths to be certain? Am I really capable of pointing to some ground for believing a particular instance of the T-schema, e.g., that *if there is a tree there then it is true that there is a tree there*?

These are very complicated cases. But so long as we keep in mind the fact that for something to qualify as a ground is for it to be something that the subject regards as a ground, then we can see how these cases fail to be obvious counterexamples to the Ground Principle. In all these cases, even if we are not capable of providing an articulated and convincing story about the grounds we have for believing them, we surely have something that we might describe, for lack of a more theoretically respectful name, as a seeming of correctness or as an intuition that grounds the correspondent judgments. There is some form of experienced understanding that sustains the acceptance of these truths. All these mental phenomena could count as grounds as much as perceptual experiences and previous beliefs can. A self-evident truth – like analytic truths and simple arithmetical truths – is not ungrounded: the fact that it strikes us as true can count as a ground for believing it[20][21].

In order to see the presence of these seemings of correctness or intuitions, suppose that we didn't find it obvious, or right, or intuitively correct, that 2+2=4, and suppose further that we weren't capable of pointing to any ground whatsoever for believing that it is true. Would we then believe that 2+2=4? This question is hard to address, for it is hard to see what it would take to understand that 2+2=4 without finding it correct. But consider a quite complicated subtraction like the following: 739,54 – 542,78 =

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20 Audi (1999).

21 Someone might object as follows. What about someone who is not sophisticated enough to entertain notions like intuition, seeming, or striking (someone) as true? Can she take herself to have grounds? Suppose the answer is 'no'. Still it seems that she can know that 2+2=4, say. A similar worry applies to perceptual beliefs. Most people do not think of perceptual experiences at all, yet some of their perceptual beliefs amount to knowledge. They have the experience, and they form the relevant belief, but they need not be capable to articulate the relation.The reply is that even if we have good reasons to say that knowledge doesn't require the possession of internalist grounds (Burge 2003), still this 'knowledge' does not amount to absolute certainty. The point made here is not that absolute certainty is required to have knowledge or justification. The point is simply that of describing what having absolute certainty amounts to.

196,76. After some reflection you might find it correct. But you won't take yourself to be certain that this is indeed correct if it doesn't strike you as correct, and to find it correct you might need to find various steps intuitively compelling (depending on what you do in order to check the subtraction). To see the importance of grounds in this quite unintuitive subtraction allows us to see the presence of ground even in the case of simple sums like 2+2=4. Again, the point is not a normative one about what could count as a *sufficient* ground for being absolutely certain. I am not arguing that a simple feeling of correctness or intuition could be a normatively sufficient ground for believing some proposition with certainty. I am just saying that in particular cases they count as candidate normatively necessary grounds for judging the corresponding proposition. In these particular cases, were we not to have any ground at all for a given proposition, not even a feeling of correctness, we would not be capable of taking the truth of that proposition as absolutely certain.

§1.3   *Inferentialism about certainty*

Granted that absolute certainty requires grounds, what characteristics should these grounds have in order to do their work? We can roughly distinguish between two sorts of grounds, doxastic and non-doxastic, where the former include beliefs and judgments, whereas the latter includes experiences[22]. Could certainties be grounded on doxastic grounds alone? Or should they rather be grounded on non-doxastic grounds alone? Or should they be grounded on both sorts of grounds? In this paragraph I will introduce a couple of principles about doxastic grounds for certainty.

The first crucial question about doxastic ground is the following: could a belief amount to certainty while being grounded on some doxastic ground which is not itself justified, or whose justification doesn't contribute at all to the justification for believing the certain belief? The answer seems negative. From the first-personal perspective, if I don't take myself to be justified in holding a belief which I am then using in order to support belief in something else – maybe a belief in a proposition which entails or makes probable the grounded proposition – then why would I ever rely on *that* belief for believing anything at all? The choice of that belief as a ground would be arbitrary (I could have equally chosen another unjustified belief as ground, but then I would have ended up with different beliefs). In fact, if we try to put ourselves in situations in which we judge to have a

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22 The category of non-doxastic states is quite broad. It includes experiences of all sort, even intuitions and seemings of correctness, if we think of them as distinct from judgments.

certainty grounded on unjustified doxastic grounds we realize that it is impossible for us to be in that situation. I can't understand myself as judging that *p* is true while at the same time judging that I have no ground at all for believing that *p*. Hence, I can't believe that I have a certainty which is based on a ground which is not itself justified, for if I think of my ground as not being justified, then I thereby loose it as a belief of mine, and if I loose it as a belief of mine I also loose it as a doxastic ground for believing.

The next question is the following: what sort of justification should be possessed by the doxastic ground if it is to qualify as a ground for a certainty? I propose that the ground should itself be certain.

Infallibility Principle for Doxastic Grounds : I am absolutely certain that *p* on the basis of the doxastic ground that *q* only if I am absolutely certain that *q*

Can I be certain that *p* on the doxastic ground that *q* if I take it that *q* is not certain? If my ground for believing is only fallibly justified and judged to be so, then I also judge that it (epistemically) might be false – the justification I have for it is compatible with its being false – and I will thereby have to judge my certainty to be only fallibly justified which is tantamount to stop considering it as a certainty. Of course, I might ground a particular certainty in a less then certain belief, but this ground is not what confers the certainty enjoyed by the grounded belief. For instance, I believe that I am walking, and from this I can infer that I exist. The inferred belief is certain, but the ground for taking my existence as certain is not that I am walking, for this ground is itself uncertain – I might simply be having an hallucination of a body. That I exist is certain on some independent ground.

The Ground Principle and the Infallibility Principle for Doxastic Grounds are sufficient to see the emergence of a first problem for an epistemology centred on certainty if we further assume the following principle:

Inferentialism about Certainty: I am absolutely certain that p only if my judgment that *p* is at least partially grounded on doxastic grounds.
(This principle doesn't say that there couldn't be certainties which are partly grounded on non-doxastic grounds; it just says that all certainties must be at least partly grounded on doxastic grounds)

This principle is enough to see the emergence of a challenge which is perhaps one of the

most famous challenges to our understanding of the possibility of knowledge to be known in the whole history of epistemology, namely what has been variously called, not without confusion, the problem of regress, Agrippa's trilemma, Munchausen's trilemma, or even, sometimes, the problem of the criterion[23]. The problem is this: since any certainty should be doxastically grounded, and since any doxastic ground should itself be a certainty and should respect the doxastic ground principles as well as the ground principles, it follows that certainties could be grounded only in these two ways:

Infinitism about certainty. Infinitism holds that any certainty is grounded in an infinite chain of grounds. Since any ground should itself be a certainty, it should be grounded, and its ground should itself be a certainty, and the same applies to this latter certainty, and so on and so forth, ad infinitum.

Circularism about certainty. Circularism holds that any certainty is grounded in a finite chain of grounds, and that one of the doxastic grounds in the chain is precisely the certainty that the chain grounds. Any certainty is, at least partly, grounded by itself.

However, it is extremely hard to see how an infinite chains of grounds could be a ground for a certainty. For, I can't be certain of something if I am not capable of articulating my grounds for it (Ground Principle), and since I am a finite believer I am not capable of articulating an infinite chains of grounds, as a consequence I couldn't have any certainty on that ground. In order to test infinitism about certainty it is interesting to follow the methodology from intelligibility we have used thus far. Imagine you have to take yourself as possessing a certainty whose ground is infinitist. But is it possible to take oneself to *have* an infinity of grounds while at the same time one knows one's mind to be finite and hence

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23 Often the problem is presented as a trilemma: either justification comes from nothing (ungrounded justification), or it comes from an infinite series of grounds (infinitism), or from a finite circular chain of grounds (circularism). In my presentation of the problem the option that justification comes from nothing is excluded from the outset by the acceptance of the Ground Principle about certainty.

The same problem has been presented in various ways in the history of philosophy, and the choice of its many labels hasn't always been entirely consistent and faithful to the presentation of the problem. For instance, Agrippa didn't present a trilemma, but rather *five* modes, namely discrepancy, infinite regress, relativity, hypothesis, and circularity. However, the five modes naturally split in two classes: two challenges to justify one's claim, namely the recognition of discrepancy and relativity, and three modes whose task is to show that the challenge to justify one's claims can't be met, namely, infinity, hypothesis, and circularity. See Fogelin (1994).

'Munchausen's Trilemma' is the name that Hans Albert gives to Agrippa's trilemma. See Albert (1968). The same problem is also often called the problem of the regress, though infinite regress is only one of the unpalatable options of the trilemma. The problem is sometimes also presented as the problem of the criterion, though the two are quite different. See Cling (2014) for a detailed discussion of the relationship between the problem of the criterion and the regress problem.

incapable of grasping all of them? Maybe one can think that *there is,* in the abstract space of reasons, an infinity of grounds for a given belief, but what is in the abstract space cannot be *appropriated* and used by the subject given the shape of her finite mind. Hence, infinitism cannot be a right principle about grounds for certainty.

There are however some epistemologists who have recently defended an infinitist account of justification[24]. This is a view about the nature of justification. Regardless of the merits and demerits of infinitism as a view about justification, the question we should ask is whether infinitism captures anything that can be regarded as Cartesian absolute certainty. For the reasons just provided, I think it doesn't. Infinitism about justification may capture some important kind of justification, but it is not plausible as an account of the justification that characterises Cartesian certainty.

With respect to circularism, the problem is different. Since I want to be certain of the truth of some proposition, it doesn't make any sense to presuppose its truth in order to become then certain that it is indeed a truth. Again, if I try to put myself in the circularist situation I will find it unintelligible for me to claim certainty of something which I am presupposing in order to claim my certainty. Both options, and the mixture of the two, seem just false qua principles about certainty.

So, to sum up, if we assume Inferentialism about Certainty, plus the previous principle about the nature of doxastic grounds, then we have a problem. This is a very well-known point. This is why most plausible accounts of certainty are non-inferentialist about it and this is also why all people trying to construct an epistemology centred on certainty are, like Descartes, foundationalists with experiences and beliefs based on them at the foundations. This brings us to a discussion of non-doxastic grounds.

§1.4   *Infallibility and Reflexivity*

Non-inferentialism about certainty is often called foundationalism. Foundationalism is the view that there are beliefs justified on the basis of experience alone, that is beliefs whose justification doesn't require that one grounds them on other justified beliefs. Those beliefs whose status as certainty is grounded on non-doxastic grounds alone are also called basic beliefs or basic certainties. The question we should then ask about non-doxastic grounds is the following[25]: what are the features that non-doxastic grounds should possess in order to

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24 See Klein (2005).
25 There are other questions, of course, that should be of direct concern for any defender of Cartesian epistemology. Just to mention one of them which is related to the nature of non-doxastic grounds, one should respond to the contention that non-doxastic grounds (i.e., experiences) can't count as *grounds for*

ground certainties?

Let us reflect again on the conditions that would make intelligible from a first-personal point of view the act of taking some ground as a ground for one's judgment. It is part of what it means to take something as a ground for judging that p that I regard that something as speaking in favour of the truth of p. This is part of the conditions of intelligibility for taking something as a ground for judging. If I try to consider myself as judging that p on the basis of some ground which I do not regard as telling in favour of the truth of p, I realize that I am not imagining anything which can be understood as being the act of relying on a ground for believing that p is true. I might perhaps try to make sense of a scenario in which I believe some proposition p on the basis of grounds which I don't take to be alethically related to p, though they support the belief that p for *pragmatic* or *moral* reasons. But this sort of phenomenon, if real[26], is not the relevant one here. Notice that this point applies both to doxastic and non-doxastic grounds.

So, taking one's ground as ground for believing that p presupposes that one takes the ground as telling in favour of the truth of p. However, since we want *certainty* that p we do not simply want our ground to tell in favour of p, we want the ground to speak in favour of the truth of p in a way that makes it certain that p is true. So, we must take the ground to be conclusive, and not just truth-conducive with respect to p.

Examples. Let's see the distinction as applied to doxastic grounds. Suppose I want to justify an inference about the colour of swans. If my ground is the recognition that all swans in the past were black, then my ground might be truth-conducive with respect to the proposition that the colour of swans is black – since it increases its probability – but it is not a conclusive ground, for it doesn't entail the truth that all swans are black, since it is conceivable that in the future we will meet white swans. On the other hand, if we are certain that a, and that a *entails* b, then the beliefs that a and that a *entails* b are conclusive grounds for b. The important point is that a truth-conducive ground in favour of p is a ground the presence of which merely makes the truth of a proposition likely enough, whereas a conclusive one in favour of p is such that its presence is incompatible with the falsity of p.

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believing at all. See for the original expression of this worry, Davidson (1986). More generally one should provide an account that explains what are the conditions in which an experience can count as a ground for believing that avoids the so-called Myth of the Given. See Sellars (1956), McDowell (1994).

26 It is almost universally accepted the view according to which doxastic deliberation – that is, deliberation about what to believe – could not be guided by considerations other than alethic ones (this is the feature of cognition called 'exclusivity'). There are however attempts to argue that other sort of considerations – like pragmatic ones – could be used in doxastic deliberation. See, for instance, Reisner (2009) and Sharadin (2016). More on a defense of exclusivity in Chapter IX, §9.10.

Now consider cases of *non-doxastic grounds*. Suppose I have an experience of pain. That ground doesn't merely tell in favour of the truth that I am experiencing pain, it is conclusive with respect to it, in the sense that there being this experience guarantees that I am having this experience. It can't be the case that I have that experience of pain and that I don't have that very experience of pain[27]. Suppose now instead that the same experience of pain is not used as a ground for believing that I am experiencing pain but rather for believing that *my body* is in pain, where that proposition is committed to the existence of a body beyond the experience that I have of having one. In this case, even if we might concede that the experience of pain speaks in favour of the proposition that I have a body, the experience is clearly not a conclusive ground for the corresponding proposition, for its presence is compatible with the falsity of the proposition.

We thus have a new principle about grounds for certainties, both doxastic and non-doxastic:

Infallibility Principle: I am absolutely certain that p only if I have a conclusive ground (either doxastic or non-doxastic) for judging that p.

So far, the Infallibility Principle is still not enough to engender any new problem about certainty. As stated, it requires that the ground be actually conclusive with respect to p, and this might be the case regardless of whether the subject knows or is justified in believing that the ground is actually conclusive. The problem is, however, that certainty seems to require the subject to actually be *certain* that the ground is conclusive with respect to p. This is why. If I am not certain that my ground for believing that p is actually conclusive with respect p there is a sense in which I thereby stop taking the ground to be *certainty*-conducive with respect to p. For, if I am not certain that the ground is certainty-conferring with respect to p, then I am committed to take it to be possible that the proposition is merely fallibly supported by the relevant ground, and thus I no longer take the ground to be certainty-conferring with respect to p and as a consequence I cannot even consider the grounded belief as a certainty.

Since, for the reasons just provided absolute certainty requires not only a conclusive ground but a conclusive ground certainly known to be such, we have this principle about certainty:

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27 I might fail to categorize it correctly if I don't categorize it as being an experience of *pain*. But I can't be wrong in believing that I am having *that* experience.

Reflexivity Principle: I am absolutely certain that *p* only if I have absolute certainty that *g* is a conclusive ground (either doxastic or non-doxastic) for *p*

Now that we also have this last principle about certainty we are in a position to see how this analysis captures most of the platitudes that are associated with Cartesian certainty and Cartesian epistemology more generally[28].

Certainty is factive, i.e., if one's belief is absolutely certain then it is true. This point is captured by the fact that the sort of grounds required in order to have Cartesian certainty are conclusive grounds, that is, grounds which guarantee the truth of the believed proposition[29].

Certainty is incorrigible, or unrevisable, or indefeasible, i.e., there is no way in which the subject could abandon her certainty on the basis of new incoming evidence. This is secured by the Infallibility and Reflexivity principles. If the ground is conclusive, then there is no possible evidence that will tell against the absolute certainty, for if there were such evidence one's initial evidence will no longer be conclusive. And if the subject is certain to possess such conclusive grounds, then the subject is certain that there will be no possible scenario in the future in which she has evidence against her certainty.

Certainty is incompatible with doubt. This incompatibility has two aspects. Certainty is incompatible with grounded doubt, namely a doubt that one has grounds for having. Since a ground for doubting is a ground that speaks in favour of the truth that it is correct to doubt, and since it is correct to doubt only if one's evidence doesn't conclusively establish the truth of the target proposition, it follows that grounded doubt is impossible, for to possess certainty for a proposition is to knowingly possess conclusive grounds in favour of this proposition. Certainty is also incompatible with mere ungrounded (or wishfully grounded) psychological doubt. So long as one is consciously and comprehendingly attending to the fact that she possesses conclusive grounds for *p*, one is not in a position to also doubt whether *p* is true or not. Of course, however, when one forgets all this, or doesn't attend to it, it is possible for her to doubt the truth of *p*.

§1.5   *The problem of certainty*

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28 Descartes didn't explicitly offer an analysis of certainty. The sort of analysis I have provided is thus in part a reconstruction of what certainty amounted to in Descartes's work. To sustain this exegetical point will require further arguments that go beyond the scope of the present paper.

29 Since certainty is factive, the Reflexivity Principle entails the Infallibility Principle and makes the latter redundant. It is however useful to have both of them in view for dialectical and expository purposes.

Having clarified the kind of certainty Descartes was looking for, we are also now in a position to appreciate why certainty is thought to be so hard to obtain, not only in particular domains (like empirical domains), but in general. The problem of regress which arises in connection with Inferentialism about certainty has typically been solved by moving to a Non-inferentialist view about certainty, since this view stops the regress by putting at the foundations basic beliefs grounded on non-doxastic states, the sort of states which are not in need to be justified[30]. However, if the Reflexivity principle is true we then have the same problem which reappears in a general form for both doxastic and non-doxastic grounds[31]. The reason is that any certainty requires the certainty that its ground is certainty-conferring, but then this certainty must itself be grounded, and so the regress restarts. As before, we might envisage two positive reactions to this problem.

Infinitism. Any certainty is grounded in an infinite chain of grounds.

Circularism. Any certainty is grounded in a finite chain of grounds, and one of the doxastic grounds in the chain is precisely the certainty that the chain grounds. Any certainty is, at least partly, grounded by itself.

If, as before, we further add the following eminently plausible principles about certainty, we are then in a position to see the problem of certainty in its bare bones.

No Infinite Regress: the sort of justification possessed by certainties cannot be infinitist, that is, the certainty cannot be grounded on a chain of infinite grounds.

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30 The difference between doxastic and non-doxastic states is important for theorizing about certainty and justification in general since non-doxastic states are the sort of states with respect to which it doesn't make sense to ask whether they are justified or not. We can ask whether the beliefs we have are justified or not. But we can't ask whether the experiences we happen to have are justified or not. This is why they are supposed to be the unmoved movers of the epistemological edifice. We might ask however whether experiences are veridical or not (does this experience of a hand correctly represent an external world where there is a hand?), and, more importantly, we might also ask whether experiences are conclusive grounds or not for believing what they are supposed to ground (is the experience of a hand a conclusive ground for believing that there is a hand?).

31 Notice that the reflexivity principle is enough to engender the problem of regress in a new form even it is required that the ground be not certainty-conducive but simply truth-conducive. See Fumerton (1995) where he defends something similar to the spirit of the Reflexivity Principle without however requiring certainty, and without requiring certainty-conduciveness but mere truth-conduciveness. In Fumerton (2006), p. 39, he formulates his 'Principle of Inferential Justification' as follows: "To have justification for believing P on the basis of E one must have not only (1) justification for believing E, but also (2) justification for believing that E makes probable P". Other defenders of similar inferentialist principles are Hookway (2000a) p. 345, Feldman (2004) p. 115, Rhoda (2008) p. 217 and p. 227, and Leite (2008) p. 423.

No Premise-Circularity: the sort of justification possessed by certainties cannot be premise-circular, that is, no certainty could figure among the premises of its certainty-conferring argument.

Given the Reflexivity Principle, we are back to an inferentialist view of certainty, which faces the problem of regress.

This is, I think, the most powerful challenge to the possibility of certainty. It is not the purpose of this Chapter to solve this problem[32]. It is however interesting to highlight the general structure of the challenge to the possibility of achieving certainty, for versions of this challenge are often appealed to by anti-Cartesian epistemologists in order to motivate a departure from a certainty-based epistemology. Since absolute certainty seems impossible to obtain, and anyway it is hardly obtainable with respect to most of the propositions we care about in our life, most people characterise the nature of justification and knowledge in terms that reject some if not all of these principles.

We have already seen Wittgensteinian rejections of the Ground Principle. With respect to the Infallibility Principle, it is interesting to notice that most people[33] – internalists and externalists alike – require that one's grounds be simply truth-conducive and not certainty-conducive. It is a well-known point that the mere fact of having an experience doesn't necessitate that things are as they appear to be. However, it might be argued that having an experience makes it sufficiently probable that things are as they appear to be. If one desires to preserve as much of our commonsensical picture of our epistemic condition as possible, then one is advised to require mere truth-conducive grounds rather than conclusive grounds.

The sort of justification that is described by the Reflexivity Principle is almost universally rejected in contemporary accounts of justification[34]. The Reflexivity Principle captures the spirit of traditional internalism[35], namely the idea that in order to be justified

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32 There are various moves that could be made in order to solve this problem. Descartes's own position in the *Meditations* could be enlightened by explaining what sort of resources he had to solve it. I offer my own solution to the problem, and an explanation of Descartes's attempt to solve it, in Zanetti (ms5). For some further discussion of the nature of the problem and the conditions for its solution, see §, Chapter V.

33 According to Stewart Cohen "the acceptance of fallibilism in epistemology is virtually universal" and Baron Reed agrees when he says that "Fallibilism is endorsed by virtually all contemporary epistemologists". See Cohen (1988) p. 91 and Reed (2002) p. 143.

34 There are at least two notable exceptions. Richard Fumerton's work is explicitly aimed at preserving the sort of insights and problems that animated Descartes's epistemology. Though he doesn't explicitly describe his own epistemology as being centred on absolute certainty, he surely is an allied of Cartesian epistemology. Lawrence Bonjour is another epistemologist who is trying to preserve Cartesian insights in epistemology. See their papers in DePaul (2000).

35 The distinction between internalism and externalism can be framed in various ways. But it is common practice to define externalism as the denial of internalism, and to distinguish internalism in two kinds:

in believing a proposition one must have a suitable reflexive access to the adequacy of one's grounds for believing. With some few exceptions (see above), most contemporary epistemologists don't need that one is justified in believing that (or in knowing that) one's grounds for believing are epistemically good. Thus most internalists say that the mere possession of truth-conducive grounds is sufficient in order to have justification, without requiring that the subject be also justified in believing that her grounds are truth-conducive. Similarly, all externalist accounts reject the sort of reflexively accessible justification characterised by the Reflexivity Principle, since even when the possession of grounds for believing is required, it is enough that one's belief be formed through a suitable process (e.g., a reliable one, or a virtuous one) in order for one to have justification for believing. Crucially, the subject is not required to know or be justified in believing that the belief-forming process is reliable or anyway an adequate one.

We have now completed the presentation of Cartesian certainty and of its relationship with the contemporary debate. To recap, we might see Cartesian certainty as being the combination of an infallibilist requirement on justification and of a strong access internalism about epistemic justification. As we have seen, there are few if any authors that can be seen as interested in a kind of justification and knowledge that incorporates both elements. Almost all accounts of knowledge and justification are fallibilist and accommodate this fallibilism either within an externalist framework[36] or within a modest form of internalism which abandons the requirement of reflexive access to the adequacy of one's grounds that is captured by the Reflexivity Principle.

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access internalism (the one that aims at capturing the Cartesian epistemological aspirations), according to which one should have a suitable reflexive access to the adequacy of one's grounds for believing; and mentalism, the view that doesn't require reflexive access, but requires that one be in possession of mental grounds for believing. See Kornblith (2001) for classical papers on the internalism/externalism debate.

36 Externalist theories are typically fallibilist ones. One exception is Dutant (2016).

Chapter II
Eidetic Phenomenology

The aim of this Dissertation is to explain why the search of absolute certainty is an inescapable end for our cognition. In order to achieve this aim I need to show that the structure of our cognition is such as to posit for itself the quest to search for absolute certainty. So, what is it in the structure of cognition that shows that we are inescapably committed to search for absolute certainty? In very few words, my answer to this question mentions two fundamental facts about cognition:

1)   *judging commits to certainty*. When we cognize – that is, when we ask questions and try to find true answers –, and particularly when we form judgments, we do engender alethic commitments – that is, commitments to accept further propositions or to refrain from accepting further propositions. Among these alethic commitments, when we judge that *p,* we commit ourselves to the truth of a further proposition, namely the proposition that the truth of *p* is absolutely certain. In judging that *p* we are in some sense taking it to be certain that *p* is true.

2)   *doubting is to look for certainty*. When we doubt we commit ourselves to the lack of certainty about the proposition doubted. We doubt some proposition because we aren't certain of it yet. Since we can doubt the truth of proposition *p* so long as we aren't absolutely certain about the truth of *p*, and since we want to remove doubt and to have judgments, when we doubt we are expressing our desire to possess absolute certainty.

These two facts are those I am going to rely on in order to argue that certainty is the fundamental aim of cognition. The arguments that establish that these putative facts are indeed facts, as well as the arguments that move from the existence of these facts to the conclusion that certainty is indeed the aim of cognition, are complex arguments that will occupy us throughout the Dissertation.

In the next chapter – Chapter III – I argue that judging commits to certainty. In Chapter IV I argue that suspension of judgment is reducible to judgment (and so that suspending judgment also commits to certainty). And in Chapter V I argue that to ask questions and have doubts is to look for certainty. A fundamental notion on which I will rely a lot in my arguments is the one of alethic commitment. In this Chapter I want to begin to explain what alethic commitments are, and what the methodology I shall use to find them is.

In §2.1 I offer some terminological distinctions that will be important in what

follows, and begin to explain what it means to say that judgments have a committal nature. In §2.2 I introduce the method of eidetic variation I will use in order to investigate the normative profile of cognition. In §2.3 I discuss a couple of worries about the possibility of there being an eidetic phenomenology of cognition, namely a study whose aim is to find the nature of cognitive acts individuated phenomenologically. In §2.4 I explain why a phenomenological investigation about the normative profile of cognition is necessary in order to answer the normative question about what to believe – in a slogan, in this paragraph I explain why epistemology needs phenomenology.

§2.1 *Terminological preliminaries*

We form judgments on the basis of grounds for thinking that things are thus-and-so. Most often we judge on the basis of grounds without being aware of them *as such*. But we do sometimes cognize grounds *as such*. One of the precondition for the emergence of the problem of certainty is our capacity to take a reflective stance with respect to our grounds for judging and to cognize then *as such*. One of the first realization that one makes in the quest to achieve certain knowledge is that one *must* have grounds for one's own judgments and that these grounds *must* be of the appropriate kind. It is the fact that we can become aware of grounds *as such* that provides the condition of possibility for raising the question of certainty, namely the question whether our grounds are *good enough* to make our judgment certain. The problem of certainty is a problem for a mind that is capable of cognizing her own judgments as being based on grounds that could be or fail to be appropriate. This capacity for reflection or 'reflective distance' is central for epistemology, and, according to some, is what distinguishes animal from human cognition[37].

Reflective distancing can take different forms, but the common factor of all forms of reflective distancing seems to be that we are capable to raise a question about the target of our reflection. The sorts of questions we are interested in here when we deal with foundational issues in epistemology are normative questions about whether our grounds for judging are good in supporting the truth of the proposition to be judged.

Interestingly, there are some questions that can't be intelligibly raised about all

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37 See Korsgaard (2009a,b) and McDowell (1996). There are grounds for judging and reasons for action. The same claim about grounds for judging can be made with respect to reasons for action. We can cognize our desires, say, as *reasons* for action, and this a condition of possibility for the emergence of the *moral* problem, namely the problem of knowing what one should do. These problems are not problems for animals, for even though they might be aware of their reasons, they have not the capacity to be aware of their reasons *as reasons* and their grounds *as grounds* and so they are not in a position to wonder whether their reasons and grounds are *good*.

mental phenomena. One crucial question for epistemology is the question of justification: the question whether I am justified in having a certain mental state. Our judgments and beliefs are the sort of things with respect to which it makes sense to ask whether they are justified or unjustified. My present feeling of fatigue, for instance, is not the sort of thing with respect to which it makes sense to ask whether it is justified or not. The same goes for perceptual experiences and experiences more generally.

Let me briefly recall from the previous chapter why the distinction between mental phenomena that are targeted by the justificatory question and mental phenomena that are not so targeted is important. Defenders of the possibility of certainty have always been foundationalists and they have tried to explain the justification of the foundations by appealing to experiences. The reason is that experiences are the sort of mental phenomena that do not require to be themselves justified. If the grounds for a certainty were beliefs, namely the sort of phenomena with respect to which it makes sense to ask whether they are justified or not, then these grounds will not be ultimate, for another ground will be needed in order to justify the beliefs, and so on and so forth, *unless* at some point one can ground one's belief on something that need not itself to be grounded. And experiences are the sort of things that should play this role. They are the unmoved movers of the whole belief system. The point is not so much that they can be grounded or justified, though they do not need to. The point is rather that it doesn't make any sense to think of experiences as justified/unjustified.

The distinction between grounds with respect to which we can ask for a justification and grounds with respect to which it doesn't make sense to ask for a justification is then one of the fundamental distinction in our reflection about knowledge and our Reason. Let's introduce terms for it. Let us call *received grounds* the sort of grounds for belief with respect to which it is nonsensical to ask whether they are justified or not, and let us call *derivative grounds* all those grounds with respect to which it makes sense to ask the question of justification[38]. To this distinction we can add a parallel distinction about mental phenomena in general, regardless of whether they are used as grounds or not. We can call basic *received phenomena* all those phenomena with respect to which the question of justification doesn't arise. And we can call *derivative phenomena* all those states which support

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38 Notice here the distinction between: 1) something's being the sort of thing with respect to which it can/can't be raised the question of justification; 2) something's being the sort of thing which requires to be justified. Something can be of the latter sort only if it is such that the question of justification can be raised with respect to it. However, something with respect to which the question of justification can be raised need not necessarily be in need of justification according to *all* senses of justification. There is conceptual room for kinds of justification such that beliefs that support the question of justification are not in need of it. Wittgensteinian epistemologies of perceptual justification might appeal to this distinction in order to sustain their views.

the question of justification[39].

Typically the distinctions between received and derivative grounds/phenomena have been drawn in terms of the distinction between doxastic and non-doxastic grounds/phenomena. The paradigmatic doxastic phenomena are belief and judgment. The paradigmatic non-doxastic phenomenon is experience[40]. Maybe the two distinctions end up dividing the mental space in the same way, but they are *conceptually* different: the received/derivative distinction merely concerns the question whether a state can be evaluated with respect to its being justified or not, whereas the doxastic/non-doxastic distinction concerns the question whether a state amounts to a belief-state or not[41].

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39 How do we know of the distinction between received and derivative mental states? When we approach the nature of our most basic mental phenomena and realise that their nature shapes the way in which we inquiry and the sorts of epistemological problems and adventures that we face we reach a level where we can raise almost unthinkable questions. We have seen that there is a distinction between mental phenomena that support the question of justification and mental phenomena that don't. There is a sense in which this is a fact about *our* mental capacity. We are shaped in such a way that we can't ask whether an experience is justified (though of course we can ask whether it is correct, whether it is originated by the fact it purports to represent, and many other questions). Maybe that is the way in which we are shaped because we are responsive, as it were, to the fact that experience is really such as to elude the question of justification. Yet, one might feel the pressure to wonder as follows: does it follow from our incapacity to ask the justificatory question that experiences are not the sort of things that need and are capable of having a justification? After all, things might differ from what we think of them. The space for this sort of question is opened by the thought that things might be different from what our best judgments say of them. If we are capable of conceiving of this without inconsistency we are thinking of a situation in which things like experiences might be justified or not, even though we are not even capable of thinking of them as such. This would be a case where impossibility of conceiving is not a route to impossibility *tout court*. The trouble is that if we can't rule out this possibility, then we might fail to be capable of having certainties at all if certainties need to be founded on the unmoved movers that experiences are supposed to be.

   Interestingly, moreover, if we were to try to *rule out* this possibility, we would have to appeal to experiences themselves. But how can we satisfactorily appeal to them in such a way that we take them to be out of the business of justification if we want to appeal to them precisely in order to establish that they are out of the business of justification?! There is an appearance of vicious circularity here. The problem, in a nutshell, is this. As we have seen in the previous Chapter, certainty needs experiential foundations. Experiences can be foundations only if they elude the question of justification. But can we rule out the possibility that experiences can be justified/unjustified? Surely we have the impression that they do elude the question of justification. But are we justified in trusting this impression? After all, as the thought of objectivity has it, things might be different from what we think of them. So, how can we rule out the possibility that experience can in fact be justified/unjustified? If we can do so with certainty, we must appeal to experiences as things that elude the question of justification. Hence, there is some appearance of vicious circularity here. This is a form of circularity that occurs whenever we try to vindicate the structural features of cognition, for in trying to vindicate them we have to rely on them, since we can't vindicate them without engaging in cognition (See Chapter XII).

40 Armstrong (1968) famously held the view that perceptual experience is identical to belief. Besides the many problems this view has, it is unclear how it could capture the fact that experiences elude the question of justification. There are views according to which perceptual experience is some non-doxastic form of alethically committed propositional attitude. Notice that even if these views are right, their point should be compatible with the observation that perceptual experience elude the question of justification.

41 There might be reasons to think that the two are not equivalent. So, suppose that suspension of judgment is a sui generis mental state that is not reducible to belief and that doesn't amount to an alethically committed propositional attitude. Since it is clearly the sort of state with respect to which we can raise the question of justification, we would have non-doxastic states which support the question of justification. The same might apply to other potentially non-doxastic states which might seem to support the question of justification, like the state of doubt, and maybe intuitions. Anyway, I will argue that suspension of judgment is reducible to judgment. Also, I will argue that questioning (of which doubt is a particular instance) can be evaluated as justified/unjustified.

It is important to notice that even though received phenomena aren't susceptible of being justified/unjustified, at least some of them can nonetheless be evaluated as correct/incorrect. Consider experiences. All the experiences with a representational content, namely experiences that represent things as being thus-and-so[42], can be evaluated as correct if they correctly represent what they represent or incorrect if they don't. Similarly, beliefs and judgments can be evaluated as correct if true, incorrect if false. In this sense they can both be evaluated as correct/incorrect. However, some questions can be raised about derivative mental states but not about received mental states. It is fine to ask whether I have a ground to hold a particular belief, but it is not fine to ask whether I have a ground to have a perceptual experience.

In what follows I will help myself with a Kantian vocabulary in order to refer to the distinction between the realm of the mind where the question of justification applies and the realm of the mind where the question of justification does not apply. I will say that received mental states belong to the realm of *receptivity* – hence the choice of the term 'received' – whereas I will say that derivative mental states belong to the realm of *spontaneity*.

Here I don't want to put too much theory on this distinction. Yet, I think that it usefully indicates the sort of distinct phenomena we are trying to explore. The realm of receptivity is the realm of passivity, where the mind passively receives suggestions to believe and act. Its being a realm of passivity offers some prima facie indication why experiences are the sort of things with respect to which the question of justification doesn't apply: because experiences are not the sort of things that *we do*, or that *we commit ourselves to*. Rather, they are suggestions that we receive and with respect to which we are asked (if we become reflective and take distance from them) to take a stance. This taking a stance belongs to the realm of spontaneity. This is the realm of activity, where the mind takes a stance as to how things are[43]. This is prima facie why acts belonging to spontaneity,

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42 I take no stance on the debate which mental states have and which don't have representational content. Moreover, the way in which I speak of representational content has a mere phenomenological import – namely the import of signalling the difference between states that *make a claim*, as it were, and states which don't – and it is not meant to have any metaphysical import, though it might be taken as a premise for conclusion about the metaphysics of the mind. Importantly, I wish to remain silent on the following issues: (1) whether representational content is propositional content; (2) whether representational content is conceptual content; (3) whether the phenomenological feature of representing things as being thus-and-so is compatible only with representationalist theories of experience, or also with relationalist theories, whether direct or indirect. The literature on these topic is vast. See Crane (2009) about (1), and the literature referred to therein. Evans (1982), Peacocke (1992), McDowell (1994) are classics in the debate on (2). See Siegel (2016) for an overview of the issues surrounding (2). For relationalist theories of perception, see Travis (2004), Campbell (2002), Brewer (2011). For representationalist theories about perception see Tye (1995), Siegel (2010), Pautz (2010).

43 Interestingly, our mind is so structured that those acts that belong to spontaneity might slide, as it were, in the realm of passivity. Thus, I might form a judgment that *p*, then take a stance with respect to that judgment such that I see it as something that I might have formed on the wrong grounds, and by conceiving of my first-order judgment I loose it as a judgment *of mine*, and it is then thought of as some

like judgments, are the sorts of things with respect to which it makes sense to ask whether they are justified or not. This is not yet an explanation, it is just an indication of how to think about the distinction in order to see a possible venue for an explanation.

When I consciously and comprehendingly form a derivative mental state like a judgment I am thereby committed to the fact that my judgment is *correct*. If I judge that *p*, I am also committed to take the judgment that *p* as correct. Contrast with experience. If I have an experience that *p* I am not committed to take the experience as correct. The experience is something that, as it were, I passively receive. In the case of experience, it is experience that is committed, as it were, to its content being correct, it is not *me* who is so committed. Experience presents the world as being in a certain way, but I am not obliged to take the experience at face value. In the case of experiences and of received mental states more generally, it is *the world* which makes a claim, as it were, whereas in the case of belief and derivative mental phenomena more generally it is *me* who makes a claim. In the case of experiences, *that something is thus-and-so* is something that I receive as a suggestion, as it were, whereas in the case of judgment, *that something is thus-and-so* is a suggestion that I make, it is something that I am offering, instead of something I am receiving[44].

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sort of received mental state. Here is a concrete example. Suppose I enter into a room in which a seminar is held and judging from the configuration of the room and the location of the people in it I judge that a man is going to give the talk. An instant later, reflecting on the conversation I just had with a friend on gender bias, I might consider my judgment as something that I no longer hold but rather as something I have been saddled with. When I do think of it in this way, I loose it as a judgment of mine.

One interesting phenomenological question is whether I can experience a judgment both as mine and as something I am saddled with. I think that this is possible for in a fundamental sense it is impossible to choose the phenomena one is *in*, hence any experience can be seen as something I have been thrown in, rather as something *I* have really decided to have. The very experience of decision, even doxastic decision, is an experience I am saddled with, like I am saddled with my existence as a whole.

44 Here we touch an extremely complicated philosophical problem. On the one hand, we want to say that there is a distinction between received and derivative mental states, and we want somehow to draw this distinction by appealing to the concept of passivity in connection with experience and to the concept of activity in the case of thought. On the other hand, however, there is also an important sense in which both experiences and thoughts are alike in being states I am saddled with, for it is not *me* who produces the experience of *me being thinking a thought*, nor is it really *me* who is producing the experience of *me being wondering whether to think that p*. Surely, *there is the phenomenon* of me thinking something, and maybe also the phenomenon of me being somehow actively engaging with thought production. But it is not me – whoever this 'me' is here supposed to refer to – who is producing this very phenomenon. This is an extremely subtle and profound point.

Here is another way of making the same point. To say that there is a distinction between passive and active states is to make a phenomenological point about the way things appear as being. My judgment appears as being my production, whereas an experience appears as being something that I am saddled with. Yet, to accept this point about phenomenology is not yet to be committed about any thesis about free will. I might grant that I am not free in having those acts which appeared as being my own production. The world might be determined in having states that have the features of appearing as being my production. So, the point about activity and passivity is just meant to signal a fact about phenomenology, and it is not committed to deny any of these further claims: 1) that a more profound phenomenological reflection reveals that any phenomenon (included the phenomenon me-being-thinking-a-thought-spontaneously) is there irrespective of my will (for the phenomenon of my willing something is not a phenomenon I have willed!); 2) that a metaphysical reflection about free will reveals that there is no free event.

The committal feature of derivative mental states, in the case of judgment, concerns alethic correctness only. Consider your judgment that p. When you judge that p, you take the world to be in a certain way. You take it to be in a certain way because you take yourself to have grounds that speak in favour of the truth of p. If you were to think that there is no ground for believing that p is true, you would typically not form the judgment that p. This is the sense in which you are committed to take your judgment as correct. You take it as being the one to have in order to get things right about the world, and the one to have given whatever resources you might use in order to figure out how things really are. The sort of correctness in question here is *alethic* in nature. It is a correctness which is tied to the aim of getting things right, with the aim of getting the truth[45].

There are no similar commitments to correctness in judgment when correctness is not alethic or epistemic. Thus, it is not the case that by judging that p I am committed to the fact that my judgment is prudentially correct, or morally correct or aesthetically correct. In order to see this, we might look at what happens to one's judgment that p when one discovers that it is not correct. If I discover that it is not the alethically correct one to have – because, say, I discover that my grounds for p are not good, or, more simply, because I discover that p is false – then I will not be in a position to consciously and comprehendingly hold the judgment. The belief might survive as a disposition – for whatever causal reason – but it won't survive conscious reflection. If, however, I discover that my belief that p is not prudentially correct or morally correct – in that it is not the one to be had given certain prudential or moral aims – I don't discover anything that will persuade me to stop thinking that *p is true*. These discoveries might originate a causal process for getting rid of them, but they won't affect in any way my conscious and thoughtful adherence to the truth of p[46].

It is important to appreciate another difference between received and derivative mental phenomena, a difference which is related to the fact that derivative mental phenomena are committed in a way in which received mental phenomena are not. Derivative mental phenomena respect or are governed by what we might call the law of alethic commitments, whereas received mental phenomena are not. An alethically committed mental state is one which exhibits alethic commitments, that is, by the fact of having that mental phenomena, the subject is committed to take a stance (or to refrain from taking a stance) about the truth of further propositions, at least if the subject is

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45 See Chapter IX, in which I offer a minimalist view about the claim that truth is the constitutive aim of judgment.

46 In Chapter IX I will discuss and reject arguments to the effect that there are non-evidential considerations that might be used in forming judgments.

presented with the relevant proposition and understands how the truth of that proposition relates to other propositions she accepts as true. There are many mental phenomena that are so committed. Call these commitments – that is, commitments to take a stance or to refrain from taking a stance about the truth of further propositions – *alethic commitments*. Judgments are obviously the sort of thing that display alethic commitments – e.g., the judgment that p commits me to the fact that there are good grounds for judging p to be true. But intentions seem to display alethic commitments as well – e.g., the intention to do plan A commits me to take as true the proposition that the intended plan is doable.

Importantly, alethic commitments come in two broad varieties: *positive* alethic commitments, and *negative* alethic commitments. Positive alethic commitments are commitments to judge further propositions as true. Negative alethic commitments are commitments to refrain from judging further propositions as true. In what follows I will mostly talk about positive alethic commitments, omitting for simplicity's sake the qualification 'positive'.

Also, it is important to distinguish two kinds of alethic commitments (which of course come in positive and negative varieties). Some commitments are *psychologically-binding*, whereas others are not. Let us start with commitments which are merely *norm-generating* and are not psychologically-binding. A norm-generating (non-psychologically-binding) commitment to take p as true is to be captured by saying that when the commitment is triggered one has to respect some norm that says that one should take p as true in the relevant circumstances. The idea is that by performing some cognitive act one is putting oneself under some norm, and in this sense one is committing oneself to take some further proposition as true. By performing a given cognitive act one is putting oneself under the norm that says: judge (or do not judge) p to be true, were you to be invited to take a stance with respect to p's truth. The exact sense in which one is under that norm, as well as the detail of the norm can be open to dispute, but the main feature of this understanding of commitment is the fact that all there is to commitment is the generation of some norm which is going to have an authority for the subject because of the cognitive acts she has performed. If one doesn't respect the norm one is not fulfilling one's commitments, and in some sense one is not doing correct. But, crucially, this kind of commitment is not psychologically-binding because one can fail to fulfil one's commitment while keeping the mental state that engenders the commitment. Using the judgment that p as our toy example, and assuming that judging that p commits one to the possession of grounds for p, the present understanding of commitment has it that one can judge that p

even if one fails to fulfil one's commitment, namely even if one doesn't judge to have grounds for *p* when one is invited to take a stance with respect to that proposition. All there is to commitment is norm generation, namely the fact that one is doing wrong if one doesn't have grounds for *p*, given that she judges that *p*.

Psychologically-binding commitments are different. To be committed in this sense to take *p* as true means that if one wants to *keep* having the mental state that triggers that commitment one must also take *p* as true if the subject is invited to take a stance with respect to *p*. Using again judgment as our toy example, if judging that *p* commits (in a psychologically-binding sense) one to take it that there are good grounds for so judging, then, if one is explicitly considering the proposition that there are good grounds for so judging, one can *not* keep judging that *p* if she doesn't also judge that there are good grounds for so judging. So, commitments here don't merely engender norms, but they also narrow the field of what is psychologically possible for a mind who wants to keep her judgment.

As presented here both psychologically-binding commitments and non-psychologically-binding commitments are also norm-generating. The connection between commitments and norms is a quite intuitive one: if I am committing my self to do some thing (like accepting a given proposition as true if I entertain it), then if I don't do that thing I am doing wrong, in some sense. In the case of non-psychologically-binding commitments, it seems that there is nothing left to the notion of a commitment if we don't understand them as generating some norm under the legislation of which the subject is putting herself by performing some committal cognitive act. However, when we think of psychologically-binding commitments, there is room to ask the following question: does the fact that some combination of mental states is impossible – like judging that *p* and that there are no grounds for *p* – have anything to do with the existence of some norm – the norm that says that judging that *p* is correct (if and) only if one has grounds for so judging? It seems that it is an intelligible *further* question whether the presence of some psychologically-binding commitment also sustains the presence of some corresponding norm. That is, it seems to be a further question whether a given psychologically-binding commitment also is a norm-generating commitment (or is accompanied by such norm-generating commitment). To illustrate: suppose again that judging that *p* commits (in the psychologically-binding sense) one to take it as true that there are grounds for so judging. This means that if one wants to keep her judgment that *p* one should also judge that there are grounds for so judging when one is invited to take a stance with respect to that issue.

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But does it also mean that there is a corresponding norm to the effect that a judgment that *p* is correct only if there are good grounds for judging that *p*? The aim of subsequent chapters is to show that the answer is positive. In fact, the aim is to ground the validity of some norms on the psychologically-binding commitments of cognition. Since the presence of these commitments is argued to be *constitutive* of the corresponding cognitive acts, the aim is to ground on that basis the existence of *constitutive* norms for cognition. This transition from facts about impossible combinations of mental states and the validity of norms is of course controversial. It seems to be a paradigmatic instance naturalistic fallacy or a violation of Hume's law that prohibits to derive normative truths from merely descriptive ones. I will touch on this controversial transition from commitments to norms in Chapter VI, and again in Chapter XI, where I argue about how to bridge the gap between the presence of psychologically-binding commitments and the corresponding norms.

These are two sorts of commitments. The question then is the following: do both sorts of commitments exist? What are the sort of alethic commitments that cognitive mental states exhibit? To discover what are the alethic commitments we have is to investigate the normative profile of our cognitive life. I do think that judgment and questioning display both sort of commitments, but in the next three chapters I will focus exclusively on psychologically-binding commitments (norm-generating commitments will be discussed in Chapter V, and again in Chapter X, XI, and XII). In this Chapter I will explain the methodology I will use in order to investigate psychologically-binding commitments – from now on when I speak about 'commitments' or 'alethic commitments' I will always mean psychologically-binding commitments.

Notice that the category of mental states that elicit *commitments to take propositions as true* is a special category of the broader category of mental states that elicit commitments to do something, where the deed does not necessarily need to be a mental action like judgment, suspension of judgment, and possibly others. E.g., promise to do something engenders commitments to do further things, like arranging things in such a way that one can be in a position to fulfil one's own promise. The law of *alethic* commitment is thus a particular law which governs states that respect a broader kind of law we might call the law of commitment, under whose legislation we might place all those mental states that generate commitments[47].

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47 Importantly, as you might have already noticed, within the category of mental states that have alethic commitments, there is a distinction to be made between mental states that are alethically constrained and mental states that are not alethically constrained. Here is a first characterization of the notion of alethically constrained state: for a state to be alethically constrained is for it to be a state whose conditions

How can we find out the commitments of our cognition? Here is the main idea of the whole methodology. If there is a commitment which is elicited by a given mental state, then one will be in a position to keep one's own mental state only if, were the committed proposition to be presented to the subject, she will accept it as true. So, if the subject is asked to take a stance with respect to the truth-value of a proposition to which she is committed, then the subject must judge it true in order to keep one's own committal mental state. There are two ways in which a subject might fail to comply with her alethic commitments: one is by judging that these committed propositions are false; the other is by being open-minded about their truth-value. So, if one holds a mental state which commits the subject to the truth of q, if the subject was presented with q, she would have to judge it to be true. If, however, a subject doesn't judge that q (either by disbelieving it or by being open minded about it), then the subject will thereby abandon the initial mental state. Given the way in which commitments work, we have a natural way of finding them out: take a candidate committed proposition of given mental state. Put yourself in that mental state, and then ask whether it is possible to be in that mental state while you do not judge that the candidate committed proposition is true. If the proposition is really a commitment of the given mental state, then it would be impossible to both be in that mental state and to refrain from judging the committed proposition to be true. If, however, the proposition is not really a necessary commitment of that mental state, then it would be entirely possible to both be in that mental state and refrain from judging the committed proposition[48].

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of correctness depend on the aim of getting the truth. This is rough and will be made more precise in the next chapters, as we clarify the mechanism of commitments and doxastic deliberation. The phenomenon which the notion of alethic constraint is meant to capture is however simple to refer to. States like intentions do engender alethic commitments, yet their primary dimension of evaluation is not alethic, in that it doesn't make any sense to say that an intention is correct only if it is true, or correctly represents what it purports to represent, for intention is not a thing such that it makes a claim about how things are. Judgments is primarily evaluated according to whether it is true or not.

48 In order to make vivid the contrast (or absence thereof) between a mental state and a putative commitment of that mental state it is sometimes *useful* to try to put oneself in a situation in which one both holds the mental state and actually *disbelieves* the candidate commitment (namely judges that it is false). This is because it makes the contrast sharper between the actual commitment and one's relationship to the candidate committed proposition. But this instruction is too strong and doesn't work in all cases. Here is one. Does suspending judgment about p commits one to take p as false? To test it, if the instruction of the method was to try to put myself in a situation in which I hold the initial mental state and judge the alethically committed proposition to be false, then I would have to put myself in this situation: a situation in which I suspend judgment about p and also judge that it is false that p is false, and so a situation in which I also judge that p is true. If it is impossible, according to the method I would have to judge that the initial candidate alethic commitment was genuine. In fact, it is arguably impossible to suspend judgment about p and judge p to be true at the same time. Hence, I would have to conclude that to suspend judgment about p is to be committed to the falsity of p. But this is also obviously false,

This is very roughly how the method works and what is its main rationale. Here are a couple of illustrative applications. A trivial commitment of a judgment that p is the fact that p is true. To test that, I try to put myself in a state in which I both judge that p and am open-minded as to whether p is true (or even judge p to be false). Yet, this is impossible, and this is evidence for taking the truth of p to be an alethic commitment I have when I judge that p.

Another example: consider the claim that when we judge that p we are committed to take it that p is grounded on good grounds to take it to be true. To test whether this is so, the method asks us to put ourselves in a state in which we judge that p but remain open-minded as to whether p is grounded or not. If I try, I can't keep my initial judgment if I remain open-minded as to whether I have any ground for taking p to be true. This can be taken as evidence for concluding that taking p as grounded on evidence that speaks in its favour is a committing we have when we judge that p is true.

This methodology is an instance of what is called the method of eidetic variation in phenomenological literature[49]. The method hinges on the conviction that our experience (included our experience of being cognitive agents) exhibits a certain structure. Some things are possible, some are not. In order to find out what are the structural features of our experience, we should find out which combinations are possible and which are not. In order to find out which combinations are not possible, one can engage in the method of eidetic variation. The method roughly works as follows. One takes the target of one's phenomenological analysis – e.c., a judgment – and then one tries to modify the experience of judging by modifying the factors that are typically present in the experience of judging. Thus, I might try to judge while changing the kinds of grounds on the basis of which the judgment is made. Or I might try to judge while changing the contents of my judgment. The method aims at discovering the necessary structure of the experience of judgment by seeing which modifications are possible and which are not possible. Here are some examples:

1)   One might discover that by trying to modify the grounds on the basis of which a judgment is made, one cannot use considerations that don't speak in favour of the truth of the content to be judged. Thus, one might try to judge that p is true on the basis of the

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because to suspend judgment is precisely neither to judge that p nor to judged that it is not the case that p. This is why the instruction of the method should not be: try to put yourself in a situation in which you judge the candidate alethically committed proposition to be false! It should rather be: try to put yourself in a situation I which you do not judge the alethically committed proposition to be true – where entertaining a proposition without taking a stance about its truth-value is what it takes to be open-minded about its truth-value.

49 The method has been introduced and used systematically by Edmund Husserl in his phenomenological works. See next paragraph for more on this method.

consideration that so judging will be pleasurable. Also, one might try to form judgments on the basis of no ground. Yet, if one finds out that these are not possible scenarios, then one has evidence for thinking that it is a structural feature of judgment the fact that a judgment can be made only on the basis of some ground, and that only alethic grounds can count as grounds. (I will in fact defend these claims in Chapter IX).

2)   Or one might wonder whether in judging we always take the content of our judgment to be true. In order to discover whether this is indeed the case, one might try to modify one's own judging experience in such a way that in judging a proposition one is not judging that that proposition is true but rather one is committing himself to something different from the truth of the proposition judged. As it turns out (and as I will argue in Chapter IX) this is not possible: whenever we judge we present the content judged as true.

3)   Or one might wonder whether there can be judgments without contents. By trying to imaginatively vary the experience of judging, one might end up realising that it is impossible to judge without judging some content to be true. At the same time, one might also wonder whether it is essential to judgment that it has a particular content (like the content that 2+2=4) and one might verify the (trivial) claim that it is in fact possible to judge other propositions.

4)   One might also wonder whether there are structural relationships between mental states. Thus, one might wonder whether the act of judgment and the act of raising a question stand in some particular relationships. To illustrate, I might want to know whether it is possible to judge that p and at the same time to ask a genuine question as to whether p is true. As I will argue in Chapter V, if we try to modify the states of judgment and questioning in such a way that we end up being at the same time judging that p and questioning whether p is true, we realise that this is not possible.

These are just some illustrations of how to apply the method to cases which are going to concern us later. The point of engaging in this method is to find out facts about impossible combinations of mental states (like case 4), to consider these cases as instances in which performing some cognitive act constitutively triggers some psychologically-binding commitments, and finally to ground on the existence of these psychologically-binding commitments the claim that some norm is constitutive of the corresponding cognitive act.

One might reasonably wonder at this stage what is the connection between claims about impossible combinations of mental states, and claims about commitments. Why is it that the impossibility of judging that p and being open minded about p, say, will have to be

conceptualised as a case in which judging commits one to refrain from being open minded about *p*, say? This is indeed a very good question. The general question that we should ask at this juncture is why we are entitled to apply normative concepts to phenomenological experience. This is a tough question, and I will come back to it in Chapter VI. From now on, I will assume that it makes good sense to speak of psychologically-binding commitments in the cases I will describe in the next chapters, but then in Chapter VI I will try to say something more in order to vindicate this contention.

§2.3   *Objections to eidetic phenomenology*

One of the hypothesis that this philosophical work is meant to explore is whether there are essences of conscious mental states. Since the work is phenomenological, the hypothesis is more precisely that there are essences of mental states whose nature is exhausted by their way of appearing.

The hypothesis might be incredible in various ways in the present intellectual climate. Some would probably grant that there are 'things'[50] whose nature is exhausted by their phenomenology – qualia or sense data, for those who believe in them, might paradigmatically be taken to be things of this sort. Yet here we are focusing on ingredients of cognition with respect to which there is a natural tendency to regard them as having a nature which is partially constituted by facts that go beyond their way of appearing. Questions, judgments and doxastic deliberation more generally are phenomena that seem to be partly responsible for my behaviour and in order for them to be so responsible they should be suitably integrated in the process of the whole organisms that lead to bodily movements. When we think of such integration it is natural therefore to take conscious mental acts as having a life that goes on beneath the phenomenological surface. Discussion in philosophy of mind provides us with many models for thinking about the interplay, if any, between consciousness and the rest of the natural order.

It would an interesting work to explore how reflection in philosophy of mind provides resources for being sceptic about the possibility of there being phenomenological essences. Here I won't take this complicated route, for it will lead us too far afield from the central topic of our concern. Rather I will point to a couple of positive reasons why the attempt to engage in eidetic phenomenology is justified.

First, in order to investigate the relationship, if any, between consciousness and the

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50 Here the talk of 'things' is not meant to be committal to any specific ontology of *things*, it is a short hand name for a something whose nature we are investigating.

rest of the natural order, we first need to know what are the two relata[51]. Thus, to illustrate, even if one were to try to wholly or partially reduce the conscious phenomena themselves, one would need to know what it is that needs to be reduced. Unless I know what the experience of judging is, there is no hope I can satisfactorily achieve a reductionist program about judgment.

The second reason is that, simply, our conscious experience exhibits a structure that we can attempt to describe. Our experience is not a chaos. The very idea of a completely chaotic experience is unintelligible. It will amount to a lost of experience, not to a particular kind of experience, for in the latter case the experience would have a structure, namely the structure that is such as to make it possible the experience of chaos[52]. Since the mind is not chaotic but it rather exhibits a structure, it is possible to investigate this structure, and try to discover essences within it.

If we follow Descartes's invitation[53] to consider our life as a dream in which we can freely modify and compose reality according to our wishes, we suddenly realize that our freedom in this respect is not without boundaries. There are some things that we can't change: we can't perceive, for instance, an uncoloured surface, nor can we see the same surface coloured in all its parts of two different colours at the same time. These are structures of perceptual appearances, the sort of structures that Husserl called *material* or *synthetic apriori*, since their source is not formal – like those formal structures, which he calls *formal* or *analytic a priori*, which are captured by true analytic propositions – and at the same time they enjoy some sort of necessity, since there is some relevant modal reading which makes true the claim that we *can't* experience uncoloured surfaces, or synchronically and uniformly bi-coloured surfaces.

The case of colour and space concerns necessary structures of perceptual experience, but there there are also other interesting a priori structures – which aren't captured by analytic propositions – which concern, for instance, the nature of cognition. I

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51 This argument is often used by phenomenologists in order to motivate the engagement in phenomenological reflection in present philosophy of mind and cognitive science. See Varela (1995) and Petitot et al. (1999).

52 This reason for denying the possibility of chaos is somehow reminiscent of Kant's idea that the *I think* is a condition for the unity of representations. Even if we really try to pretend that we are capable of *thinking* or *quasi-representing* an experience devoid of structure, we understand that there is a *principled reason* why such a chaotic experience couldn't possibly exist. For it to be given, things in it had to be *represented as* chaotic, or *cognized as* chaotic, or *experienced as* chaotic. If the chaos has to be *experienced*, then the chaos is not absolute, for the *recognition that everything is chaotic would not be itself chaotic*. This thetic or representational component of experience will not itself be chaotic. And this thetic component is unavoidable: if we try to imagine an experience that would lack it, in order to picture that experience (that is, to try to place ourselves in that experience) we would have to have an experience which as such would represent things as being one way or another.

53 See Descartes's *first meditation*.

have given some illustrations in the previous paragraph, where I have introduced some of the claims I will make about the phenomenological essences of cognition. Thus, the simple fact that there is a distinction between a question and a judgment suggests that there is something like the essence of a question and the essence of a judgment. The phenomenological investigation will have to reveal whether there are essences that justify the very distinction between things like judgments and suppositions, say, or between the simple state of entertaining a proposition and the state of being wondering about its truth value, say. The investigation might reveal that there are more distinctions to be drawn than those that are made in folk psychology, or it might reveal that some distinctions that we commonsensically make are illusory. Since it is possible to provide a description of the mental phenomena that aim at distinguishing essential from contingent features of the relevant mental phenomena (e.g., that a judgment has a content is essential, whereas it is contingent that it has the particular content that it has, say, that it is raining, rather than snowing), this work can be executed in a way that is in principle independent from the further question about whether the phenomenological essence belongs, as it were, to a thing whose nature is exhausted by its phenomenology or rather belongs to a thing whose nature goes beyond its phenomenology.

Even if one has partially vindicated the self-contained focus on phenomenology, and has succeeded in persuading the sceptical reader of phenomenological works to take as legitimate an investigation about phenomenological essences that purports to be wholly descriptive (an investigation that avoids any appeal to facts that go beyond the phenomenology), one might still be sceptical about the possibility of there being any means to achieve knowledge about these essences. This scepticism touches the question how we know such phenomenological essences. This is how the problem can be formulated. On the one hand, we might want to rely on induction (e.g., so far, all the judgments I have seen also had a content), and on this basis make claims about necessity (e.g., there is no judgment without content), but this faces Hume's scepticism[54][55]. On the

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54 This is why Husserl rely on eidetic *intuition* instead of relying on induction. Husserl's problem is the same Kant was facing in the *Critique*: how can I obtain knowledge of universal and necessary truth on the basis of experience? Husserl (1954) argues that Kant's appeal to transcendental deduction is not sufficiently critical (in the Kantian sense of 'critical'), for its justificatory source is not given in experience itself, which is the sole legitimate source of evidence that we possess. This is why he had to find in experience the source for modal knowledge, and that is the role that eidetic intuition is meant to have. This is also the reason why he took the modal knowledge discovered through eidetic intuition to provide a new understanding of Kantian synthetic a priori. In Husserl's terminology, through eidetic intuition we discover *material a priori*, that is, necessary structure *of* experience (hence the qualification 'material', because they concern the very structure of experience, rather than our conceptual scheme or categories). See Husserl's third logical investigation, in Husserl (1900/1).

55 For critical discussion of this issue, see, for instance, Levin (1968), Zaner (1973), Mohanty (1989), and Cobb-Stevens (1992).

other hand, we might appeal to eidetic intuition as elicited through eidetic variation. Here the idea is that by trying to imaginatively modify a given conscious phenomenon whose nature is under investigation, we can at some point *see* that there are some possibilities that are foreclosed to this phenomenon. That is, at some point, by trying to conceive possible ways in which this phenomenon might be, we end up achieving in a direct, non-inferential manner modal knowledge about its essence. To illustrate with the classic example of colours and surfaces[56], by trying to imaginatively conceive various ways in which colours and surfaces might interact, at some point we *see* or *understand* that there can't be an experienced uncoloured surface. Yet, critics individuate at least two problems with the possibility of achieving this modal knowledge through eidetic intuition[57]: the first problem is that even if one grants the possibility of achieving knowledge about what is experientially conceivable/inconceivable (this is knowledge that goes beyond the inductive generalisation), there is no way of moving from this to what is possible/impossible (e.g., I grant that a judgment is conceivable only if contentful, but how can I be sure that this is not just a limit of my imagination, instead of an intuition into the essence of judgment itself?); the second (and, I submit, most pressing) problem is to explain what are the enabling conditions of this eidetic understanding, for the suspicion is that its possibility depends on the particular concepts we possess (it is only because we possess a given concept of judgment that we end up 'seeing' judgment as we see it). But then, if this is so, there is a tension with the idea that the knowledge eidetic variation delivers is knowledge of *phenomenological* essences, rather than of *conceptual* essences.

These are very important objections. I will briefly come back to the second objection – the one from *conceptual relativity* – in Chapter VI, when I argue against *conceptualism*. In general, in this work I won't be concerned with the epistemological problem of explaining why and how eidetic investigation can deliver modal knowledge of phenomenological essences. Yet I hope that actual engagement in the method will convince the reader of its fruitfulness and eventually of its cogency, despite the many questions that remain wide open and that need to be addressed in another occasion.

§2.4   *Epistemology needs phenomenology*

In concluding this chapter I would like to offer one more argument for the claim that we need to engage in phenomenology of cognition if we want to answer the questions that

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56 To be found in the third logical investigation, see Husserl (1900/1).
57 See Kasmier (2010) for a defence of the method.

animate our epistemological concerns. When we deal with epistemological issues, one of the central question that we ask is the following: what should I believe? We want to believe the truth, and we ask which norms we should follow in order to get what we want. The theory of justification and the theory of knowledge can be seen as aiming at responding to this question: by discovering what it means to have a justification for believing and what it means to know, they offer us the content of the norm or norms that we should follow in order to get the truth. Now, here I want to present an argument whose conclusion is that we need phenomenology in order to settle the epistemological question *what should I believe?*. The argument has the following structure. First, it invites us to think what we could possibly achieve through conceptual analysis or natural science. Then it argues that what we can achieve doesn't provide a definitive answer to the question *what should I believe?*. Finally, it suggests that only phenomenology can provide us such guidance.

Suppose we engage in conceptual analysis by appealing to our intuitions about concept application. The intuitions might be gathered from the armchair or by relying on experimental philosophy. The minimal point that both methodologies should share for our purposes is that they produce prima facie evidence for drawing conclusions about the conditions of applications of our epistemic concepts. Here I will focus for simplicity's sake on the concept of justification, but the same considerations can be applied *mutatis mutandis* to other related concepts – like the concepts of knowledge, evidence, rationality – which might be thought of as relevant in order to frame the answer the the question *what should I believe?*[58]

The investigation of our conceptual repertoire might lead to three results:

(1)   there is only one concept of justification;

(2)   there is more than one concept of justification;

(3)   our conceptual repertoire is such that there is (are) no concept(s) of justification with clear   conditions of application.

Let's start with (3). If our conceptual repertoire doesn't give us *by itself* any concept of justification which can then be used in order to orient our thinking about what we should believe, then we obviously need more than investigation about our conceptual repertoire in

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58 Our question is *what should I believe?* and so conceptual investigation is pertinent in so far as it concerns concepts which will be needed in order to answer this question. Thus, the assumption here is that the concept of justification is pertinent in as much as it is the case that, roughly, one should believe what one is justified in believing, and one is justified in believing what one should believe. If the concept of justification is totally unconnected to considerations that would answer the first-personal problem about what to believe, then conceptual investigation about that concept is not enough for answering the question, and we should look for investigation about the conditions of application of other concepts. I will assume for the sake of the argument that the concept of justification is tied to the question *what should I believe?* in the relevant manner. If it is not, then the same argument can be applied *mutatis mutandis* to whatever concept is deemed as pertinent in order to answer the question *what should I believe?*

order to answer our question.

Suppose that (2) is the case, that is, that we end up having two concepts of justification. If they are significantly different, then they would give us different instructions about what to believe (if they don't, then, for our purposes, this case falls within category (1)). But then, how can we choose which one of them we should follow? In order to answer this question, we can't, by hypothesis, appeal to a further independent concept of justification that would allow us to choose among the two others, for in that case we would have three and not two concepts of justification, contrary to the initial hypothesis. So we must decide which concept is to be followed by relying either on concept 1 or on concept 2. If we argue in favour of concept 1 by using concept 1, then we are begging the question against the proposal to employ concept 2. If we use concept 2 in order to justify employment of concept 2, then we beg the question against the proposal to employ concept 1. If we use one concept in order to motivate the use of the other, then our reasoning is self-defeating. Hence, again, we are left with no guidance. Conceptual resources *alone* are not enough to answer the question *what should I believe?* if they deliver two concepts of justification that compete for being the concept that we should use in order to answer our question.

This brings us to (1), the apparently most favourable option. Even if we put on a side the obvious worry that we do not seem to possess only *one* concept of justification[59], there is another serious problem. Suppose that we end up discovering that we do have a single concept of justification according to which we should believe only when conditions *J* obtain. It is still an open question whether we should believe when conditions *J* obtain, that is, whether we should use *J* in order to orient our thinking or not. The reason is that absent any further motivation we have no guarantee that our concept tracks the truth about the conditions in which we should believe. The mere fact that we have a given concept of justification doesn't entail that the conditions described by that concept are the conditions that we should follow in order to believe the truth. But then, suppose we want to settle the question whether we should judge according to concept J or not. How are we going to answer this question? Either by following J or not. If we do follow J, then we beg the question against potential suggestions to form belief in other circumstances. If, however, we do not follow J, then the proposal that we should judge according to J is self-stultifying.

One way to solve the problem is to show that it is constitutive of our reasoning to

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59 Works by experimental philosophers put a lot of pressure on the monist assumption that we do have a single concept of justification. Moreover, even if we do not appeal to experimental evidence, reflection on the actual employment of the method of cases seem to reveal that we do indeed have more than one concept of justification. See Zanetti (ms2) for an argument to that effect.

respect conditions specified by J (J provides a strongly constitutive norm) or to show that it is constitutive of our reasoning to be evaluated as correct and incorrect according to a norms specified by J. This appeal to constitutive norms is one way to to if one wants to solve the problem about guidance, but in that case the answer won't be provided by conceptual analysis, but through a discovery of the structure of cognition itself, and the way in which we discover what is the structure of cognition itself is by appealing to phenomenological evidence.

Let me present you the argument with a particular case that makes the problem very vivid. Suppose that a modest internalist account of justification captures our single concept of justification. This will permit us, for instance (and simplifying a bit for the sake of illustration) to believe that *p* when I have a perceptual experience that *p*. Crucially, I don't need to have a *prior* justification for taking my perceptual system to be reliable. I understand that I have a concept of justification such that in these circumstances it is true that I am justified in so believing. Yet, the question whether I should believe that *p* in these circumstances is entirely intelligible to me. One way of asking it is whether I should judge according to *that* concept of justification. One reason why it is intelligible to so asking is that I understand that I might judge according to different instructions – and this is intelligible even if the concept that captures these instructions is not, by hypothesis, the concept that conceptual analysis has (somewhat miraculously) baptised as the *true* concept of justification. Thus, I understand that it is possible for me to refrain from judging that *p* when I am presented with the relevant experience and take myself to be allowed to judge that *p* only when the evidence for *p* is conclusive. Given that this question is intelligible, I now have a problem: how do I choose between the internalist modest kind of justification, and the instruction to judge only upon conclusive evidence? Since I have this problem, conceptual analysis is not enough – if it were enough I would not have this problem, for the question what to judge would be settled by the discovery about the right concept of justification. And of course, there is no non-question begging way of arguing that I should judge according to the modest internalist kind of justification. If I use that kind of instructions for so concluding, then I am begging the question against the proposal to judge only on the basis of conclusive evidence. If, however, I so conclude on the basis of other instructions, then the conclusion is self-stultifying.

Thus, we need more than investigations about our concepts. What do we need? One option is to be a naturalist like Kornblith (2002) and (2007) and to say that what we need is not so much conceptual analysis but rather to isolate the natural kind of

justification (or, in his case, knowledge). Ideally, the natural kind would be provided by our best scientific theory (he relies on ethology). The problem with this approach is twofold. First, as many have pointed out[60], in order to know whether some natural kind is the natural kind *justification* or *knowledge* we should have some prior grasp of the conditions for something to be *justification* or *knowledge* and this prior grasp is precisely that which conceptual analysis is meant to provide[61]. Second, the problem is that even if we accept that our single concept tracks some natural kind, this discovery doesn't answer the question *what should I believe?* Again, as argued before, it is still intelligible to ask whether we should believe according to that concept of justification. The simple fact that this concept of justification tracks a natural kind doesn't block the intelligibility of the question whether we should judge according to the instructions provided by the concept, rather than by the instructions provided by some other concept. Thus, we need to appeal to something else.

Here is a natural way in which phenomenology can be seen as necessary to answer our normative question about what we should believe[62]. Judgments are the answers to our questions. We want to know the truth, and our desiring it gets fundamentally expressed in the form of the *questions* that we ask. When we ask a question we want a true answer. Judgment is the form of the satisfaction of our cognitive desires, desires that are expressed in the form of questions. Now, phenomenology tells us what are the conditions in which our desires are taken to be satisfied, that is the conditions in which a judgment is taken as correct, or justified. If we can find these conditions for satisfaction as exhibited in the very structure of cognition, then we can hope to answer our question by relying on a phenomenological investigation about the structure of cognition. If that were possible, we would not be in a position to intelligibly raise the challenge I have raised against the proposals to appeal to conceptual analysis and/or natural science. The challenge was: in the

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60 See, for instance, Goldman (2005).

61 One can still think that they are natural kinds, and be a Camberra Planner according to which scientific investigation helps us to locate our concepts in the world – and eventually, the discovery of natural kinds help us to restructure our concepts so as to rightly capture them. For Camberra planners's conception of conceptual analysis, see Jackson (1998), Smith (1994), and the essays collected in Braddon-Mitchell & Nolan (2009), particularly Nolan (2009). Even if one follows these lines, this approach still fails to answer the question *what should I believe?,* as argued in the main text.

62 There is another argument against the appeal to conceptual analysis as a means for answering the question *what should I believe?* The reason is that, simply, concepts are paradigmatically the sort of things that can be changed or lost, and moreover they could have been different from those we actually happen to possess. As a result, we can't take a discovery about the concepts we now happen to possess as sufficient for answering our question. For we understand that if we had had different epistemological concepts, we would have provided different answers, and so we would have believed differently. But in this case we can't give credit to the answer that our actual concepts suggest as the right one. Moreover, the view that sees our epistemological concepts as contingent and as the ground for answering our epistemological questions is self-defeating because it entails that belief in that very view is licensed by appealing to concepts that might have been different – if they had been different we would have believed a different epistemological theory.

case we have a single concept, either we use it to arrive at our theory about the right concept of justification, or we don't. If we do, the strategy is question begging. If we don't, the strategy is self-stultifying. This challenge doesn't apply to the present suggestion because if some norm is constitutive of cognition then it is inevitable for us to be under the legislation of that norm even when we attempt to ground it. And even when we try to make it intelligible to us the possibility to rely on other norms, since this activity is still a cognitive one, even this activity will be under the legislation of the relevant norm that is constitutive of cognition.

The argument just presented is largely inspired by Christine Korsgaard's critical discussion of moral realism. (See, among others of her works, Korsgaard (2003)). The thought is that normative truths are *answers to our (practical) problems*. Our problems, in the theoretical realm, are our *questions*. And our questions are so structured that the form of satisfaction of the desire that they express should be of a certain kind, that is, should respect particular norms. This is how epistemic norms are grounded in the shape of our theoretical problems. And we discover what these norms are by discovering what it takes to solve our theoretical problems – that is, our questions. And these discoveries are phenomenological in the sense that they are gained through an investigation of the structure and commitments of our inquiring conscious mind.

But how is it that an appeal to phenomenology will allow us to answer the question *what should I believe?* – understood as a question about the conditions in which it is justified to take a proposition as true? It should show that there are conditions in which we can answer satisfactorily the question *should I believe according to this standard rather than these other standards?. One* way of doing so – and this is the approach I am going to adopt and defend in the subsequent chapters – is by showing that *whenever* we raise a question we posit some norm as the one the satisfaction of which is necessary in order to have an answer, hence a justified judgment, to it. To anticipate, I will argue that a question as to whether p is true is possible as long as one doesn't have conclusive grounds for p (this is a truth discovered through the eidetic method). On this ground I will argue that having conclusive grounds is a constitutive aim or desire of cognition. Then, on this latter ground I will argue that having conclusive grounds is the norm of judgment, and in that sense the answer to our normative question is that we should believe what we have conclusive grounds for.

I will argue that as a matter of fact the normative profile of our questions and judgments is unitary in such a fashion that whenever we engage in cognition we do want conclusive grounds for the propositions to be judged, and in that sense the answer to our

question is quite unitary and straightforward: we should believe what we have conclusive grounds for believing. Yet, it is not the case that phenomenological reflection is necessary for answering our normative questions only if it delivers *this* particular result I am going to argue for. The only requirement for a phenomenological reflection to settle our question is to discover conditions in which it is no longer intelligible to raise it with respect to a given issue. As I will argue, it is no longer intelligible to raise a question as to whether I should believe a given *p* only when I have conclusive grounds for it. But one might argue that this is not always so. There might be contexts in which fallible grounds are enough to answer our questions in a satisfactory manners. Whether there is this contextual dependence is something that will have to be established through phenomenological inquiry.

Even though the way our conscious mind is actually structured will be what motivates the acceptance of the view that we should believe only what we have conclusive grounds for, there is an argument that can be given now to the effect that if there is no unitary norm for our mind, then the possibility of reflexively stable judgment is in danger. Here is how it goes. Suppose that our mind is so structured that sometimes conditions 1 are enough for justified believing, and sometimes conditions 2 are enough. Suppose further that the two conditions license different incompatible beliefs. Now, again, what norm should we follow? Well, this will depend on the norm that applies to the very latter question, a norm which in turns will tell us that in some occasions we will have to follow a given norm. But if the norms of our questions vary from time to time, contexts to contexts, then our answer at a time might be different from our answer at another time. And so our doxastic system won't be reflexively stable.

This is an argument – indeed a very compressed one, which will be further discussed later on – for thinking that stability and unity in the normative profile of our inquiring mind is needed in order to have a reflexively stable judgment. Phenomenology will settle, or so I will argue, that the mind is actually governed by a single fundamental norm – the norm of judging only what is absolutely certain.

Chapter III

Judgment

In this Chapter I begin a systematic investigation into the normative profile of our mental states. I will start by focusing on judgment, and will try to establish a very strong claim: namely that by judging that *p* one is committed to it being certain that *p*. In order to prove this claim I will try to prove the following uncotenability claim: namely that it is impossible to comprehendingly judge at the same time that *p* and that *p* might be false. Both claims are highly controversial and we will see how hard it is to defend them from objections.

I myself am unsure about whether the latter uncotenability claim is true, but I will try my best to persuade you (and myself) that it is. If it were true it would promise to offer the resources to ground epistemic normativity and in particular norms for seeking absolute certainty in the very nature of our mind.

At the end of the Chapter I will try to make room for the possibility of grounding the claim that judgment commits to certainty in the nature of the mind without appealing to facts about uncotenability. The strategy will be to say that even if it is possible to judge that *p* and that *p* might be false, there still is an experienced normative pressure to reject the possibility that *p* is false, or to reject the truth of *p*.

Grounding normativity in an experience of normative pressure will be naturally perceived as a suspicious move. What does an experience of pressure has to do with what I should judge? The pressure might simply be a psychological tinsel with no normative import.

If this last move doesn't work, I will then ask the reader to wait for Chapter V and Chapter XI for a stronger direct argument for the conclusion that judgment commits one to certainty and for the more general conclusion that inquiry is aimed at certainty. The argument, to anticipate, will be that the possibility of raising a doubt about the truth-value of a given proposition remains open until one possesses certainty for that proposition. This shows, I will argue, that it is a structural feature of cognition to posit certainty as the ultimate aim to be achieved in order to give peace to the mind.

§3.1   *Being certain*

When we do have absolute certainty, what sort of thing do we have? Surely, we are in some sort of mental state. There are two questions about it. One concerns the nature of that

mental state. What is it? What does it feel like to *be* (psychologically) certain? Is it like judging? Or is it some sui generis kind of mental state which is distinct yet similar to a judgment? The other question concerns the sort of epistemic credentials that this mental state should possess in order to amount to a justified absolute certainty. What are the conditions that must be satisfied in order to be justified in being in that mental state? (See Chapter I for a discussion of the latter question).

Typically, when we think of the interplay between epistemology and reflection on the nature and phenomenology of cognition, we endorse a picture according to which the conditions for being *justified* having a given mental state are not the very same conditions that must be satisfied in order to *be* in that state. Consider judgment. It is platitudinous that judgments might be unjustified (and false, of course). It is therefore entirely possible to have judgments – to be in a state of judgment – even if the conditions for justified judgment are not satisfied.

Should the mental state of certainty be thought of along the lines of this picture or not? It is fair to say that the standard approach to certainty consists in taking it as a state of mind similar if not equivalent to belief and judgment, and to signal its specificity by saying that it is a state of mind which enjoys a special epistemic pedigree. Thus, phenomenologically speaking, according to a reductivist model, there is no introspectible difference between having a judgment that falls short of certainty and having a judgment that amounts to absolute certainty (assuming that judgment is the bearer of certainty). The only difference is in their epistemic credentials. Even if one were to concede that knowing or believing that one's judgment is certain does make a phenomenological difference, the difference would not concern the mental state of judgment itself. It would rather be a difference in the way in which one relates to that judgment. The second-order judgment that one's first-order judgment is certain might be what accounts for the phenomenological difference between having a judgment that one takes to be certain and having a judgment that one doesn't take to be certain. Yet, the state of being psychologically certain itself would just be equivalent to the first order judgment. The crucial feature of this model then is the fact that certainty just is a judgment like any other judgment, the only difference being in the specific epistemic quality that it possesses.

Another way in which one can reduce psychological certainty in terms of judgments is by reducing it not to a single judgment but to a complex of judgments. One might think that it is part of the conditions for being psychologically certain that p that one has a first-order judgment that p and a second-order judgment that p is certain, or

something of the sort. This picture still understands psychological certainty as being just like any other judgment, except that it is accompanied by a further judgment that makes it different, from the perspective of the believer, simple judgments and judgments that the subject takes to be certain.

If one was not to think of certainty according to the two pictures just described, one could think of certainty as being some special mental state which differs from belief and judgment even though it shares with them the fact of being an alethically committed mental state, since being certain that p is a way of taking p to be true. This model will then allow for two pictures. According to one picture, the conditions for being in the psychological state of certainty still differ from the conditions for having a justified psychological state of certainty. In this respect, certainty will be like judgments for they both can be unjustified (and false). This seems to have some initial phenomenological plausibility, since it seems that we can be certain of many things that upon reflection reveal themselves to fail to be certain.

The other way of understanding certainty is to understand it as a special state such that the conditions for achieving it and the conditions for its justification are the same. Whenever one is in that special psychological state that takes p to be true, p is guaranteed to be true, and it is guaranteed to be true in such a manner that one can't fail to recognize, as it were, that it is guaranteed to be true. This picture comes closer to understanding certainty as a peculiar revelatory or epiphanic mental state. This picture has some initial phenomenological plausibility if we think of it against the background of mystical searches for the truth[63], where revelation of the truth is closely tied with the occurrence of experiences that seem to represent a discontinuity from the normal stream of our mental life. One respectable way[64] of resisting this picture while conceding its initial

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63 One need not to look to mystical intellectual contexts, however. Husserl himself, among others, defended the possibility of enjoying particular intuitive evidences with this certainty-conferring self-revelatory character. See, for instance, Husserl (1931/1960).

64 A brief note on the possibility of extraordinary experiences that give special access to the truth. In this Dissertation I don't discuss the place where I think the most insightful discussions of certainties are to be found, namely religious texts belonging to different traditions, mostly mystical traditions or anyway traditions where the quest for truth goes through a disciplined research. However, I want to briefly present a couple of obvious reasons to block any sort of naif scepticism concerning the possibility of sui generis experiences that give a certainty-conferring access to the truth. First of all, one can't be *certain* that these experiences don't exist. The fact that one never had (or never recognized) such experiences doesn't entail that these experiences don't exist. To think otherwise could be a way of taking one's own (possibly present) limitations to be the standards to use in order to measure our capacity of knowledge. Second, any sort of argument against the possibility of such experiences has a great chance to be ineffective *qua argument whose aim is to establish with certainty the existence of such experiences*. Either such experiences are among the evidences relied upon by the argument or they don't. If they do, the argument is obviously self-defeating. If they don't, the argument is likely to be question-begging. This seems to be true of naturalistic arguments against the possibility of such experiences, and these seem to be the more or less articulated arguments that one nowadays has in mind when one quickly dismisses the possibility of special access to the truth. If the argument relies on the fact that a mind like ours that belong to the natural order

phenomenological plausibility is to say that the special state is not the mental state of being certain itself, but rather the source of evidence for then judging with certainty what has been seen, where the judgment is then either understood as being equivalent to everyday judgment, or a sui generis kind of judgment whose conditions of obtainment, however, are not its conditions of justification. Yet, a defender of this way of looking at certainty might insist that there are particular experiences where certain knowledge is achieved in a way that isn't reducible to the formation of a judgment on the basis of experiential evidence[65].

Here I will put this picture of certainty on a side, and will concentrate on the other models, namely those that understand psychological certainty as reducible to belief (or set of beliefs) and those that understand psychological certainty as a sui generis kind of mental state where the conditions for being in that state and the conditions for the justification of that state can come apart. Whether certainty has to be thought of according to this special model or rather according to the two more traditional models is a question that should be settled on phenomenological grounds. Moreover, we need not assume from the outset that these models have to be in competition. There might exist both special kinds of mental states that deserve to be called certainties and that are captured by the third model, as well as kinds of mental states that deserve to be called certainties that are captured by one or both of the two more traditional models.

So, having put on a side for the moment the special model of certainty according to which certainty is a sui generis self-revelatory mental state that occurs only when the conditions for its justification occurs we are left with two approaches. One consists in thinking of the mental state of certainty as identical with judgment, the other consists in thinking of that mental state as being peculiar yet very similar to judgment, and anyway a

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can't transcend it or somehow have a special access to truths, then one might reasonably complain that the appeal to a naturalistic picture presupposes an answer to the very issue that is at stake. Thus, we can't quickly dismiss the possibility that there be special experiences which provide a special access to the truth. That would be a childish move for a seriously committed seeker of the truth.

65 I myself think that this way of thinking about certainty is true of many paradigmatic certainties like those expressed by the cogito and the sum. In order to solve the problem of certainty presented in the first Chapter one would have to deny the very model of knowledge which is presupposed by the construction of the necessary and sufficient conditions for absolute certainty: that is, the model according to which certainty amounts to a judgment (or anyways some alethically committal mental act) which is based on some ground. Once you have adopted this model, given the principle of reflexivity, there is no way in which one can have certain knowledge. But the model is arguably wrong. To briefly show why it fails, consider the case of the cogito – I am thinking (in the broad 'Cartesian' sense of thinking which roughly means 'having an experience). In order to know that I am thinking, it is not that I first become aware of a ground (my present experience) and then on this basis I judge that I am thinking. This might happen, but the way in which certainty is achieved is by having a particular experience which is the experience of understanding *that this* (the very experience I am having now, which also includes the present moment of understanding) is what it takes to be thinking. So construed, there is not a separation between the ground and that which has to be grounded: the two are one and the same. This is, of course, very rough, but I think that this is the road to take. Also, I think it would be very useful in this context to appeal to Husserl's theory of intuitive fulfilment. But this is work for another occasion. See Husserl (1900/1).

mental state that might occur even when its justificatory conditions aren't satisfied[66]. Our question boils down to this: is psychological certainty identical with judgment? In this Chapter I will argue that judging that *p* is in an important sense committed to *p*'s being certain. This provides evidence for thinking that psychological certainty just is judgment.

§3.2 *Alethically committed mental phenomena*

What is a judgment? It is part of the aim of this chapter to partially answer this question by providing an analysis of the normative profile of judgment. Before starting to employ the method of eidetic variation, we first need some preliminary observations that help us in isolating the sort of phenomenon we are going to investigate.

There are conscious and unconscious aspects of our mind. Here I am only concerned with conscious phenomena. There are dispositional and non-dispositional states. Here I am not concerned with dispositional mental states. By 'judgment' I will refer to the conscious act consisting in taking a proposition to be true. By 'belief' I will refer to a dispositional mental state or to a disposition to form judgments[67].

I am not going to make any hypothesis about the connection between judgment and belief, beside the hypothesis that all the conscious phenomena that consist in taking a proposition to be true in a committal way (more on this below) are judgments. Let me explain. Granted that there are both dispositional beliefs and judgments, one question is whether judgments are the only alethically committed mental states that are conscious. One might think that within the conscious life of the mind there appears *both* judgment *and* beliefs. That is, *the very same thing* which has an unconscious dispositional life (belief as understood as a dispositional state) also sometimes appears at the surface, as it were, along with its sister alethically committed mental act of judgment. Another view will be to argue that all conscious alethically committed mental states are judgments, whose nature differs from that of beliefs, which only have an unconscious life. In what follows I will simply assume that *all* conscious occurrences of phenomena consisting in taking a proposition to be true in a fully committal way are judgments, and thus belong to a single kind. The assumption can be argued for, though I won't do it here, by noticing that phenomenologically speaking there is no clear clue that would vindicate the thought that

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66 Another proposal is to think that belief comes in degrees, and that certainty is belief with credence 1. I will consider and dismiss this proposal at the end of the Chapter.

67 People who endorse a dispositionalist account of belief according to which if one believes that *p*, then one has the tendency to consciously affirm that *p* if one is asked whether *p* include Cohen (1992), Alston (1996), Schwitzgebel (2002), and Smithies (2012).

some conscious acts consisting in taking a proposition to be true in a fully committal way are judgments, whereas other are the conscious manifestations of dispositional beliefs. Surely, *some* judgments are the manifestation of one's dispositional beliefs, but I won't proceed under the assumption that there are no manifestations of dispositional beliefs that are committal in the way judgment is without being of the same nature of judgment. Here one might either think that these manifestations are the very dispositional beliefs that are brought to consciousness, or one might rather think that these judgments and the corresponding dispositional beliefs are just different types of phenomena, and I will proceed by assuming the latter[68][69].

Having distinguished belief from judgment, we should now distinguish judgments from mental states that somehow resemble judgment since they consist in the act of taking some proposition to be true[70]. The following are phenomena that *in some sense* can be described as acts that takes their content *as* true: judgment, assumption, acceptance, supposition, and possibly others.

Judgment should be distinguished from assumption, supposition and acceptance. Loosely put, the sort of difference which I am interested in here is that to judge that p is to *really* be committed to the truth of p, whereas to assume, suppose and accept that p is to take p as true without really be fully committed to its truth.

Take assumption and supposition first. Assumption can be done for the sake of an argument, that is, in order to see where the assumption leads one. When I assume that p I am not fully committing myself to its truth, but I am merely treating it as true in order to see where it leads. The proof is that I can at the same time assume that p is true for the sake of an argument while judging that it is not. Similar observations apply to supposition. I can suppose a proposition to be true in order to engage in a thought experiment. But I can at the same time believe and judge that that proposition is indeed false.

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68 According to Crane (2014) belief understood as a dispositional state can't have both a conscious and an unconscious life. I agree, assuming that there is such thing as dispositional beliefs. See Pitt (2016) for discussion of Crane's view. Pitt also agrees that judgments do not have an unconscious life, and argues that all there is to our unconscious life are dispositions to believe, and not dispositional beliefs proper. See Audi (1994) for the distinction between dispositional beliefs and dispositions to believe. Both views are compatible with mine. The notion of a disposition to believe is also sometimes referred to as a tacit belief. See for instance Lycan (1986).

69 I take it that there is a phenomenological ground for claiming that all conscious endorsement of the truth of a proposition belong to the same type. Phenomenologically speaking, there is no introspectible difference between the act of judging that p as a result of a deliberation on a new issue and judging that p when one is by so judging bringing about one's dispositional belief that p (or when one's judging that p comes as the result of one being disposed to so judge: see Audi (1994) for the distinction between dispositional belief and disposition to belief).

70 I assume that taking a given proposition to be false is reducible to taking it to be true that that proposition is false. Though I don't want to argue for it here, I think that phenomenological reflection reveals that rejection is not a different mental state from judgment.

Importantly, both assumption and supposition differ from the mere act of entertaining a proposition for I can entertain a proposition without taking a stance about its truth-value. Once assumption and supposition are contrasted with the mere acts of entertaining a proposition, it is clear that in some sense they consist in taking a proposition to be true, and yet they are not doing so in the way in which judgment does.

Notice moreover that while judgment can't be formed at will, supposition, assumption, and entertaining can. I can assume at will a proposition to see where it leads; I can suppose at will that a proposition is true, when I engage in a thought experiment, for instance; I can also just entertain a proposition at will in order to explore some of its properties. But I can't judge a proposition at will[71].

If there is any such thing as acceptance, then it should be appreciated that its commitment is weaker than (or just different from) the commitment of judgment. Van Fraassen (1980) has argued that often in science scientists accept theories without really believing and consciously judging that they are true, and Bratman (1999) has presented a case that has been used to show that sometimes one can believe and judge propositions to be true without however accepting them. For our purposes, we set on a side commitments like acceptance and focus on judgment[72].

Velleman (2000) takes acceptance as being that which judgment and the other cognitive attitudes like supposition and assumption have in common, namely the fact that they all somehow consists in attitudes that take or regard their contents as true. Velleman then contrasts judgment from other attitudes by saying that they differ in the aim with which a given proposition is accepted. Judgment is accepting a proposition for the sake of accepting it as true if and only if it is true, whereas imagining, for instance, is accepting a proposition as true for the sake of something else, like entertainment. I will discuss and reject Velleman's account in Chapter IX.

To sum up, a judgment that *p* is then the conscious act that consists in taking *p* as true in a way which is committal, whereas other attitudes like acceptance, supposition, and assumption do not commit the person who has them to their truth.

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71 There is widespread agreement in the literature that belief and judgment can't be formed at will. For defenders of the impossibility of believing at will, see Alston (1989), Adler (2002), Church (2002), Buckareff (2014), Swinburne (2005), Yamada (2012); Williams (1973) O'Shaughnessy (2000) and Scott-Kakures (1994). There are however some people who claim to have found counterexamples to the claim. See Steup (2000), (2008), (2012), Ryan (2003), Hieronymi (2008), Ginet (2001), Nickel (2010), Peels (2015), Johnston (1995). However, even if these counterexamples were genuine, they would not prove, as they defenders themselves admit, that it is *always* possible to believe/judge at will. They show that believing/judging at will is possible only in very specific circumstances. We are always in a position to suppose, assume and entertain something at will.

72 For discussions on acceptance see also Harman (1986), Cohen (1989), (1992), Lehrer (1990), Velleman (2000), and Frankish (2004).

There is another cluster of issues that we should briefly mention before proceeding. Is judgment an all-or-nothing affair, or is it an alethically committed gradated attitude like confidence, if there is any such thing? This question intersects a wider set of concerns which relate to debate about the relationship between degrees of belief and outright belief. I will explain how the discussion I am conducting here affects and is affected by discussion on credences and outright belief at the end of the Chapter, as I will present possible objections to the claims I propose in what follows. For the time being, I will assume that judgment doesn't come in degrees and will only consider it as an outright judgment.

Having circumscribed the phenomenon of judgment, I now proceed to offer an analysis of its normative profile. As explained in the previous chapter, the analysis is conducted by engaging in the method of eidetic variation. The aim is to discover uncotenability claims – claims about whether two mental states can be held at the same time – in order to have evidence about what one is committed to accept if one is judging that p is the case.

§3.3 *To judge that* p *is to be committed to* p*'s being true*

Easy claims first. One can't judge that p while at the same time judging that p is not true or while at the same time being consciously and comprehendingly open minded as to whether p is true or not[73].

§3.4 *To judge that* p *is to be committed to there being grounds for judging that* p

In order to test that, try to put yourself in a state such that you judge that p is true while at the same time you judge to have no ground for judging that p is true (or while at the same time you are consciously and comprehendingly open minded as to whether you have grounds for judging that p is true). This is impossible, I submit. Remember that the category of grounds is quite inclusive, since for something to count as a ground for p is just for it to be taken by the subject as speaking in favour of the truth of p. Suppose you really take yourself to have no ground for judging that p. Then to judge that p is true is not possible for you, because judging that p would be entirely arbitrary from your own

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73 In Chapter IX I will defend a *minimalist* view of the thought that truth is the constitutive aim of judgment. The discussion will further clarify the sense in which judgment is committed to the truth of the judged content.

perspective (why not judging that not-*p* instead?).

We might see the same point by reflecting on doxastic deliberation[74]. Could you possibly *come to judge* that *p* while you take yourself to haven't discovered any ground yet for so judging? No. You could eventually have the dispositional belief that *p*, but when you raise the question whether *p* is true self-consciously, so long as you don't take yourself to have grounds you won't be judging that *p*, even if the disposition is present and operative at earlier and later moments. Notice that this result is achieved even if we try to put ourselves in a mental situation in which we are open minded as to whether there are grounds for our judgment. This is impossible, again. One positively needs grounds for judging, otherwise the judgment won't survive reflection.

Here again some possible misunderstanding should be avoided. The claim is *not* that there is no coming to form a judgment that *p* unless one also judges (maybe before coming to formation of the judgment that *p*) that there are grounds for so judging. If that were the claim it would both be phenomenologically implausible and have the consequence that judging is impossible (we would be like Achille trying to reach the Tortoise). Moreover, we might even allow the existence of judgments formed on the basis of no ground, if there be any[75]. The point here is simply that a judgment won't survive reflection unless one is prepared to judge that there are grounds for so judging, were the question about grounds to be raised. This claim is compatible with the possibility of believers that don't possess the concept of ground for belief. Even though it seems difficult to make sense of a believer who is not capable of basing one's belief on grounds that she understands to speak in favour of the truth of the judged proposition, we might make room for the possibility that one lacks a proper concept of epistemic ground. In this case, there would be no committed proposition about grounds that she would be able to understand and, as a consequence, required to judge as true in order to keep her initial judgment – however, I guess that the believer might be capable of endorsing the commitment about ground if the content of the commitment is specified with less sophisticated concepts.

Are there possible counterexamples to this claim? There have been attempts to argue that doxastic deliberation is possible on the basis of non-evidential considerations, that is, on the basis of considerations that don't speak in favour of the truth of the proposition the belief in which they are meant to support. Even if we grant the possibility of such cases (though see Chapter IX for a rejection of the claim that these cases are

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74 By doxastic deliberation I mean the activity consisting in trying to make up one's mind about the truth-value of some proposition.

75 Though see again Chapter IX for the suggestion that there is no ungrounded judgment, that is, whenever we form a judgment, we form it on the basis of some alethic ground.

possible) these are still compatible with my claim. For, even if it is possible, let's assume, to judge that *p* on the basis of no alethic ground, but rather on the basis of some prudential ground, say, the point still remains that if one raises the question whether there are alethic grounds for *p* one would not be capable of judging (or keep judging) that *p* while she comprehendingly judges that there are no grounds for *p*[76].

§3.5   *Five models about the relationship between a mental state and its commitments*

When we are committed to the presence of grounds for judging, are we also committed to our grounds having a specific epistemic quality or not? Surely, we are committed to our grounds being *good enough*. But are we also committed to our grounds being *conclusive* for judging that *p*? If that were so, it would mean that judgment is committed to infallibility. That might seem incredible at a first sight, yet this is precisely what seems to be the case. In order to prepare oneself to see that judging commits to infallibility, we should first make a digression.

There broadly are five different ways of understanding the relation between judgment (and the other mental states that give rise to commitments) and its commitments.

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76 This is a long footnote in which I argue that *to judge that* p *is to be committed to its being (alethically) correct to judge that* p. One can't judge that *p* is true while at the same time she judges it to be (alethically) incorrect to believe that *p* is true (or while at the same time she is consciously and comprehendingly open minded about whether it is alethically correct to judge that *p* is true).

Of course, the claim is *not* that judgment that *p* occurs only when one also judges that it is correct to judge that *p* is true. This is phenomenologically implausible and anyway will make judgment impossible for it will demand that our mind be stuck with an infinity of judgments. The only thing that is claimed here is that if one judges that *p*, then, *if* one is asked to take a stance with respect to the claim that it is correct to judge that *p*, one can keep her initial judgment only if she judges it to be true that it is correct to judge that *p*. To reject it (i.e., judge that it is false) or to be open minded about it will destroy one's judgment that *p*.

Of course, it might be the case that some believer doesn't understand what the meaning of alethic correctness is. My view doesn't entail that this person can't have judgments. Simply, she won't be capable of entertaining one of the propositions she would be committed to were she to understand them.

The main claim is also compatible with the possibility we have of thinking of our judgments from a third-personal evaluative perspective. So, I can *evaluate* my judgment as correct or incorrect according to a variety of evaluative dimensions. To illustrate, I can think that in so far as the prudential dimension, say, is concerned, my judgment that *p* is not correct if it makes me sad where it is one of my goal to be happy. But from a first-personal deliberative point of view, if I master the concept of alethic correctness, I must be in a position to recognize my judgment that *p* as alethically correct, where the issue to be raised, even if I might at the same time judge that to judge that *p* is undesirable or incorrect given other non-alethic aims.

The only dimension of correctness which is efficacious from a *deliberative* point of view is the one of alethic correctness. As I will argue in Chapter IX, we can ground our judgment on alethic grounds only, namely on grounds that speak in favour of the truth of the proposition to be judged. Thus, evaluating our judgments in terms of their correctness or incorrectness with respect to non-alethic dimensions like prudential and moral ones has no impact whatsoever in our deliberation. I can't form a judgment on the basis of non-alethic reasons, and the only grounds for judging are alethic ones. Nor can I abandon a judgment that *p* upon recognizing that it is not prudentially correct say, so long as I take it to be alethically grounded. Nor can I maintain a judgment if I take it to be without sufficient alethic grounds, even if I judge at the same time that it is correct as far as my prudential goals are concerned.

First model. A given mental state sometimes give rise to commitments, sometimes it doesn't. There is no core set of commitments which are constitutive for a given mental state, though the mental state sometimes might give rise to them. This model is out of the game, I think, for all the mental states I am going to discuss in this dissertation and that are going to be crucial for understanding certainty. They are states that are constitutively normative (their giving rise to commitments is necessary for them to be the sort of states that they are) in a sense that will have to be made more precise[77]. For now, all the mental phenomena whose normative profile I am going to explore (namely judgment, suspension of judgment, doubt) are such as to give rise to a core set of commitments.

Second model. A given mental state always gives rise to commitments, but there is no core set of commitments that are always triggered by that mental state. This model is, like the previous one, out of the game as far as the mental states under considerations are concerned. Take judgment as an example (but we will see other examples in the next chapters). It is implausible to think that the commitments we have seen so far are only contingently triggered by judgment. I haven't argued that it is inconceivable for us to think of a judgment that doesn't give rise to the commitments I have listed so far. However, it seems fair to say that for creatures like us it is not possible to be judging that *p* without being committed to *p*'s being true, and to there being grounds that speak in favour of the truth of *p*. So, this second model is not plausible.

Third model. A given mental state always gives rise to commitments, there is a core set of commitments that are always triggered by that mental state, yet there are some commitments which might or might not be triggered by that mental state depending on the circumstances. This model gets some initial plausibility when we wonder whether judgment has a commitment not only about the possession of grounds but about the possession of grounds which have a quite *specific* epistemic quality.

This is an illustration of how this model applies to the case at hand. It seems that in different circumstances we content ourselves with different grounds for forming opinions. This might be captured by saying that the formation of opinions is tied to different commitments depending on the context in which they are formed. So, we might think that the very same judgment that *p* is tied to the commitment that there are good enough yet possibly fallible grounds for *p* in some circumstances (say, ordinary life), but the very same judgment that *p* is tied to the commitment that there are *conclusive* grounds for *p* in other circumstances (say, circumstances of deep reflection). All judgments, being states that constitutively give raise to commitments, vanish when they find their commitments

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77 See Chapter VI.

negated. But there are circumstances in which they trigger commitments that are quite modest, so that they are quite easy to fulfil. For instance, a judgment which, given some circumstances, is simply committed to the presence of good yet possibly fallible grounds is not lost once one judges that there are no conclusive grounds for that judgment. For, so long as there are grounds, even if inconclusive, the commitments triggered by one's judgment will be satisfied. There are other circumstances however in which the very same judgment might give rise to very demanding commitments that are very hard if not impossible to satisfy, like the commitment that one has conclusive grounds for her judgment.

Fourth model. There are various species of the same kind of mental state, judgment. This model offers another way in which we can try to make sense of the sort of variability that the previous model is also trying to capture. We have judgment of type F (that stands for fallible) and of type I (that stands for infallible), say. They both qualify as kinds or species of judgments, for they both give rise to a core set of commitments. However, they differ because F-judgments have commitments that I-judgments don't have, and vice versa. So, the idea here is that there is no such a thing as Judgment with a capital J, but rather many different judgment-states, that is, states which are somehow the same – because they all consist in taking a proposition to be true and they all give rise to a core set of commitments – and yet they differ because they have attached to them different specific commitments. To illustrate, when I ordinarily believe things about the price of fruits at the supermarket, say, I have judgments of kind F, that is, specific sorts of beliefs which are governed by the fallibilist norm that they are correct only if I have fallible evidence for them. When I do philosophy, or engage in deep existential speculations, the sorts of judgments which I eventually end up having are judgments of kind I, that is, specific sorts of judgments which are governed by the infallibilist norm according to which they are correct only if I have infallible justification for them. What is crucial for this model is the fact that F-judgments and I-judgments are at the same time judgment-states and yet their nature is such that they belong to different species of judgment. Here the relation between the category of judgment and the category of F-judgments and I-judgments is the relation of genus and species.

This model is the one adopted by those who think that there exist both degrees of beliefs and outright beliefs. This model might also be adopted by someone who thinks that being psychologically certain is one thing, and that judging is another. If we take into consideration the fact that we think of ourselves as having convictions that might differ in

their degrees of strength (I am sure that I exist, I am less sure that I will see a movie tonight, though I believe I will), then this model immediately gets some plausibility.

Fifth model. For any kind of mental state, there is a fixed core of commitments, and the same mental states don't have species. Here we have the simplest model, where judgment is a mental state with its own definite set of commitments. So, according to this model, it can't be the case that judgment sometimes commits to the possession of conclusive grounds and sometimes doesn't, nor can it be the case that there is a kind of judgment that does, and another kind of judgment that doesn't.

If there is any source of evidence which could possibly convince us of the truth or falsity of any model about the nature of the commitments of judgments it must be some phenomenological source of evidence. It is by living the act of judgment and by paying attention to how we relate to potential commitments that we can hope to understand which one of these models is the right one. Let's see.

§3.6   *To judge that* p *is to be committed to there being conclusive grounds for judging that* p

I think that phenomenological reflection rules out the fourth model. If we look at the phenomenology of judgment, I think it is impossible to detect any difference between several sorts of judgment-like mental states (though see the discussion on degrees of belief below). Maybe one might try to vindicate the fourth model by looking at third-personal evidence for this conclusion. One can, for instance, show that the same phenomenologically individuated thing – judgment – occurs along with the activation of different brain patterns. But this is not the relevant sort of claim I am interested in here. Even if that were the case, the nature of judgment is exhausted by its phenomenological nature. Anyway, I will put on a side the fourth model for the moment, and call it back into discussion in a later moment.

I think that many will be tempted by the third model. There is something initially attractive about it which depends on the consideration that in different contexts we set for ourselves different epistemic standards. If the epistemic standards vary, then maybe the commitments about the sort of evidence one needs in order to be correctly judging will vary as well. After all, one might think, if I am committed to have conclusive grounds for my opinions will depend on what I want, on how easy it is for me to be satisfied in my investigations, or on what the context demands of me.

If we engage in the method of intelligibility, however, we will see that there is no

possible variation concerning the sort of evidence one is committed to possess for one's judgment: one's judgment triggers a commitment to there being *conclusive* evidence for it. Following the method of eidetic variation we should ask this question: can I judge p to be true while at the same time I judge that I don't have conclusive evidence for p? At first sight, the answer might seem to be 'yes'. After all, it is a platitudinous fact about our epistemic predicament that we don't know pretty much anything on conclusive grounds. Yet, we surely form plenty of judgments all the time. And it doesn't look as though when I consciously consider the fact that I haven't much conclusive grounds in my life I also stop judging all the things that I normally judge. I simply recognize, if I am lucid enough, that they are fallibly grounded. What is wrong with that? Can't I do that?

But let us see what happens if we dig in the meaning of the thought that one's grounds for judging are not conclusive. When you judge that your grounds are not conclusive, you are judging that they are fallible. If you master the concept of fallible grounds, you are also in a position to judge that p (epistemically) might be false, for this is part of what it means that one's evidence is not conclusive, namely that one's evidence leaves it open the possibility that p is false. But here comes the problem. Is it really possible to judge *at the very same time* that p is true and that p might be false?[78] I must confess that I have contrasting impressions here. But I am strongly inclined to think that it is not really possible. I will try to argue for that claim now.

The plausibility of my claim of uncotenability depends on the notion of epistemic possibility that is involved in the content of the judgment that p might be false. The following are possible accounts of epistemic possibility. An evidence-based account has it that whether p is epistemically possible depends on whether it is compatible on one's evidence, whereas according to a knowledge-based account, whether p is epistemically possible depends on what one knows (where one's evidence is not identical with what one knows). For my purposes, I should think of p as being epistemically possible if compatible with what one takes to be her grounds for judging. Thus the idea is roughly that p is

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78 As I remarked when I introduced the method of eidetic variation, in order to test whether a given proposition is a commitment of an alethically committed attitude we should both look whether the truth can be consistently judged to be a falsity while one is holding the alethically committed attitude, *and* whether one can be open minded about the putative committed truth while holding the alethically committed attitude. So, is it possible to judge that p while one remains open-minded as to whether it is true that p might be false? In order to be open minded one should consciously and comprehendingly entertain the relevant proposition – that p might be false – and refraining from taking any alethically committed attitude with respect to it – that is, one should refrain from judging that it is true/false Is it possible? Well, it doesn't seem so. For you can't be open minded about whether it is true that p might be false unless you take it that p might in fact be false. Were you to judge that p might not be false, you would not be able to be open minded as to whether p might or might not be false. But if you judge that p might in fact be false, we are back to the uncotenability between judging that p and judging that p might be false.

epistemically possible for some subject if the grounds the subject recognizes as her grounds are not conclusive. This is the best notion that need to be investigated for an epistemological project that focus on a Cartesian quest for certainty[79].

One might however construct an objection[80] to the claim that judging that p and judging that p might be false are uncotenable by criticising my understanding of epistemic possibility. Suppose that one has independent reasons to think that the right account of knowledge is fallibilist (one can have knowledge even if one doesn't have conclusive evidence for the known proposition). Now, if one further endorses a knoweldge-based account of epistemic possibility, then it would seem entirely possible to judge that p even if one recognizes that one's ground are not infallible.

However, this objection misses the target. Even if one assumes that there is some independent plausibility in both a fallibilist account of knowledge and a knowledge-based account of epistemic possibility, there still seems to be a recognizable sense in which one can judge that p might not be true in case one's grounds are merely fallible. This *sense* will remain intact even if one grants to the objection that there is a notion of knowledge that makes knowledge fallible and a notion of epistemic possibility that makes it relative to the knowledge possessed by the subject. So, all I am claiming is that if one is judging that p and that one's grounds for p are fallible, then one can't also judge that p might be false, even though she is committed to judge that p might be false *in the sense* that the falsity of p is compatible with the evidence the subject takes herself to possess.

To be clear: I do not want to object to a knowledge-based account of epistemic possibility, nor to a fallibilist account of knowledge. All I am claiming is that these accounts do not capture *all* recognizable senses of epistemic possibility and knowledge. We should distinguish between several recognizable accounts of knowledge and epistemic possibility, and see which one of these senses give rise to co-impossibility between judgments. Since the co-impossibilities arise, under the hypothesis investigated here, because of the nature of the *act* of judgment and because of its *content*, we should explore the claim that judging that p is uncotenable with judging that p might be false by using different conceptions of epistemic possibility – hence different contents. The relevant notion of epistemic possibility that I am using here is that which is captured by the evidence-based account of epistemic possibility. But it is interesting to see whether similar uncontenabilities arise even if we endorse other models of epistemic possibility, and it is also interesting to see whether

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79 For discussion of epistemic possibility see, for example, DeRose (1991), Stanley (2005), Huemer (2007), Yalcin (2007), and Dougherty and Rysiew (2009), as well as the essays in Egan and Weatherson (2011).
80 Thank to Giorgio Volpe for pressing this objection.

kindred uncotenabilities arise when we consider judgments whose contents include different concepts of knowledge.

In order to further support the claim about uncotenability I am making here it is important to make the following clarifications. First, the idea is not that one can judge that *p* is true only if one also judges that it is false that *p* might be false. Rather, the claim is that *if* one is presented with the thought that *p* might be false, then one can't judge it to be true and *also* keep one's judgment that *p* is true. Nor should one judge that one's grounds are conclusive in order to be in a position to judge that *p*. Simply, if one is presented with the thought that one's grounds are not conclusive, one can't both keep judging that *p* is the case and also judge that her grounds are not conclusive. Second, one might of course judge that *p* might be false (or that one's grounds are not conclusive) while having the dispositional belief that *p* is true or the disposition to judge that *p* is true. Third, one might fail to fully understand what it means for one's grounds to be fallible, and so, thanks to this failure of understanding, one might both keep the judgment that *p* and the judgment that *p* might be false.

I have the impression that phenomenological reflection reveals that judging that *p* and judging that *p* might be false are not cotenable. However, there are plenty of resistances to accept this claim. In what follows I will try to dissipate some of them.

§3.7   *On the idea that commitments are implicit I*

There is a principled objection to the employment of my method.

It is clear that when one engages in the method of eidetic variation one will be incapable to hold a judgement while she judges not to have conclusive evidence in favour of it. The reason why this happens is that the method is so construed that it forces the mind to raise its standards at a very high level. Moreover the general context of inquiry (philosophy) is such that it reinforces the raising of standards. So it is not surprising that having conclusive evidence becomes a relevant standard for judgment when we consider a judgment held in such epistemically demanding contexts. Thus, the method is simply unsuitable to find evidence about judgments held in ordinary contexts, and no conclusion about judgment *in general* could be drawn on the basis of the verdict of the method of eidetic variation.

This is a powerful objection[81], and it is very useful to understand what the challenges it

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81 And also a general objection to the phenomenological tradition.

poses are. The idea, at bottom, is this: so long as we are unreflective, possession of conclusive ground might not be a commitment of judgment; it is only as we move to reflect about our judgment that the commitment of having conclusive grounds is triggered. This objection relies on something like the third model of the connection between judgment and commitments, the model according to which there is a variation in standards that depends on variation of contexts. But the same objection might be framed exploiting the fourth model. One might say that when we are not reflective we are having F-judgments, and that it is only when we reflect that we have I-judgments. Either way, there is a methodological problem for the phenomenologist. By relying on the method of eidetic variation I can discover the commitments that are triggered only by demanding contexts of inquiry (or, to frame the point in terms of the fourth model, I can discover only commitments about the kind of I-judgments that we have in these contexts). But then I am not entitled to infer from what is true about demanding contexts to what is true about less demanding ones. It might simply be that in less demanding contexts we have mental states (whether judgments tout court or F-judgments) that trigger less demanding commitments, and it is principle impossible for me to know that through phenomenological investigation alone.

The objection, as I have framed it, only targets my contention that having conclusive grounds is a commitment of judgment. The focus is explained by the fact that this commitment is the most controversial one. But the objection is general. It might be extended to any claim I make about commitments. Any claim is made in the reflective context. I simply can't be sure of what is the truth about judgment in unreflective contexts.

There is something right and something wrong in this objection. What is true, is that one might fail to make explicit all the things to which one is committed to by the simple fact of having a certain judgment. So, ordinarily, I judge without having explicitly in my mind the commitment that my judgments be conclusively grounded. In *this* sense of the expression 'being committed to', it is not the case that we are always committed to the possession of conclusive evidence, for we are not always consciously entertaining and eventually endorsing this committed proposition. This point is true also when we move at a level in which one becomes more conscious and reflective about her own judgments. It is not the case that as I consciously and deliberatively wonder about a certain issue and eventually opt for an answer I am also consciously entertaining the *further* propositions to which my answer commits me. This is a quite general phenomenon about commitments. Think of all the logical consequences of a judgment that I can make. It is obviously not the

case that I entertain all of them or even any of them while I make my judgment. Yet I am committed in the relevant sense to either accepting those propositions which I am capable of grasping, or revising my judgment. For, where I to be presented to a logical consequence of p, and where I to be capable of understanding p in such a way that I realise that it is a logical consequence of p, then I will have to judge the consequence if I want to keep my initial commitment to the truth of p.

However, the fact that I don't entertain explicitly all the commitments of a given judgment doesn't entail that I am not committed to take (or refrain from taking) further propositions as true for the simple fact that I am judging in a certain way. The sort of commitments I am talking about are of course implicit in nature. Thus, by judging that p, I am committing myself to judge that p or q, and this is true even if of course I am not even entertaining q (which might have nothing to do with p) in the moment in which I form the judgment that p. The same applies to the other commitments I have unearthed in the previous paragraphs. To say that a commitment is triggered is to say nothing more in this context than that they will have to be endorsed, where their truth-value to be made salient to reflection, if the subject has to keep her judgment.

Notice, moreover, that one can even go so far as to endorse the falsity of one of her commitments – a philosopher persuaded that certainty couldn't be required for correct judgment might at times explicitly endorse the thought that it is false that judgment requires conclusive evidence.

So, the objection is wrong in supposing that commitments might not be implicit. If commitments are implicit in the way suggested, then it is possible that even judgments that are formed unreflectively display the sort of commitments that become salient to reflection when one is invited to take them into consideration in the context of a phenomenological investigation about the commitments of one's judgments.

Yet, even if the possibility that commitments are implicit would explain the uniformity between judgments held in reflective contexts and judgments held in unreflective ones, the objector might still insist that I can't *be sure* through phenomenological investigation alone that this is indeed the case. The objector might insist in saying that I am not entitled to conclude anything about commitments for judgment *as such* given the kind of artificial context generated by philosophical reflection in which I am supposed to discover these commitments.

A first fairly concessive reply to this objection is to grant its point. It might be true that our mental life is such that there are aspects of it that, even though they are conscious,

elude systematic phenomenological elucidation for the very reason that phenomenological elucidation modifies them by removing them from their unreflective *modus vivendi*[82]. In the concessive spirit of this reply, I will also grant that most of our mental life could be such that our conscious judgments do not commit themselves in any relevant sense to the sort of demanding commitments that I have been describing. To grant that much, however, is compatible with the recognition that the locus where the most important part of cognition and inquiry takes place is the conscious and reflective one that I am trying to elucidate. We might have plenty of judgments whose formation doesn't trigger the relevant commitments I am describing, but the point remains that as soon as we consciously and actively raise a question and try to evaluate our grounds for judging, then the points I make about commitments would apply. It is there, when we are reflective, that we can protect ourselves from errors, and conclusively convince ourselves that we are judging the truth. Since the work on commitments I am doing here is intended to highlight the nature of the problem of certainty and the fact that it impossible for us not to care about certainty, I might rephrase all the points I am making as points about *reflective cognition* or *reflective inquiry*. The point would be that the necessity of having certainty is a necessity of our cognition when our cognition is reflective enough. This point would maybe strike one as uncontroversial and not so interesting. After all, everyone might accept that we can raise the standards for judging at the point of requiring certainty for our judgment. But here the point I would be making, if I were to take this concessive line of reply, would be stronger than that. The point is not simply that we can raise our standards to those of certainty in the sense that we will be judging that we are entitled to judge something only if it is certain. The point here is rather that *regardless* of what one thinks about the standards for judging, when one is reflective enough, one won't be able to keep judging that *p* if one judges that the grounds for so judging are not conclusive (or if one is open-minded as to whether they are conclusive).

Can one say more by way of reply to this methodological objection?

§3.8   *On the idea that commitments are implicit II*

One puzzling thing in the picture I am defending is the idea that some commitments be

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82 This is a general objection to phenomenlogical method that have surfaced the literauture on many occasions. A fairly clearl illustration of the force of the objection occurs if we think of a phenomenologist who is trying to investigate the nature of an emotion. It is noticed that by paying the required inquisitive eye to the phenomenon, one looses the phenomenon itself by modifying it. I don't think that this apparently natural line of thought is correct, though I won't argue for it here.

part of what it takes for a judgment to be correct even though the existence of this commitment is something that is not present in one's mind when one judges, or anyway is something that the subject need not be aware of while judging. We might try to dissolve the feeling of puzzlement by relying on an example that doesn't concern judgment. Consider perception. When I perceive my environment, I see things. I am now seeing a person in front of me. There is a sense in which the content of perception is richer than what I am capable of articulating in the instant in which I have the experience. So, by experiencing the person, I am also experiencing him as being a united entity. I don't perceive a head, a body, arms and legs, I do perceive a person, where the body, the arms and the legs are the parts of the whole. Now, was this fact present or not in my perception of the person in front of me? Yes and no. For the simple fact that my perception is the one that it is – namely the perception we are all very well acquainted with, the experience of seeing a person in front of one – there is a sense in which I was experiencing the head, the body and the arms as being part of a unity. But I was not experiencing *that* they were part of a unity. To bring to light this feature of my experience is precisely an activity which consists in pointing out features of one's experience, but *that* there are these features is *not* part of the experience whose features I am pointing out. There is a difference between an experience of a person, and an experience of the fact that the arm, the body, and the head belong to a single whole, which is a person. By doing phenomenology, the phenomenologist shifts from the simple experience of a person to the experience that the person is given as a whole having parts, and not as distinct elements casually interconnected, in order to *elucidate* what does it take for one to have an experience of a person.

Now, a similar phenomenon occurs with our doxastic life, except that the phenomenology associated with our cognitive life is much more elusive. When we form judgments there are facts about what it takes to have judgments which are in a sense *present* for the simple fact that one is having a judgment; yet, in another sense, they are not present or they are not *explicitly* present, for if they were then they would modify the experience of unreflective judgment. To illustrate: when I am judging that *p* I am committed to my having grounds for judging, but this commitment is not explicit. While I judge that *p* I am not *also* judging that there are good grounds for judging – if I were doing so, I would simply have a different experience from the one which I typically have when I judge that *p*. And yet, there is a sense in which this commitment is already present while I believe that *p*, and the presence of the commitment can be brought to light by using the method of eidetic

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variation.

The presence of commitments as well of our presuppositions in experience is made manifest when something occurs that shows that these commitments and presuppositions are not respected. Thus, in experience, suppose I see a person, but then while I talk with her at some point she removes her head from the body while continuing to speak nonchalantly with me. Here a very well entrenched presupposition that was a precondition for my experience of that thing as a person has been frustrated. By seeing that thing as a person I was seeing its whole body as an organic unity, but when I realize that it is not such a unity I loose the experience of that thing as the experience of a person and eventually start to conceptualise the thing as a robot.

The same occurs with judgment. Judgment that *p* has at least two families of commitments that are partly constitutive of it: one family which concerns the nature of the act of judgment itself, the other which concerns the specific content of that act. Consider content first. When I judge that there is a tiger here, I am also committing myself to judging that there is not a cleverly disguised mule there, even though I am not consciously judging it. As you can see, the sort of commitments that are implicit because of the specific nature of the content believed is potentially infinite here[83]. It is obvious then that they are not explicitly before one's eyes while one judges that there is a tiger. However, if some of them were to be judged to be false, then one's judgment will be lost. If the subject comes to judge that in fact what she has before her eyes just is a cleverly disguised mule, she will no longer judge that it is a tiger – provided of course that her conceptual resources allow her to appreciate the connection between her initial judgment and the discovery.

Now consider the act of judgment itself. Regardless of the specific content one is endorsing, if one finds out that one's putative grounds for judging are defective, or if one finds out that there are reasons to judge that the content believed is false, or if any other of the many commitments that judgement triggers is false, one would thereby loose one's judgment. The disposition to judge the proposition true might survive the realization that

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83 I might have a dispositional belief that *p* because I have in the past considered whether *p*, made up my mind about the issue, and stored in my memory this belief. The potentially infinite list of commitments triggered by the content of one's conscious belief are not all dispositionally believed in this sense. Most of the commitments are such that I am disposed to form judgments that they are true, not that I already dispositionally believe that they are truth. I might be disposed to form a judgment that a given commitment is true because, given the other beliefs I dispositionally have, if I were to be presented with *p*, I would find myself inclined to judge that *p*. This is the sense which goes toward capturing the phenomenon of commitments triggered by content. It is part of what I believe about the world, that if there is a tiger, there isn't something that merely looks like a tiger without being one. In a sense I am then disposed to judge that the tiger is not a cleverly disguised one, even though I have never explicitly considered and made up my mind about that proposition. See Audi (1994) for the distinction between dispositional belief and disposition to believe.

the judgment is not correct, but this is compatible with the points I am making here. I hope that these few remarks have gone toward the direction of making less puzzling and problematic the idea that belief triggers implicit commitments.

I hope also that these comments have helped in responding to the objection according to which unreflective ordinary beliefs do not display the commitments that reflectively scrutinized beliefs have. One reason why we have the impression that conclusiveness of grounds is not a commitment of judgment is this. We form judgment without actively looking for conclusive grounds. Then we retrospectively realise – if we start to philosophise, for instance – that the evidence we have for these judgments is not conclusive (or we realise that we don't know whether the evidence that we have is conclusive or not, which amounts to realise that we can't take the evidence that we have as conclusive), and yet since we see that we have formed judgments nonetheless, we think that judgment is possible even if one doesn't possess conclusive evidence. That it is possible to judge even if one doesn't possess conclusive evidence is obvious, since we do that all the time. But to suppose on that ground that when we judge we are not implicitly taking the evidence to be conclusive is fallacious.

The picture I am suggesting is this: in everyday contexts, it is not that we form judgments unreflectively while assuming that the evidence is non-conclusive, something which one might think retrospectively once one has realised that there isn't much conclusive evidence for the things we ordinarily judge to be true[84]. Quite the contrary: we

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84 Giorgio Volpe has pressed the following objection to me. My account apparently runs afoul of the fact that agents who are convinced that the evidence they have for most of the propositions they believe is actually non-conclusive continue to believe them.

There are two cases to be distinguished here.

First, there is a case in which a subject, like a philosopher or some person who have thought about the issue, becomes convinced that *in general* we don't have infallible grounds for our ordinary judgments. Yet, the objection goes, this person will keep having judgments all the same. But this is easily explained by the fact that the subject doesn't bring her general conviction to bear on her doxastic deliberation whenever she inquieres about a given issue. Even Hume, after having convinced himself that scepticism about external world and about induction is true, would continue forming judgments, because he doesn't also explicitly entertain the truth of scepticism while he forms them. Moreover, and this is another important point, if he was on occasion to think of the truth of scepticism while judging some empirical proposition, if he is really endorsing the truth of scepticism and appreciating the content of the view he would not be capable of judging the empirical proposition to be true. More below for a discussion of cases in which one fails to integrate her opinions.

Second, there is a case in which, regardless of what the subject thinks of the *general* possibility of having conclusive grounds, the subject might have *on occasion* the *particular* suspicion that with respect to a given judgment or class thereof no conclusive ground could be possessed. Thus, I might on occasion think that I am unsure whether there really is water in my bottle. The objection says that even in these cases I might be unsure about whether there is water, while judging that there really is water, and so while doing all the things that are typically associated with that particular judgment when it occurs (e.g., drinking the content of the bottle, or pouring it in the glass of a friend). But if these are the cases that one has in mind, then it is not clear to me that these are cases in which one keeps *judging* that *p* upon explicit recognition of the uncertainty about the truth of *p*. These might be cases of acceptance (in Bratman sense), or cases where one judges a content which is not *p* but something that qualifies as probable or likely the truth of *p*.

do form judgments unreflectively while at the same time taking for granted that the evidence we have is indeed conclusive. Think, for instance, of perceptual experience. When I see now the laptop which I am using to give written shape to my thoughts, I do implicitly take the experience as conclusive evidence for the presence of the laptop. It never crosses my mind the thought that I might be wrong in taking the laptop before my eyes as existing. I do not even cognize the perceptual experience of my laptop as my ground for judging that there is a laptop there. For sure, it never crosses my mind the thought that experience of a spatially extended world is compatible with my being in a Matrix scenario. It is only a very complicated and controversial piece of philosophical reflection which eventually gives to me the realisation that there might not be a laptop in my hands now.

The case of the formation of perceptual judgment is extremely interesting and naturally lends support to the contention that judgment that p isn't compatible with judging that p might be false. As noticed, we see and judge. There is seldom the experience of perceptual experience as a ground for judging. When experience becomes cognized as ground there is some special factor that pushes us out of the normal stream of perception and judgment. When the flow is interrupted there often is the thought that what we see might be deceptive in some way or another. Thus, I see a person in front of a shop and go there to ask her for information. There is a moment in which I come to think that that thing I thought was a person might not be one (but is, instead, a mannequin). The doubt might occur because of the frustration of some expectation (like when we ask the supposed person an information but she doesn't respond and stay frozen in the same position for too long). And when the doubt occurs we are no longer judging that that thing is a person.

As already noticed, one factor that makes us recalcitrant to accept the claim that when we judge we take our grounds to be conclusive is the fact that we philosophers or intellectual who have thought about the issue know, retrospectively, that the grounds we have for our judgments are not conclusive. Another source of resistance is the thought that in order to take one's grounds as conclusive one would have somehow to judge or appreciate that they really are. This is of course phenomenologically implausible. We almost never apply the concept of conclusive or infallible ground to our grounds. We never even apply the concept of ground. But there is a sense in which they might be said to be *taken* as conclusive nonetheless. Even without being conceptualised as conclusive or infallible, considerations are taken as grounds for believing while granting that they show the truth of what they ground. This is clear with perceptual cases, where experience is

understood as direct confrontation with reality. When I drink my cup of coffee I never put into question the fact that I have a cup of coffee in my hands. I just implicitly take it for granted that no strange sceptical situation is occurring. The same occurs in the case of testimony and memory, though in these cases sometimes we might have little doubts which can however be discarded by removing mundane possibilities.

§3.9 *Objection from the impossibility of irrationality*

One might object to my view on the ground that it doesn't make it possible to be *irrational*. But this is not true. All that my view entails is that some combinations of mental states can't obtain if one is *conscious* and *understands* the states she is in. Conscious irrational mental states are impossible *in that sense*. Yet one might very well have irrational dispositions and therefore clashes between one's dispositions and between one's disposition and one's conscious judgments. I might be disposed to judge that airplanes aren't safe even though I am also disposed to judge that they are safe, or that all the evidence points to their being safe; the fact of being disposed in both ways makes me irrational, and where I to judge, say, that the plane is not safe, then I would be irrational in the sense that my judgment conflicts with a disposition that I have to regard flying as safe. All I am denying is the possibility of judging at the same time that flying is safe and unsafe, for instance, or that flying isn't safe, though I am almost sure that it is, and so on.

§3.10 *Doubt as incompatible with judgment*

Reflecting on doubt provides another angle from which one can appreciate the impossibility of holding in the same mental breath the judgment that *p* and the judgment that *p* might be false. Here I will briefly introduce ideas that will be further explored in Chapter V so I'll ask the reader to wait for further details and argument.

The thought is simple. Doubt concerning the truth of *p* is incompatible with judging that *p*. A doubt as to whether *p* is true is often (though not always) prompted and sustained by the thought that *p* might be false. Moreover, it is not possible to genuinely doubt whether *p* is true and to doubt that *p* is true if one at the same time judges that *p* might not be false, but rather must be true. This, as I will argue, is evidence that doubting about *p is* committed to it being the case that *p* might be false. Given the fact that judging that *p,* one the one hand, and doubting whether *p* is true, on the other hand, are

uncotenable mental states, this provides further evidence for confirming the uncotenability of judging that *p* and judging that *p* might be false.

§3.11 *Failures to integrate one's own thoughts into a unified perspective*

Right now you are taking yourself to be in a world which exists and within which you exist. That this is how you take things to be need not be consciously recognized, at least not before I explicitly invite you to notice it. We obviously don't spend all our life paying attention to this fact. But as soon as I bring your attention to consider the issue you will realise that this is indeed your case. You are now thinking that you are in an extended world. Can we say that all of us *judge* that there is an external world even in the moments in which we don't take the fact into explicit consideration? Yes and no. The sense in which 'yes' is the right answer will not concern us here. There surely is a sense in which right now I am having a committed perspective on what is going on. This perspective includes plenty of things: that I exist in a spatially extended world, that I am not alone, that there is a laptop, that I have hands, and many many more things. Husserl's remarks on what he called the *natural attitude* – that is the attitude we all have when we live and do not consider the phenomena in a way that deprive them of our natural everyday commitments[85] – goes toward the direction of describing what it means to be committed about the way things are even when we are not consciously entertaining thoughts about the way things are. Here we are interested in conscious thought. There is a clear sense in which by inviting you to consider the thought that a spatially extended world exists I am inviting you to make explicit a commitment that you already implicitly have. By proposing to you a particular proposition on which to focus I might bring your attention to a little facet of your whole network of commitments concerning your place in an existing external world. And when you do consciously entertain the thought that there is an external world and that you are part of it, for instance, you are entering in a committal state that differs from the sort of implicit underlying commitment that structures your everyday experience.

Let's focus on this judgment that you now have. You do think that there is an external world. Can you really also think that the external world might not in fact exist? It is important to stress here that the 'might' is epistemic, not metaphysical. You are not invited to think that things might have been otherwise from what they actually are. You are rather invited to enter a state where the existence of the world and the inexistence of the world are both possible actual states given all your evidence says about the way things are. You

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85 See Husserl (2010).

might even take yourself to have more evidence that speaks in favour of the existence of the world, rather than in favour of its inexistence. Yet, if you really think that the world might not exist, you are not in a mental state whose occurrence is compatible with the occurrence of the conviction that the external world really exists. It is like picturing reality in two different ways: in one way it is already settled (when you take the world to exist), in another way there are holes in the whole picture (this tile of the picture might either be filled in by an external world, or not). You can't picture reality in both ways.

One reason why this is especially difficult to realise is that, I suggest, it is a cause of suffering. If you actually try to seriously entertain the thought – if you indeed judge it to be true, for if you don't you will have to find another example – that the external world might not exist (and so that *right now* things might not really be as they seem to be) but that it might be, say, a simple hallucination, then there is a moment in which the mind has a kind of short circuit. For a moment everything is dark, not because the colours of what you are experiencing changes. Rather, everything takes the dark atmosphere that we experience when we confront something which is perplexingly unfamiliar. The same painful experience can be brought about if we try to think of cases that might be taken as less hallucinatory than the apparently catastrophic possibility that our loved world be only an illusion. Think of a relationship you have with a person you love and that you take to know very well. Try to consciously entertain the thought that she might be a robot – if you really think that this is a possibility. This might give the same effect. This suffering deserves to be explained (it is a suffering associated to a loss of meaning: for a second the world is lost). Unfortunately, this is not the place where I can discuss this topic. However, the existence of these painful experiences explains very well a phenomenon about our mental life which is also partly responsible for the impression that surely most of us share that it is entirely possible to hold both the thoughts that *p* and that *p* might be false in the same mental breath.

Why is it that we still have the impression that judging that *p* and judging that *p* might be false are co-possible? I think that this possibility is in part explained by our incapacity to clearly and thoroughly think the consequences of what we are thinking when we think these thoughts. It is a subtle form of dissociation where one has untenable perspectives that are not integrated in such a way as to make evident their uncotenability. One way in which it can occur is this. Many people appear to think that consciousness is identical with some portion of physical reality. Many people also appear to think that science never gives us certainty, but only fallibly grounded results. In fact, the people who

think that everything there is is physical are also likely to think that all the knowledge we might have is fallible, since the two pictures go hand by hand in the present intellectual climate. One might reflect about the fallibility of knowledge and realise that given the evidence she possesses consciousness might not be identical with some portion of reality but rather be something else. But this piece of reflection can or cannot be brought to bear on the question whether to judge that consciousness is physical. I can, for instance, having reasoned my way to the conclusion that consciousness might not be physical, wonder as follows: 'is consciousness physical? What should I believe?' When I so reflect, my reflection is conducted within a deliberative context which includes the thought that consciousness might not be physical. And precisely because it is conducted within that deliberative context, when one genuinely raises for oneself these questions one is not judging that consciousness is physical. If one were so judging one would not be capable of genuinely asking: 'is consciousness physical?'. Either one will already have the answer, or one will immediately answers that it is, but in the scenario we are considering, where one is keeping in one's mind the realization that maybe consciousness is not physical, one is not able to immediately answer the question affirmatively. That is what it means to be asking a question – to remain in an open state where more options are still live options for endorsement. But very often one fails to integrate one's thoughts in a single deliberative context. So, the physicalist and fallibilist person we are considering, might fail to connect her thought that all her knowledge is fallible with the thought that consciousness is a piece of matter. Simply, she might fail to realise that not having certainty just means that she might be wrong about everything, which in turn means that she might be wrong about consciousness.

§3.12   *To judge that* p *is to be committed to one's having an access to there being conclusive grounds for judging that* p

We have seen that to be judging that *p* is to be committed to judge that one has infallible grounds for *p*. But then, by parity of reasoning, to judge that I have infallible grounds for *p* is to be committed to the fact that one has infallible grounds for judging that one has infallible grounds for *p*. This further commitment shows that judging that *p* is indeed committed to certainty. Suppose that you want to judge that your grounds for *p* are conclusive, and yet you do not want to also be committed to the fact that you have conclusive grounds for taking your grounds for *p* to be conclusive. If this is the sort of

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mental state you want to be in, then you are committed to judge that it might be false that your grounds for *p* are conclusive. But then, the uncertainty about grounds transmits to *p* itself. If your grounds might be fallible, then it might be the case that *p* is false. But it is impossible to judge that *p* and that *p* might be false. Hence, judging that *p* not only commits one to judge that there are infallible grounds for *p*; it also commits one to judge that there are conclusive grounds for judging that there are conclusive grounds for *p*. In other words, judging that *p* commits one to judge that *p* is *absolutely certain*.

As we saw in Chapter I where we offered an analysis of the conditions for being absolutely certain, two principles are fundamental:

Infallibility Principle: I can be absolutely certain that *p* on the basis of ground *g* (either doxastic or non-doxastic) only if *g* is a conclusive ground for *p*

Reflexivity Principle: I can be absolutely certain that *p* on the basis of ground *g* (either doxastic or non-doxastic) only if I have absolute certainty that *g* is a conclusive ground for *p*

But these conditions are not only the conditions for being *epistemically certain*, they are also the conditions the satisfaction of which one is committed to when one is judging. This is an highly significant result. We will have many occasions to come back to the many significant consequences of this fact.

Let me just briefly mention here a *methodological* consequence. If judging commits one to certainty, then it is in the nature of judgment itself to be the sort of state that can be meaningfully evaluated in terms of absolute certainty. The justification for evaluating judgments in terms of their being absolutely certain or not is grounded in the nature of judgment itself. This result is striking if we think about the way in which contemporary epistemology tries to discover the conditions for justification and knowledge. The appeal to intuitions make our epistemic appraisals dependent on our concepts and conceptions. It is not clear how we can ground, if we rely on intuitions, the application of our normative evaluations to the nature of judgments themselves, namely to the nature of what we typically evaluate using concepts of justification, rationality, and knowledge. Nor is it clear how one can ground choice of particular conceptions of justification by appealing to empirical claims, like some naturalists do[86]. If I am right, however, it is constitutive of judgment itself to be the sort of thing which is committed to certainty, and so it is

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86 See Kornblith (2002)

constitutive of judgment itself that it be evaluated by using the standards of certainty. It might also be evaluated with other concepts – like reliability. But these concepts will not be capturing the most fundamental notion of epistemic appraisals. This is an important result for those who have pluralistic proclivities in epistemology, for it provides a ground for ranking different kinds of epistemic justification and knowledge according to whether they capture or not the commitments of that which they are purported to evaluate.

Let us take stock. In this chapter we have seen some uncotenability claims that are connected to claims about what judging commits one to. There is a story to be told which explains why commitments and uncotenability claims should be linked, and also why some commitments and facts about uncotenability are central to the nature of a given mental state and for determining what is its normative profile. I will address these issues in Chapter VI. Let me now anticipate the link I will establish between commitments and normativity. It is natural to take the network of commitments we have discovered as defining what it takes for a judgment to be a *correct* judgment. There is a very natural sense in which a judgment is correct only if its commitments are fulfilled – that is, not if the subject actually judge the committed propositions to be true when he entertains them, but if the committed propositions are actually true. The correctness in question is essentially tied to the nature of judgment. The core commitments that we have individuated capture the sort of stance that a subject is taking with respect to the truth by having a particular judgment. In a sense, the satisfaction of one's commitments constitutes the satisfaction of the claim or pretension that a judgment is advancing.

Here is a table of the most relevant uncotenability claims[87], the corresponding claims about commitments, and principles about correctness for judgment.

Normative profile of judgment

Judgment	Correctness principles	Uncotenability claims	Commitment claims
Truth	Judging that p is (alethically) correct only if p is true	Judging that *p* can't occur while one is comprehendingly judging	Judging that *p* commits one to judge that *p* is true (and to refrain from

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87 Here, please keep in mind the following. There are plenty of principles that are conceptually equivalent to those I have just listed. So, one principle could have been the following: a belief that *p* is correct only if it is not epistemically possible that not-*p*. Why choosing one principle rather than another, even though they are equivalent? Nothing particularly profound hinges on the choice. The choice is governed by what right now are the sort of expressions that are more likely to point our attention to the relevant fact which we are thereby coming to know when we know that these principles of correctness are true. The phenomenon we are interested in is this dense and yet elusive life of our mind. We use the words we have in order to bring our attention in the relevant places. Moreover, the selection of the principles is also in part dictated by the overall aim of discussing epistemological issues connected to certainty.

		that p is false (or while one is being open minded as to whether p is true or false)	judging that p is false and from being open minded as to whether p is true or false)
Infallibility	Judging that p is (epistemically) correct only if one has infallible grounds for p	Judging that p can't occur while one is comprehendingly judging that one has not infallible grounds for p (or while one is being open-minded as to whether one has infallible grounds for p) → **Judging that p can't occur while one is judging that p might be false.**	Judging that p commits one to judge that one has infallible grounds for p (and to refrain from judging that one has not infallible grounds for p and from being open-minded as to whether one has infallible grounds for p)
Reflexivity	Judging that p is (epistemically) correct only if one has infallible grounds for judging that one has infallible grounds for p.	Judging that p can't occur while one is comprehendingly judging that one has not infallible grounds for judging that one has infallible grounds for p (or while one is being open-minded as to whether one has infallible grounds for judging that	Judging that p commits one to judge that one has infallible grounds for judging that one has infallible grounds for p (and to refrain from judging that one has not infallible grounds for judging that one has infallible grounds for p,

		one has infallible grounds for p)	and from being open-minded as to whether one has infallible grounds for judging that one has infallible grounds for p)

§3.13 *Judgment, degrees of belief and outright belief*

What is the relationship between judgment on the one hand, and degrees of belief and outright belief on the other hand?

Let me first sum up my view. Firstly, I hold the view that judgment is an all-or-nothing affair – there are no degrees of judgment. Secondly, I hold the view that judgment is a distinct mental state from belief understood as a dispositional mental state. There are discussions that are going on in formal epistemology and philosophy of mind which might seem to interact with my view about judgment. I will briefly present the debates that seem to interact with my view, and explain why they don't.

There seems to be a distinction in ordinary speech between belief-like mental states that are an an all-or-nothing affair and belief-like mental states that are gradable. Here is Wedgwood on the issue:

"Both ways of thinking of belief seem to be in evidence in everyday folk- psychological discourse. It is perfectly natural to say, for example, you are considerably *more confident* that Dublin is the capital of Ireland than that Dushanbe is the capital of Tajikistan. But it is also natural to say that you simply *believe* that Dublin is the capital of Ireland, without giving any further qualifications about how confidently or strongly you believe it". Wedgwood (2012), p. 309.

This piece of linguistic evidence offers some initial plausibility to the thought that there are both outright belief and degrees of belief[88]. If outright belief is a distinct category from

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88 See Wedgwood (2012), p. 310 for a discussion of various positions that have been taken on the relationship between belief and credences. Jeffrey (1970) and Maher (1993), p. 152–155 are eliminativist about outright beliefs. Moon (2017) holds that there are no degrees of belief. Reductionist views come in many forms. Clarke (2013), Sturgeon (2008) and Foley (2009) hold that outright beliefs are reducible to levels of confidence. Kaplan (1996) and Weatherson (2005) claim that outright beliefs are reducible to facts about the relevant agent's preferences or utilities together with facts about the agent's levels of confidence. Harman (1986) and Holton (forthcoming) claims that levels of confidence are reducible to facts about outright beliefs. Finally, Greco (2015), Buchak (2013), Leitgeb (2014), Ross and Schroeder (2014), Frankish (2004), (2009) maintain that neither of these two kinds of belief is reducible to the other.

levels of confidence (assuming that credences are psychologically real phenomena), then my claims might be taken to apply to outright belief only (and, possibly, to belief with a degree of confidence 1), and in this case there are no considerations stemming from this debate which contradicts my view. If, however, outright belief is reducible to gradable beliefs then we might have a challenge to my view[89]. According to such reductionism, outright belief will then simply be a belief which has a certain degree of confidence in the truth of the proposition. This view can then roughly take two forms. Either outright belief is reducible to belief with credence 1[90]. Or one holds some version of the much more influential *threshold view*, according to which to have an outright belief in *p* is to have a level of confidence in *p* that exceeds a certain threshold *r*, where the threshold is not 1[91]. If what is right about belief applies to the nature of judgment – and we then have to accept the view that judgment is a gradable mental state – then these reductionist views are in tension with mine. Let's see why.

Outright belief = degree of credence 1. If judgement comes in degrees, and outright judgment is equivalent to judgment with degree 1 of confidence, then what I have said so far about the commitments for judgment will apply to judgment with degree 1 only. One might think that all the evidence we might have for believing the many incompatibility claims I made before come from cases in which one is judging with a degree of confidence 1, and yet insist that there are other cases where one can give lesser confidence to the truth of a proposition and that these are cases where the uncotenability claims are not true. Thus, to illustrate, one might claim that it is entirely possible to both have degree 0.8 of confidence for *p* while also having some relevant degree of confidence to the proposition that *p* might be false. After all, the lower level of confidence is witnessing precisely the fact that one takes it that *p* might be false.

Threshold view. If we consider the threshold view, the incompatibility with my view is even clearer. If the threshold is lesser than 1 (at least in most cases), then it is hard to explain why judging that *p* will have to be uncotenable with the judgment that *p* might be false.

Either way, both views are in tension with mine. The crucial factor that puts pressure on my view is the existence of credences. If there are credences, then presumably most of the judgments we make in our life have different degrees of confidence. But then

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89 Of course, eliminativism about outright belief is also incompatible with my view, but eliminativism has very little to recommend in its favour.

90 This seems to be the view defended by Clarke (2013).

91 There are many forms of this view. See, for a version of this view, Foley (2009), pp. 38-9, and (1993), pp.143-144, Sturgeon (2008).

most of the judgments we make in our life do not engender the commitments I have argued being constitutive of judgment.

One obvious rescue move will be to claim that my view about the commitments for judgments apply to judgments with level of confidence 1 only (and to outright belief, if reductionism is false and there also are outright beliefs). Yet, I think that phenomenological reflection supports a much stronger contention, namely that *all* judgments are such as to give rise to the commitments listed above. So we need to look to ways in which we can deny the existence of levels of confidence, or ways in which we can deny the fact that their existence concerns judgments.

What are the arguments for believing in the existence of credences? Here is a very clear statement of what I regard as the main argument.

"Consider first the suggestion that flat-out belief is maximum confidence — a view reflected in the frequent use of the term "full belief" for flat-out belief. The problem here is that one can believe something, in the everyday sense, without being certain of it. I believe that my grandmother was born on the 3rd of August, but I am not absolutely certain of it. I may have misremembered or been misinformed. Nor is this lack of certainty necessarily a bad thing; a fallibilist attitude to one's own beliefs has much to recommend it". (Frankish 2009, 79)[92]

Following Clarke (2013), we might call this worry the *Certainty worry*. The worry is *not* that most of our beliefs would be unjustified since they are not certain. The worry is rather that even though we think we have plenty of beliefs, in fact we don't. For most of our beliefs are not psychological certainties, or so the argument goes.

First of all, we should be clear on the distinction between having a judgment that commits one to it being the case that the judged content is certain, and having a subjective feeling of certainty or having a second-order thought to the effect that one's judgment is certain. My claim is not that whenever we judge we also have some second-order perspective upon ourselves such that we take our judgment to be certain. If that were the claim, it would obviously be false. Most of us rightly think that our beliefs are fallibly

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92 The quotation goes on introducing another problem: "Another difficulty for the full-belief view arises in connection with practical reasoning. On Bayesian principles, to assign a probability of 1 to a proposition is to cease to contemplate the possibility that it is false and, consequently, to ignore the undesirability of any outcome contingent upon its falsity. One consequence of this is that if one is certain of something, then one should be prepared, on pain of irrationality, to bet everything one has on its truth for no return at all. For one will simply discount the possibility of losing the bet. . . . Yet we can believe something, in the everyday sense, without being prepared to stake everything, or even very much, on its truth. (I would bet something, but not a great deal, on the truth of my belief about my grandmother's birth date). So flat-out belief is not the same thing as maximum probability" (p. 79). See Clarke (2013) for a response to this second worry.

justified, though of course we rarely consciously entertain and judge this thought and, even more rarely, we bring this thought to bear on what we judge to be the case. Nor am I claiming that when we judge we also always have a feeling of certainty associated with it. Far from that. The subjective feeling of certainty might be present in particular circumstances – for instance, when one is in presence of what one cognizes as the fact that one is judging to be the case, or when one understands that one actually has a conclusive ground for one's claim. But it is not always present, and in fact, if we think of how many judgments we form all the time everyday, it is seldom present. My claim simply is that judging that p is uncotenable with judging that p might be false (as well as with judging the many other propositions that entail that p might be false).

Having clarified what I am claiming, I think that part of the force that stands behind the objection evaporates. What is the evidence the argument is relying on? One source of evidence seems to be the fact that one is rarely subjectively certain of what one is believing. If by this it is meant the fact that one rarely consciously takes what one is believing as being certain, or that one rarely has a feeling of certainty while believing, then I can't agree more. But as I have explained, these observations are perfectly consistent with the recognition that judgment is committed to certainty.

Another possible source of evidence for believing that there must be credences is maybe the following. Judgment is often the output of a conscious process of deliberation. During the process, one assess one's evidence. It seems that sometimes we end up judging what we do even if during the deliberation we have realised that our evidence is not conclusive. It seems then that there is a phenomenological ground for believing that judgment is often made on the basis of less than conclusive evidence. If this is so, then judgment can't be committed to certainty.

This argument can be resisted on two fronts. First of all, I think there is something right in the contention that we come to form judgments even when we realise that we have less then conclusive evidence for the propositions we are deliberating about. But very often we do not forms judgments that p is the case or not the case. We do typically form judgments of the sort 'p is likely to be true', 'it is almost certain that p', 'p seems true', or the like. This point is overlooked because in conversation we do not mention all the cautionary clauses that are however present in thought, yet they can be made evident if we challenge what people claims by asking: 'Are you certain of it?'. Often the answer will be 'No, though it is very likely that p'. Second, and again, my view is not that we form judgments only on the basis of certainty-conferring grounds. We often don't. Third, I think that we are

inclined to have a wrong opinion about the phenomenology of judgment because we take a retrospective perspective upon our doxastic states. We form judgments. Then we eventually form opinions about the epistemic quality of our judgments. We realise that they fall short of certainty. We then have the impression that when we judge we come to judge upon the conscious realisation that we have fallible grounds. But this is not how things really occur. When we reason, we typically take for granted many alternative possibilities that would make explicit the fallibility of our grounds were they to be made explicit. But they are almost never made explicit. This is surely the case with very remote possibilities – like sceptical ones.

A third source of evidence for the claim that judgment can't be committed to certainty comes from linguistic considerations. I will discuss these considerations in the next paragraph.

There is another complain against the view that judgment is committed to certainty. The complaint is voiced by Fantl and McGrath (2009), p. 134, when they say that "if the view is true then fallibilism about justified belief is false". Fallibilism is almost a dogma of contemporary epistemology, which explains why Fant and McGath can nonchalantly take the consequence that fallibilism about justification is false as an unwelcome consequence. The dogma is false, however, as I will argue in Chapter VIII. Indeed, if certainty is the norm of judgment, then our judgments are correct only if certain, and since they don't merely aim at truth but also at certainty, it is natural to think of their epistemic justification as being infallibilist in kind. The issues here are complicated by the question whether monism or pluralism about epistemic justification is true. This is why I will postpone discussion of these issues in Chapter VIII.

Do I then believe that judgment is credence 1? I don't think that credences have anything to do with judgments. Judgment is an all-or-nothing affair. So, it doesn't make much sense to ask which level of confidence is inherent to judgment.

§3.14   *Phenomenology and linguistic data*

So far I have constructed my arguments by trying to make reference to phenomenological evidence only. Particularly, I haven't brought to bear any consideration stemming from an analysis of the way in which we speak about our mental states. In what follows I discuss some purported pieces of linguistic evidence that are meant to be somewhat informative about the nature our mental states.

The view that certainty is the norm of judgment provides a very natural explanation of a bunch of various purported facts about the way in which we speak. Consider the following.

(A) It is raining, but I am not certain that it is raining (p, but I am not psychologically certain of p)

(B) It is raining, but it is not certain that it is raining (p, but it is not epistemically certain that p)

(C) It is raining, but it might not be raining (p, but p might be false)

(D) It is raining, but my reasons for so believing don't make it certain that it is raining (p, but my reasons for believing p are such that p is not certain)

These four sentences when asserted are infelicitous. One natural explanation is that judging that p commits one to certainty that p in such a fashion that it is impossible to comprehendingly judge the conjunctions listed above. Since it is impossible to be in such states, and since we might suppose that ordinary speakers are somewhat sensitive to this fact, hearing these sentences strikes one as odd. The expressed propositions are not false. They simply can't be held by a subject who is comprehendingly thinking these propositions and fully understands the implication of what he is committing himself to by judging the conjuncts of these conjunctions.

Now consider these sentences about belief.

(A') I believe it is raining, but I am not certain that it is raining

(B') I believe it is raining, but it is not certain that it is raining

(C') I believe it is raining, but it might not be raining

(D') I believe it is raining, but my reasons don't make it certain that it is raining

Do you find these odd? C' is odd[93]. B' seems odd as well, at least if one keeps track of the fact that C' is odd while one entertains B'. A' and D' apparently are not found odd. One might argue that since C' is odd, one should find A' odd as well, for if one is not certain that it is raining then one takes it that it might not be raining. For the same reason, one might argue that since C' is odd, D' should be found odd as well, for if one's reasons don't make it certain that it is raining then it might not be raining. Of course, both argumentative strategies will have to explain why people don't find A' ad D' odd even if they should.

There are plenty of ways in which one can resist the way in which I have suggested we might connect my view about the certainty norm of judgment with the debate on norms of assertion. Some theorists have argued that certainty is the norm of assertion[94]. A

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93 As noticed by Yalcin (2007).
94 See Stanley (2008). Williamson (2000), p. 254, seems to be committed to a certainty norm for assertion as

basic piece of evidence in favour of this view is the fact that A and B are found infelicitous when asserted. In A a subject asserts that p, while denying that he is psychologically certain that p, whereas in B a subject asserts p while denying the possession of grounds for being psychologically certain of p. If certainty is the norm of assertion, the oddity is explained. Moreover, one's assertion might be challenged by asking whether one is certain of it[95], and this is further evidence for taking certainty as a the norm of assertion. If one accepts this view about the norm of assertion, and sincere assertion is taken as the expression of one's judgment, then it is natural to think that certainty is the norm of judgment as well[96].

This view has of course been challenged[97]. There is a growing literature that offers data in order to support a great variety of theories about the norms of assertion. Some theorists hold that knowledge (understood along fallibilist lines), and not certainty, is the norm of assertion[98]. Other theorists have defended weaker accounts of the norm of assertion[99]. Moreover, it is not clear that the norm of assertion and the norm of belief and judgment are the same[100]. It seems the debate is far from being settled. Anyway, in order to defend the view that certainty is the norm of judgment we need not to argue that certainty is also the norm of assertion, though that might be a desirable result that further supports the contention that certainty is the norm of judgment.

In a recent paper, Hawthorn et al. (2016) have argued that belief is weak, meaning that the norm of belief is weaker than the norm of certainty. One of their aim is to argue against the claim that the norm of assertion and the norm of belief are the same, proceeding under the assumption that there are good reasons to hold a certainty norm of assertion. Here we need not be bothered about this specific point. What matters for us is whether the evidence they offer for the contention that belief is weak is good evidence, and whether it has any bearing on the question whether certainty is the norm of judgment. They first offer some linguistic evidence. Whereas

(A)   'It is raining but I am not sure it is raining'

sounds odd – and its oddity might be naturally explained by a certainty norm of assertion,

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well.

95 A fact noticed by Unger, (1975), pp. 263–264, who acknowledges the insight to Michael Slote ; Williamson (2000).

96 Stanley (2008) argues for a certainty norm of assertion while denying that certainty is the norm of belief. See also Hawthorne e al (2016) for the contention that the norm of assertion differs from the norm of belief and that the norm of belief is weaker than certainty.

97 Turri (2010) and (2016), for instance.

98 See Turri's work in defence of the knowledge norm of assertion.

99 Douven (2006); Hill & Schechter (2007); Kvanvig (2009); Lackey (2007); Wright (2014).

100 Hawthorne e al (2016) argue that the norm of belief is weaker than the norm of assertion. In the attempt to defend a fallibilist approach in epistemology, Stanley (2008) defends a certainty norm of assertion in order to explain away the impression that certainty is the norm of belief.

(A')   'I believe it is raining but I am not sure it is raining'

doesn't sound odd. Also, they notice that

(E)   'It is raining but I know it might not be'

is infelicitous, whereas

(E')   'I believe it is raining but I know that it might not be'

is not. Since both A' and E' don't sound as admissions of irrationality it is natural to think that certainty is not the norm of belief, and that one might be correctly believing something even if she is not psychologically and epistemically certain of it. To this point one might further want to add that these pieces of evidence speak against my claims about incompatibility. Since neither A' nor E' sound as admissions of being in an impossible mental situation, it is natural to think that it is indeed possible to be in the mental situations described by A' and E'.

What are we to do of these arguments? One move that I am willing to make is to reject the impression, if anyone has such an impression, that A' and E' are reports of belief. I would follow Stanley (2008) in claiming that sentences like A' and E' are not belief reports but rather cases in which one is expressing that she has some reasons, though not conclusive ones, for thinking that p[101].

Here is another argument they advance in favour of their claim.

"One comes from lottery cases. Many argue that one cannot felicitously assert that one's lottery ticket with a one in a hundred chance of winning won't in fact win (e.g. Dudman 1992; Williamson 2000). However, at least intuitively, it seems reasonable to believe that one's lottery ticket will lose in these situations. If this were not the case no one would be even initially bothered by the lottery paradox. This data is problematic for anyone who endorses entitlement equality and thinks that lottery sentences are unassertable. Of course, these judgements about lottery cases might be denied. But the data suggests that having a norm of belief on par with that for assertion is revisionary of our ordinary practice in a way that, e.g., the knowledge norm of assertion does not appear to be". Hawthorne e al (2016), p. 5.

From the fact that it is highly intuitive to hold that it is rational or justified to believe that one's ticket will loose, it doesn't follow that people actually believe that their tickets will loose. When we say that it is highly intuitive to say that one is justified in believing that one's ticket will loose we surely want to capture the following uncontroversial facts: the fact

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[101] There is something strange in reporting what one believes by saying 'I believe that p' rather than simply asserting that p. This offers further prima facie support to the contention that we are not here (typically) in the presence of belief-reports. See Nes (2016) for a discussion of this issue and of many more kindred cases.

that it is almost certain, with respect to any given ticket, that that ticket will loose; that it is irrational to buy a ticket, for one is almost certain to loose; moreover, we want also to capture the fact that one's course of action will be legitimate if it proceeded under the assumption that the chosen ticket will lose – for it is highly probable that it will. But in order to grant all these intuitive facts we do not also need to grant the fact that people actually *believe* of each singular ticket that it will be a loser. One might, of course, so believe. But what really happens, I think, is that people are highly confident that the ticket will loose. People believe things like: it is almost certain that it will loose. If you ask them: will it loose? They will say: 'yes'. Are you sure? They will say: 'no'. Thus, I think that considerations coming from the putative paradox in the lottery case don't establish the fact that people have beliefs in propositions they knowingly take to be uncertain.

The third argument that the authors offer in favour of their claim suggests that the sort of phenomenon I am interested in – the one of conscious comprehending belief, what is typically called judgment – is not the same phenomenon that people are talking to when they use 'belief' and kindred expressions. According to them, 'belief' behaves like other weak mental states do. They think there is linguistic evidence to the effect that 'belief' behaves in such a way as to suggest that it is as weak as 'to think', 'to suspect that', 'to have some confidence that', 'to half-expect that', 'to be tempted to think that', 'to be of the opinion that'. I think the evidence here is controversial, and they themselves don't fully commit to the interpretation and the linguistic intuitions they favour. Anyway, if this was to show something it would show that their view indeed applies to a very weak sense of belief. The sense is so weak that it simply doesn't interfere with the thesis I am defending here. In fact, it is quite natural to think that the phenomenon of belief they are referring to is the one of *dispositional* belief. It might indeed be that our folk conception of dispositional belief is of the sort of taking it not to be subsumed by the certainty norm. Anyway, I have no intention to argue that belief in this sense is governed by the certainty norm. In fact, the authors themselves recognize (p. 10) that their point about our ordinary talk about belief doesn't show that there is no further belief-like mental state which is governed by different norms.

There is a general reply that we can give to these sorts of linguistically based considerations against my view and, more generally, in favour or against any view about the nature of the mind. These data offer evidence for understanding what is our folk theory of belief (and of other mental states). The folk theory implicitly includes both normative considerations ('I believe that p, but p is not certain' is taken to provide evidence about

what norms govern belief attributions) and considerations about the metaphysics of the mind ('I believe that *p*, but *p* is not certain' can be taken to provide evidence about our opinions about the connection between belief and certainty). But Linguistic data *alone* do not offer us ground to conclude anything that goes beyond *our* folk theory of the mind.

Yet there is a temptation in the literature to take facts about our folk theory as evidence for conclusions about the normativity and the metaphysics of the mind. With respect to the move from our folk theory to normative conclusions, it must be enough to observe, in the present context, that there is no obvious reason why we should be conservative about normativity and take our folk theory as providing the correct picture of the normativity of the mind. Even if we concede that we commonsensically think of belief as correct and justified even if uncertain, why should common sense be taken as right? With respect to the move from our folk theory of the mind to conclusions about the metaphysics of the mind, it should be even more obvious that this transition if far from being uncontroversial. What reason do we have to think that our ways of speaking about our mind has evolved in such a fashion as to track the way in which our mind actually works? We don't believe that our folk conception of time should be evidence about the nature of time, but then why should we believe that our folk conception of belief should be evidence about belief itself?[102] Anyway, even if we menage to provide abstract arguments for thinking that our ways of speaking about the mind are on the right track, it would still be possible to question whether we should be confident of our ways of speaking (let alone of our ways of collecting data about our ways of speaking and about our interpretations of these data). And the best way to check whether what we implicitly and commonsensically think about our conscious mind is correct is to look at the way in which our mind actually works. This is precisely what we do when we do phenomenology. Hence, the phenomenological evidence I have tried to provide in this chapter enjoys an obvious theoretical priority on the putative evidence provided by analysis of our linguistic practice. The last word belongs to phenomenology[103].

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102 One reason is that there is an anti-realist tendency in the literature to take facts about the mind to be determined by facts about our conceptual scheme. We will see some instances of this point, which I think can be shown to be pervasive in the contemporary analytic literature, when we discuss theories of the aim of belief in Chapter IX.

103 One might think that another way of looking directly at the way in which our mind works consists in doing cognitive science and in approaching the mind from a third-personal perspective. However, a third-personal approach still has to be checked by relying on phenomenological observations. The only way one can be sure that her scientific discoveries are about *belief*, say, is to find some correlation between the discoveries and the phenomenon that we first-personally individuate as the phenomenon of *belief*.

Chapter IV

Suspension of Judgment

Six people are asked the following question: 'why is there something rather than nothing?'. The theist answers that God created being from nothingness. The atheist denies that and maybe adheres to some other answer. A guy never thought about the question and just confesses that. He is however curious to know and starts a passionate open-minded inquiry on the matter. Then there are two agnostics. One claims that it is simply impossible to know what the right answer is and thus also claims that it is impossible to know whether God created being from nothingness. The other claims that so far, given all the evidence he has been capable of considering, he isn't capable of settling the issue one way or another, but he is still open-minded as to whether there might be some evidence that one day will settle the issue. Finally, the last person says that here the problem is not that we don't know the answer, but rather that there isn't any answer to this question and that we are facing a mystery.

In this chapter I will speak about these characters (and a few more) and clarify the differences among them. Their differences are important, and should be captured by our theorizing about our cognitive life. With the exception of the person who never thought about the question, the standpoints endorsed by all our characters represent available moves in the quest for discovering the truth. Recent literature on suspension of judgment hasn't been fine-grained enough so as to capture these differences. Or so I will argue.

§4.1 *Preliminary distinctions*

It is important to distinguish here (as we did before in the case of judgment) between conscious and unconscious suspension of judgment, as well as between dispositional suspension of judgment and occurrent suspension of judgment.

We can imagine that five of our characters (all of them except the person who never thought about the issue) are first shocked by this perplexing Leibnizian question when they are young, and that after twenty years they are asked to report how they made up their minds on the issue. We can imagine that they really endorse their respective positions, and that they are not simply playing the game of pretending to endorse some position just for the sake of responding to the inquirer. Since they have thought for a long time and quite deeply about the issue we can imagine that they have ended up forming

some cognitive *disposition* in relation to it. The theist comes to believe that God exists, and this belief becomes one of his stable dispositions. The same goes for the atheist, the two agnostics, and the person who thinks that we are facing a mystery. They all are in turn disposed to consciously judge that God created being from nothingness, that It doesn't even exist, that we can't know, that we can't know yet, and that there is no answer to the question. So, each of the committed characters has some disposition towards the question. In this chapter, as elsewhere in the Dissertation, I will primarily be concerned with conscious cognitive phenomena. I will therefore be speaking of conscious suspension of judgment, and will take no stance on the relationship between conscious and dispositional suspension of judgment[104].

What about the new inquirer? Even if he has just started to consider the issue he might already have the disposition to be open-minded about it. In order to have the disposition to be open-minded about the issue he should not have other beliefs that dispose him to answer one way rather than the other to the Leibnizian question[105]. It is instructive to contrast this new open-minded inquirer with a character who has never thought about the question, and yet who possesses other beliefs that dispose him to take a stance with respect to that question. Thus, we might suppose that he is someone who already thinks that we can't know the answers to big philosophical questions, and that somehow feels the presence of a big question when she ears the Leibnizian one, and thus is strongly inclined to dismiss it on the ground that we can't know the right answer. This naïf sceptic and the new inquirer are relevantly different even if both of them don't have any dispositional belief about the issue. They are disposed to react to it in different ways. So, our new passionate inquirer might have some relevant disposition towards the question even if is she has no answer to it. The important point to be noticed is that we can distinguish here the *disposition* to be open-minded and *the conscious act* of being entertaining a proposition while refraining from taking any stance about the truth value of that proposition. In Chapter V and VI I will say a bit more on open-mindedness, when I am going to discuss the nature of doubt and the pyrrhonian stance. For the time being, I just want to stress that we are here interested in *conscious* open-mindedness.

A last introductory remark. In what follows I will assume that suspension of judgment is closed under negation, namely that one suspends judgment about *p* if and only if she suspends judgment about not-*p*[106]. In what follows I will only speak of suspension of

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104See Chapter III.
105Moreover, we should also suppose that he does possess to some degree the intellectual virtues that prevent him to form hasty judgments.
106See van Fraassen (1998) and Hajek (1998) for some discussion of this assumption, and see also Friedman

judgment about p while leaving implicit that suspension includes propositions incompatible with p as well.

§4.2   *Suspension of judgment and mere absence of judgment*

The first point about suspension of judgment is that it has to be distinguished from mere absence of judgment. If we reduce suspension of judgment about p to the absence of the belief that p is true, then it will turn out that I have suspended judgement and am suspending judgment about an infinity of propositions. We will be suspending judgment about all the propositions that we can't grasp, about all the propositions that we have never entertained (with the possible exceptions of the obvious consequences of those propositions which we have considered), and that even agents who aren't even capable of cognition do suspend judgment[107].

§4.3   *Absence of judgment and open-mindedness*

I have just distinguished mere absence of belief from suspension of judgment. Notice that there is also an important difference between a person who simply has no opinion about the matter and a person who has no opinion *but* is actively trying to make up one's mind about the issue while being open-minded about it. Thus consider the character in our story who is confronted with the question for the first time. Immediately before being asked the question he has no opinion whatsoever about the issue – maybe he never even entertained the question. Now that he has been asked the question and that he took interest into it he is different. There is a sense in which he is more than simply lacking any opinion whatsoever about the issue, for now he knows that he has no opinion whatsoever and that he has no idea about what to respond. I would say that it is natural to mark this distinction by saying that now he is really open-minded about the issue[108], for now he has the issue in mind and so he really has something to be open-minded about. So, absence of judgment might occur even in the absence of the proposition to be judged. Being open-mindedness

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(2011), p. 166, footnote 4.

107See Friedman (2013), 2015) against the claim that absence of belief is sufficient for suspension of judgment. She also argues that non-belief is not necessary for suspension of judgment, whereas I will argue that it is necessary. See also Wedgwood (2002), who notes that, as far as absence of belief is the sole property concerned, "even rocks and numbers have *that* property" (p. 272). For similar remarks see Hajek (1998), Bergmann (2005), Sturgeon (2008).

108Being open-minded about p – in at least one interesting sense of the expression 'being open-minded' – requires at least entertaining p, in the case of *conscious* open-mindedness, and at least having entertained p, in the case of dispositional open-mindedness.

however requires that one entertains a proposition without taking a stance about its truth value[109]. To have the disposition to be open-minded is to have the disposition to refrain from taking a stance with respect to the truth of a given proposition when one consciously entertains that proposition. Wondering is different from simple open-mindedness, for to wonder about the truth of a proposition is to be open-minded about it while actively trying to determine its truth value.

§4.4   *Suspension of judgment and open-mindedness*

We should distinguish between two senses of suspension of judgment. One can be said to suspend judgment on an issue *in order to* freely and non-prejudicially inquire into that matter. That is suspension at the beginning of the inquiry; or one can be said to suspend judgment *as a result* of one's inquiry. In order to clearly distinguish between the two things I suggest that a more natural way of describing these phenomena is to speak of being open-minded when one starts inquiry and of being suspending judgment when one concludes it or makes progress in the inquiry. Suspension of judgment is a step at the end of inquiry or within the process of inquiry. Whereas to be open-minded about an issue is the first step of inquiry – at least, this is the first step of someone who never thought about the issue and never formed dispositions to take a particular committed stance about the issue. The two phenomena are easily conflated. There are many good reasons why they are easy to conflate, one of which is the fact that we have ways of speaking about suspension of judgment that conflate the two. Another important reason is that we fail to keep clear in our mind the following distinctions:

–   the distinction between the *punctual conscious occurrence of the phenomena* of being-open-minded and being-suspending-judgment. The two phenomena are different, and it is easy to show it.

–   The second distinction is the one between the *persons* who, respectively, have an open-minded attitude towards an issue, and have a suspensive attitude towards the same issue. These two persons are harder to distinguish.

–   The third distinction is the one between *definitive* suspension of judgment and *temporary* suspension of judgement. To definitively suspend judgment is to take it that there

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109 Wedgwood (2002) calls 'suspension of judgment' the act of consciously considering a proposition without believing or disbelieving it. This is roughly what I labelled open-mindedness, with the sole difference that open-mindedness involves one's being inquisitive about the proposition – merely entertaining a proposition without a taking a stance about it is different from entertaining a propositiong, *wondering whether it is true*, and refraining from taking any stance because one hasn't made up one's mind yet about the issue. Anyway, what matters here are not the labels, but the distinctions among the phenomena.

is no possible way of answering the question. To temporarily suspend judgment is to take it that *so far* we haven't found any way of answering the question, but we might find a way if we insist inquiring.

Distinction between open-mindedness and definitive suspension of judgment. To be open-minded about an issue (in the occurrent conscious sense, not in the dispositional sense) is to be entertaining a proposition while not taking any stance about its truth-value. Typically, moreover, in the context of an active inquiry, one doesn't simply entertain a proposition without taking a stance about its truth-value. Rather one wants to know its truth value. This is to wonder about an issue (e.g., about why there is something rather than nothing). To be wondering about an issue – where p is a candidate answer to the question that provides the issue – requires to be open-minded about it, hence it is obviously not compatible with judging that p is true (or false). If one judges that p is true (or false), one is not open-minded about the issue, but is rather, in our example, a theist (or an atheist). Wondering about whether p is the case is not compatible with judging that the question can never be answered either. This sort of definitive suspension of judgment which involves the judgment that it is not possible, given the sort of evidence we could possibly have an access to, to answer our question, is a significantly different stance from the stance of someone who is simply wondering about the issue. In fact, as I will argue later, it is not possible to have a definitive suspension of judgment about p and also to be wondering whether p is true or not. For, if one has a definitive suspension of judgment one takes it that there is no possible evidence that might help one in answering the question. But to wonder about an issue is to be committed to the fact that there might be a correct answer to be found, and it is also to be committed to the possibility of having an access to the evidence that will allow one to select the right answer. If one were to think that there is no such evidence one would not even begin the inquiry. Thus, when one is not simply open-minded but also actively wonder about a given issue – like in our case, since we are considering an inquirer – there is a clear difference between the stance occupied by the new inquirer and the stance occupied by someone who definitively suspend judgment about the issue.

Yet there is something that suspending judgment and being open-minded clearly have in common. In both cases, when one entertains p – the proposition that defines (or one of the propositions that define) the issue under investigation – one doesn't judge that it is true/false. Yet, in the case of open-mindedness one doesn't have any opinion yet to the effect that the issue can't be settled, whereas in the case of definitive suspension of

judgment one is precisely so committed.

Difference between open-mindedness and temporary suspension of judgment. As previously remarked, it is very easy to conflate open-mindedness with suspension of judgment. One reason is that one might fail to bear in mind the distinction between a definitive suspension of judgement and a temporary one. One agnostic in our story takes it that there is no possible available evidence that will settle the issue. The other agnostic takes it that *so far* she has found no evidence, but she is still open to the possibility that there be evidence that settles the issue. Admittedly, it is harder to distinguish between being an open-minded inquirer and being temporarily agnostic. After all, they are both still wondering about the question. They are both still inquiring. What is the difference then? The difference is that is that to be temporarily agnostic is to judge that so far the evidence one has explored in order to answer the question doesn't settle it, whereas to be open-minded about the issue one doesn't need to have any explicit judgments about one's evidence, because one doesn't need to have already started the inquiry, and thus one doesn't need to have any opinion whatsoever about her own evidence. The difference is obscured by the fact that to be open-mindedly wondering about an issue is to be committed to the fact that one doesn't have the grounds for settling the issue – and this is something to which one is committed if one judges that so far the evidence doesn't settle the issue. Moreover, both attitudes are committed to the claim that there might be grounds for settling the issue. So, even if *some* commitments of open-mindedness about *p* and temporary suspended judgment about *p* are the same – namely that one hasn't grounds for settling the issue and there might be such grounds – they are two different phenomena – for the latter but not the former also claims that some of the evidence that has been scrutinized isn't enough to settle the issue, whereas the former has no such kind of opinion about previously scrutinized evidence, for there isn't any evidence that has already been previously scrutinized.

§4.5   *Suspension of judgment as a move within inquiry*

I have distinguished suspension of judgment from mere absence of judgment; between absence of judgment and being open-minded; and between suspension of judgment and open-mindedness. We can further appreciate these distinctions by noticing that to suspend judgment is to make a committed move in inquiry, whereas absence of judgment and mere open-mindedness are not committed moves in in inquiry.

Contrast the person who is open-minded about the question 'Why is there

something rather than nothing?' because she has never previously considered it and the two agnostics who have considered the issue and made up their mind about it. Suspension of judgment is a *response* to the effort one makes in order to determine the truth value of a proposition. This is why suspension of judgment is a phenomenon the intelligibility of which presupposes that one looks at it through normative lenses. When we think of it first-personally this point becomes obvious: when someone asks me whether I suspend judgment about *p* or not I do pretty much the same thing I would do if I were asked whether I judge *p* to be true or not, that is, I consider the issue itself, whether there is any good reason to think that *p* is true, and if I end up judging that there can't be such good reasons (or that so far there are not such good reasons) I am in a position to respond to the question whether I suspend judgment about *p* or not. This is why the attitude brings with it a commitment to the correctness of the attitude[110]. And the fact that the suspension typically[111] comes after some sort of deliberation (which might be more or less sophisticated and monitored depending on the effort of the agent) is also why it is part of one's understanding of suspension of judgment that one shouldn't suspend judgment unless it is right to do so.

Another way of approaching the same point is this. Correct suspension of judgment is as much an *achievement* in the path guided by the aim of discovering truths as it is correct judgment. Their standards of correctness differ. A judgment is correct when it is true, whereas a suspension of judgement is correct with respect to p when we can't tell whether p or not-p is the case (of course what the impossibility to tell means will be addressed in a moment). Suspension of judgment is thus an achievement because it rules out one possible move in the game of discovery of the truth. Mere absence of belief that *p* is not an achievement, since it doesn't rule out any alethically relevant attitude with respect to *p*. The mere absence of opinion is simply where one finds himself if he hasn't yet started to enter the game.

§4.6   *Ignorance and mystery*

It is useful to introduce at this point another important sort of cognitive stance which can be erroneously confused with suspension of judgment. There is a difference between judging that one cannot tell the answer to a question, and judging that there is *no* answer to

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110As Sturgeon (2008) puts it, suspension of judgment is some sort of 'committed neutrality'. And as Friedman (2015) puts it, "It looks as though we should say that one is suspended on some matter when one has some sort of opinion on the matter" p 2.

111I'll discuss the issue whether suspension of judgment always require previous deliberation in a moment.

a question. In the first case we have suspension of judgement. In the latter case there is nothing to suspend our judgment about. Yet, they both are moves that compete for being the right moves in the game of truth.

When I wonder whether there is life after death, I might come to the conclusion that I should suspend judgment about the issue, for I believe that the only evidence which is *in principle* available to me now is not sufficient in order to settle the issue. But in considering this issue I am assuming that there is something to *know* – namely whether there is life after death or not –, except that I know that I can't know it. So, suspension of judgment as to whether *p* presupposes that there is a fact of the matter as to whether *p* is true or false[112].

In the case of mystery, however, we know that there is *nothing* to know, and yet we have a question. We have a question, but we know that there can't be any answer[113]. In this case we face what we typically call a *mystery*. The most profound metaphysical question of all questions is an example of this case. Why is there something rather than nothing? We understand the question and we want an answer to it. But, eventually, we know that there could be no *answer*. We are puzzled when we confront this question. When our explanations come to an end we face mystery. We raise questions, as if there were possible answers with respect to which we could then either have the state of belief or the state of suspension of judgment. But this is a mere appearance, because there are no possible answers. Thus, why is there consciousness? This looks as a normal question so long as we think that there is something to which consciousness is reducible, or something which could explain its occurrence. But even if you believe that the reduction or explanation are possible, once you have reached the bottom of your preferred path to reduction or explanation you might just raise that same question about the bottom: why does it exist? And another mysterious question: why is it *like this*, and not *otherwise*? It sounds as though there are answers to these questions, but eventually we know that there are not. And this is the realm of mystery, not the realm of suspension of judgment. We do not suspend judgment about all the possible candidate answers to this questions. Rather, we do believe that all candidate answers are false and that there couldn't be any answer at all[114].

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112 I won't pursue here the interesting question of how suspension of judgment relates to propositions whose truth is indeterminate.

113 To be clear: the answer might simply be 'for no reason'. I agree with the answer. But this is precisely the source of the mystery: even if we know that there can't be any cause for the existence of anything at all, still there remains the puzzlement that can be expressed in the question 'why does it exist?', or 'how could it possibly exist?'. Another move would be to reject these questions as meaningless, but the proposal is hard to accept given the fact that we easily understand what the questions are asking.

114 Here the relevant claim is the distinction between judging to be facing a mystery and suspending judgment, not the specific cases I used as illustrations of mysteries.

Thus, the important difference between suspending judgment about an issue and judging that we are facing a mystery, is that in the former case we are recognizing our ignorance, whereas in the latter case there is nothing to be ignorant about. These attitudes represent completely different 'last words' on the truth.

§4.7 *Suspension of judgment about* p *is uncotenable with judging that* p

The discussion conducted so far has already allowed us to make some progress in understanding what suspending judgment amounts to. I have often been speaking of it as a judgment about grounds for believing, namely either as a judgment about the impossibility of having adequate grounds for judging, or about the momentary lack of any adequate grounds for judging. I will end up defending a reductionist view about suspension of judgment, arguing that it is reducible to a judgment about grounds for judging. I will proceed in the analysis by showing how this reductionist view captures all we want to say about suspension of judgment.

When is it that suspension of judgment as to whether *p* is true is *correct*? What are we committed to by suspending judgment about a given proposition? In order to answer these questions I will follow the method of eidetic variation.

First of all, suspension of judgment as to whether *p* is true is uncotenable with the judgment that *p* is true (or false). This is trivial. It is the nature of suspension of judgment of neither being the judgment that *p*, nor the judgement that not-*p*. Vice versa, it is the nature of judgment to be committal precisely in the way in which a suspensive attitude as to whether *p* is true is not. This result is what has to be expected if suspension of judgment is nothing but a judgment about the lack of adequate grounds for judging. If I comprehendingly judge that my grounds for judging *p* are not adequate, then I am not judging that *p*. To judge that *p*, as we saw in the previous Chapter, is to be committed to judging that one has good grounds for so judging. And to judge that there are no adequate grounds for judging that *p* is to reject a commitment to judging that *p*[115].

115Again, as in the Chapter on Judgment, here is a long footnote on the connection between suspension of judgment and alethic correctness in which I argue that *suspending judgment about* p *commits one to judge that it is (alethically) correct to suspend judgment about* p. To see that this commitment is indeed part of suspension of judgment, suppose you are consciously and comprehendingly suspending judgment about *p*. Would you be keeping suspending your judgment as to whether *p* if you were to judge that your attitude is *not* (alethically) correct, namely the one to be *had* if one wants to discover the truth? No, precisely because it is part of what one judges when one comprehendingly judges that one's attitude is not correct that one should not have that attitude. Of course, one can judge that one should not suspend judgment about *p* but rather, say, judge that *p* is true, and yet one might fail to have the *disposition* to believe that *p* is true. However, while one is consciously and comprehendingly judging that she should not suspend judgment as to whether *p* one is thereby no longer suspending judgment about *p*. For, by judging that one should not

§4.8   *Suspending judgment about* p *commits one to judge that one has grounds for suspending judgment about*   p

Can I intelligibly understand myself as being suspending judgment about *p* if I don't take myself to have some ground for suspending judgment about *p*? As remarked above, the state of suspension of judgment is not a state we are saddled with like a perceptual experience or a state of pain. It is the result of an activity. Passive states like experiences are not states the possession of which requires that we have (or take ourselves to have) grounds for their correctness. Suspension of judgment, being the result of an activity, and being subject to normative constraints, as we have just began to observe, is in need of grounds for taking it as the correct cognitive attitude to have. To test that, suppose you are consciously and comprehendingly suspending judgment as to whether *p* is true. Could you be doing this while at the same time you judge that you have no epistemic reasons at all to take that attitude as the correct one to have? I don't think this to be possible. If I judge I have no reasons to suspend judgment, then it is not intelligible to suspend judgment, for I don't take it as a correct attitude to have, which is an implicit commitment of suspension of judgment. This point is to be expected if suspension of judgment is a judgment about grounds. For, being a judgment, since any judgment that *p* is committed to there being grounds for judging that *p*, suspending judgment will be committed to there being grounds for suspending judgment.

Friedman (2011) seems to think that there are states of suspension of judgment which are grounded on non-epistemic reasons.

"Can't S think that it's good luck to be agnostic about whether his team will win and so suspend judgment about whether they will prevail? Can't he think that it is morally corrupt to have any

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suspend judgment about *p* one is no longer giving assent to the implicit commitment that is part of one's suspension of judgment, namely the commitment that it is correct to suspend judgment.

This point is again captured if suspending judgment just is judging the lack of adequate grounds for judging. For, as we have seen in the Chapter of judgment, to judge that *p* is to be committed to the correctness of the judgment that *p*, hence to judge that one lacks adequate grounds for judging is to be committed to the correctness of this judgment about grounds.

I have been speaking of alethic correctness only. Suspension of judgment, like judgment, can be evaluated also by using *non-alethic considerations*. I can, for instance, evaluate my present belief that there is no God-grounded meaning in life as being prudentially ineffective for many aims that I might like to achieve. However, *first-personal deliberation* about these attitudes is constrained by *alethic considerations only* (there are non-alethic reasons that the subject can *use* in order to form judgments and in order to suspend judgment). The notion of alethic correctness I use here is tied with first.personal doxastic deliberation. However, one can construct notions of correctness which are tied with third-personal evaluation, and which can be prudential, moral, or aesthetic correctness. I am not concerned about them here.

beliefs about Middle East politics and so adopt an agnostic stance instead? Or might he not suspend because he thinks that God or his mother or his president or his doctor or Brad Pitt wants him to? It is not clear how to make sense of these possibilities on a view according to which suspended judgment is just a state of epistemically principled non-belief" (Friedman (2011), p. 175).

These are very interesting examples and they represent objections to my view. They do not show that it is possible to suspend judgment on the basis of non-epistemic reasons, however. What they show is how looking at the behaviour of our way of speaking could mislead our understanding of the nature of our cognitive life.

Let's consider her first example. Since, as we have seen, and as Friedman agrees, suspension of judgment about *p* is connected to the issue whether *p* is true or not – suspension of judgment is a move in the game of truth – one cannot *consciously* understands oneself as being suspending judgment about whether her team will win on the basis of the consideration that so doing will avoid bad luck. The fact that avoiding belief that I will win brings with it bad luck doesn't say anything at all about the truth of the proposition that I will win.

So, maybe it is possible that some *unconscious causal* mechanisms have the consequence that I don't believe that I win, where the causal mechanism is somehow initiated or sustained by my firm conviction that believing in my victory will bring to me bad luck. If we want we can speak of suspension of judgment about this sort of scenarios. But it is important to appreciate the difference between this sort of unconscious and first-personally unintelligible sort of suspension of judgment from the sort of conscious and first-personally intelligible suspension of judgment I am interested in here. If the subject were to explicitly consider the issue whether the proposition that he will win is true, even if he is unconsciously led to suspend judgment about the issue, if he doesn't take himself to have any reason to believe that he couldn't conclude for his victory or loss, then he will not be in a position to find it right to suspend judgment about *p*. There will then be a mismatch between his own unconscious inclinations and his own first-personal self-understanding. And the latter is what matters here.

It is interesting though to wonder why Friedman finds these examples persuasive. One explanation is that we simply have different methodologies, and different targets in mind. I care about what is first-personally recognizable as a suspension of judgment, and take the intelligibility as a methodological guide for discovering what this sort of suspension of judgment amounts to. She appears to be interested in suspension of

judgment as a phenomenon which could occur even when one doesn't first-personally understand oneself as being suspending judgment, and she uses the appeal to intuitions through the method of cases in order to discover what suspending judgment amounts to. Maybe it is the latter methodology which brings her to think that suspension of judgment can occur even in cases in which one is not prepared to understand oneself as being suspending judgment (in a later paragraph I will criticize her use of a case).

Another additional explanation is the following: she is giving credit, however implicitly and unconsciously, to our public practice of speaking about suspension of judgment, but the way in which we publicly speak about the truth and our cognitive life doesn't perfectly reflect the way in which our cognitive life works. Thus, consider again the case of the match. It is true that we recommend each other to avoid *saying* that we are going to win, because this is bad luck. I might say to a mate of my football team who is confidently saying that we are going to win: "Shut up! Don't say that, it brings bad luck! Actually, don't even think that!". This is a common phenomenon. But no one ever supposes that the possible bad luck is a reason to suspend judgment! It is a reason to *publicly* suspend judgment, as it were, or to *avoid* in one's own *foro interno* to think about the issue. But this evidence about the way we speak doesn't support in any way the idea that there could be non-epistemic reasons for suspending judgment. The same considerations apply *mutatis mutandis* to the other examples she makes.

§4.9 *Suspending judgment about* p *commits one to judge that there are no adequate grounds for judging that* p

What sort of *grounds* are relevant for suspension of judgment? Since suspending judgment about *p* is neither to take *p* as true nor to take it as false, these can't be grounds in favour of *p* or not-*p*. Of course, being the attitude of the agnostic, they should be grounds about the quality of one's grounds for *p*. It is natural to take suspension of judgment to be committed to there being no adequate grounds for judging that *p*, for if there were such grounds, one would just judge that *p*, instead of suspending one's judgment about it.

Since suspension of judgment is an achievement, and since it is an achievement with respect to the question whether *p* should be believed or not, and since, as we have just seen, only alethic considerations matter when deliberating whether to suspend judgment or not, it is to be expected that one would be able to suspend judgment about *p* only if one has judgments about whether there is evidence for believing *p* or *not-p*[116]. This point is

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[116]This point is noticed by Crawford (2004) as well: "Suspension of judgement necessarily involves thoughts

trivially explained if suspension of judgment is reducible to judgment about grounds. For to suspend judgment about *p just is* to judge that one doesn't have adequate grounds for *p*. So, if this reductionist view is true, it is not entirely correct to say that suspending judgment *commits* one to judging that there are no adequate grounds for *p*, for to suspend judgment and to judge that there are no grounds for *p* are just the same thing.

§4.10   *Suspending judgment about* p *commits one to judge that there are no conclusive grounds in favour of* p

If I judge to have conclusive evidence in favour of *p*, then, *if* the issue of whether *p* is true or not becomes relevant (as it obviously is since I am consciously judging to have conclusive evidence for *p*) I also judge that I should judge that *p*, for there is no other cognitive attitude with respect to p which is supported or compatible with my evidence. Hence, if I am to keep my judgment that I have conclusive grounds for *p*, I will have to judge that *p*. This point has been argued for in the Chapter *On Judgment*, where I have argued that to judge that *p* is to be committed to judge that I possess conclusive grounds for *p*. Here, we have just seen the same point considering the judgment that I possess conclusive grounds for *p*. If I so judge, I am committed to judge that *p*. And since suspension of judgment is not compatible with judging that *p*, it is not compatible with judging that one has conclusive grounds for *p* either.

This point should be clear already since it has been argued that to suspend judgment commits one to judge that one doesn't possess adequate grounds for judging that *p*. To possess conclusive grounds is of course to possess adequate grounds for *p*. Hence the two are not compatible. This point is again nicely captured if suspending judgment reduces to judgment about grounds.

§4.11   *Suspending judgment about* p *commits one to judge that one has conclusive grounds for judging that one doesn't have conclusive grounds in favour of* p

This sounds controversial, but it should not. What should be the epistemic quality of our ground for suspending judgment in order to have a reflexively stable suspension of judgment? Should the ground be conclusive or not? Suppose I suspend judgment about *p*. I can either take myself to have a conclusive ground for so doing or a non-conclusive

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about one's own epistemic perspective on whether or not p, namely, that one's epistemic perspective falls short of establishing whether p and thus that one does not know whether p" (p. 226)

ground for so doing. If I believe that the ground is not conclusive, but merely fallible, then I am also in a position to judge that it might be false that there are no conclusive grounds in favour of *p* or not-*p*. But if this is so, then I am in a position to judge that it might be that suspension of judgment is really *not* the correct attitude to take. Suppose then that I make all these consequences explicit. I will have to find myself in a mental state such that I both suspend judgment about *p* and also judge that suspending judgment about *p* might in fact be the wrong thing to do, for after all there might be conclusive reasons for settling in favour of *p* or not-*p*. But I can't find myself in that mental situation. If I am consciously judging that suspension of judgment might be wrong, then I am not suspending judgment about *p*. Thus, to have this judgment is to judge that it is not yet correct to suspend judgment, for one has still to be open-minded on the issue, at least so long as one hasn't settled (that is, reached conclusive grounds about) whether there could be conclusive evidence or not for believing *p* or *not-p*. This means that one of the implicit commitments of suspension of judgment is that one has conclusive evidence for believing that it is the attitude to have, namely for believing that *in principle* the issue whether *p* or *not-p* could *not* be known. This adds another important commitment to suspension of judgment[117].

This is again well explained if suspending judgment reduces to judgment about grounds for believing. For any judgment that *p* commits one to the possession of conclusive grounds for judging that *p*, hence suspending judgment will be committed to there being conclusive grounds for suspending judgment.

§4.12 *Temporary and definitive suspensions of judgment*

Now we are in a position to clarify the distinction between the two agnostics of our initial story. I might suspend judgment because I take it that *right now* I have not conclusive evidence for *p* or *not-p*. This is a *relative* suspension of judgment. It differs from the state of being simply open minded, because when one is open-minded one is looking for evidence to settle the issue or anyway one is still exploring one's own available evidence in order to determine whether belief is warranted or not. In this case, however, one has already gone through one's evidence and settled that suspension of judgment is warranted. This relative suspension of judgment differs from a really *definitive* suspension of judgment, though. The

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117This point is nicely explained by the fact that suspension of judgment, as I will argue in a moment, is reducible to a particular judgment. For, as I argue elsewhere in the dissertation, a judgment that *p* is true is correct only if there are *conclusive* grounds in favour of *p*. The argument relies again on the method of intelligibility. It is impossible to be *at the same time* judging that *p* is true and judging that there are no conclusive reasons for it.

latter consists in judging that there is no *possible* evidence whatsoever which will eventually settle the issue.

Another way of displaying the same distinctions is by *relativising* the reasonableness and correctness of suspensions of judgments to *bodies of evidence*. This way, we can distinguish open-mindedness from suspension of judgment in the following fashion: being open-minded about an issue amounts to not having yet completely explored one's body of evidence, and hence one is still wondering what the right attitude is; being suspending judgment is however to have already analysed and appreciated one's evidence, and having concluded that *relative* to that body of evidence, suspension of judgment is the correct attitude to have. We can then see the distinction between a relative suspension of judgment from a definitive suspension of judgment in the following way. The former is relative to a body of evidence, but it is still open to the possibility that *in principle* there could be evidence which will eventually settle the issue. A real definitive suspension of judgment is then an attitude which is relevant to *all possible bodies of evidence*. One has taken a definite suspension of judgment once one judges that there couldn't be, *in principle,* any evidence whatsoever which could possibly settle the issue one way or another.

Let me illustrate these distinctions with the case of religious belief in God. One might be completely open-minded about the issue, like our new inquirer. But then one can be a relative agnostic if she believes that the sort of evidence that she possesses *so far* is not enough to settle the issue one way or the other. This is the case of someone who thinks, for instance, that all the *empirical* evidence she could possibly possess doesn't allow him to go one way or another. She might think that it is in principle impossible to have any evidence about God's existence by relying on empirical evidence. That same person might however also believes that she has no reason yet to exclude the possibility of there being any further *source* of evidence which could settle the issue of the existence of God. Thus, having heard of particular divine experiences, of revelatory experiences*,* epiphanies, one might believe that he has no reason yet to exclude their existence. So, so far, he has reasons for endorsing a *temporary* or *relative* suspension of judgment; but he has no reasons to take a definitive suspension of judgment.

This temporary agnosticism has to be distinguished from the definitive agnosticism of someone who believes that there couldn't be any source of evidence whatsoever that could possibly settle the issue whether God exists or not. This is an agnosticism which is committed to believe that there couldn't be any evidence whatsoever for concluding with certainty that God exists.

As I have described the difference between the two agnostics, their difference boils down to a difference in judgments about grounds for *p*. Is there anything more that distinguishes their core suspensive attitudes? Of course, they do have different dispositions towards inquiry. One might want to keep looking for evidence for *p*, whereas the other doesn't. These different dispositions are again very well explained by the difference between their judgments about grounds. Also, focusing on judgments about grounds allows one to detect the otherwise imperceptible difference between the new open-minded inquirer and the old searcher of God. The latter, but not the former, has already thought a lot about the issue and has formed a stance about the grounds for settling it – only an extraordinary experience, possibly received as a gift from divine grace, might prove that a Creator exists. The new open-minded inquirer has no such stance about evidence. Yet, they both are relevantly alike in their dispositions to keep being open to the possibility that a positive (or negative) answers to the question might be found.

There is another important virtue in taking suspension of judgment to be reducible to judgment about evidence. It allows us to make very fine-grained differences among many different inquirers. By inquiring on an issue, different people might form very different opinions about the sort of evidence one has – or possibly have – for settling the issue. One might think that in this life the question can't be settled, though in future reincarnations it will, since karma pushes all of us to discover the truth. Another might think that *she* is unable to appreciate the evidence and settle the issue, though others who are more skilled are surely in a position to settle it. Another yet might think that the question might be nonsensical, and suspend judgment in this sense. Here the variety of suspensive attitudes is enormous. This variety can be captured only if one understands suspension of judgment as a judgment about grounds (and, in fact, more generally, as a judgment or set of judgments about our capacity to answer the question that defines our inquiry[118]).

Reducing suspension of judgment to particular judgment also captures this very important point: the more conceptually sophisticated you are the more sophisticated your

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[118]In this Chapter I have been focusing on our six characters only. But there are plenty more ways in which one can relate to a question. Many such ways might consist in the rejection of the question. There might appear to be a question there, but there is none (e.g., it is a nonsensical string of words). Other such ways consist, as I indicated in the main text, in varieties of positions about the way in which *we* can achieve knowledge of the correct answer to the question. So our characters might have been many many more.

mental life could be. When a layman says that he is agnostic about whether God exists, she might not have made the distinction between: God's existence can't be known never; God's existence can't be known given the available evidence; God's existence can't be known given the evidence I possess; God's existence can't be known in principle by me, but perhaps it can be known by other people; … Once you make the distinction available to her, she is in a position to refine his own state. This doesn't mean that she didn't have a judgment about grounds for believing in God's existence before. The point is simply that the contents of one's judgments depend on the conceptual repertoire of the believer, and the more sophisticated you are, the more sophisticated and nuanced might be your judgments about grounds, and hence you suspensions of judgments.

If we couple these observations with the fact that all we want to say about suspension of judgment and its normative profile is captured if we think of it as a judgment about ground, we have a very strong case for the reductionist view. So, my view end up being significantly different from the one recently defended by Friedman (2011) and (2015), according to which suspended judgment both is a particular sui generis mental phenomenon, and it has single monist nature. In fact, being reducible to a particular judgment about grounds, there might be a plethora of interestingly different ways of suspending judgment about an issue.

Is there some residual impression that somehow suspension of judgment should not be a judgment? The impression that suspension of judgment is a further mental state than belief might come from the realization that suspension of judgment should also involve something like the *absence* of positive judgment as to whether p is true or not. This is true, but the absence of a positive judgment doesn't have any mental reality, precisely because it is an absence. The lack of conscious positive judgment is necessary for one to be intelligibly suspending judgment about p, but this doesn't mean that this absence is part of the mental reality of the suspension of judgment itself. By judging that one can't in principle establish that p is true, one also understands, however implicitly, that it is wrong to judge that p (or to judge that not-p, for that matter). But this understanding isn't such that when combined with the judgment that one can't establish that p is the case constitute a new mental state. We might say that by suspension of judgment we refer to a complex set of mental states involving something like a judgment to the effect that there can't be conclusive evidence for p or not-p, plus the understanding that one should not judge that p, or something along these lines. But this complex of mental states doesn't look like the right candidate for being a sui generis kind of mental state. It is better to describe it as a set of

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interconnected states, rather than a new independent state.

Another reason why people might think that suspension of judgment is a different state from the belief that one can't know whether p is true or false is that people have in mind suspension of judgment as a *dispositional* unconscious state. Maybe the necessary and sufficient conditions that one should satisfy in order to be in that dispositional long-term state of mind differ from those that one should satisfy in order to have the judgment that one can't know whether p is true or false. But this phenomenon is not the one I am talking about here.

If suspension of judgment is really reducible to belief that one can't conclusively establish whether p is true or false, then we can rewrite all the correctness principles about suspension of judgment as principles about that particular kind of judgment. Interestingly, as I noticed in the section on the intelligibility method, what we would have discovered are then principles of correctness whose source is both the nature of the state (belief) and its particular content (that one can't know whether p is true or false).

§4.14   *Suspension of judgment and disagreement*

Having identified (some of) the normative commitments of suspension of judgment we are now in a position to better clarify a remark I have made several time in the text, namely that the characters of our story are all making incompatible moves in the same game, namely the quest for truth. I will put on a side the person who believes that we are facing a mystery, for this standpoint raises complexities which aren't our direct concern here. Also, we should put on a side the person who is open-minded about the issue, for he is not disagreeing with the theist, the atheist and the agnostics. He is still inquiring about which one of these positions (plus the position which endorses mystery) is the right one to have. The others are holding incompatible standpoints. Why?

The incompatibility, as stressed, is not between the propositions they hold, for the agnostics don't hold propositions that contradict those endorsed by the theist and the atheist. Mere proposition-incompatibility will lead to the result that the atheist and theist disagree among themselves but not with the agnostics, and similarly that the temporary and the definitive agnostics disagree with one another but not the with the theist and the atheist.

To recapture the incompatibility we should think in terms of incompatibility of *standpoints*, rather than of incompatibility between the propositions they hold[119]. These four

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119For more on the notion of standpoint see Chapter VII.

standpoints are incompatible moves because one can't occupy one *and* also occupy any of the others. This point is highlighted if we look at their respective commitments. Thus, to judge that *p* is true is to be committed to the possession of conclusive grounds for *p*. But suspension of judgment about *p* is precisely the judgment that such grounds aren't available. Similarly, to judge that *p* is false is to be committed to the possession of conclusive grounds for not-*p*, and suspension of judgment about *p* is the judgment that such grounds aren't available. The incompatibility between the theist and the atheist is obvious. So, the disagreement occurs because the different characters disagree not about propositions about God, but about propositions about our grounds for believing that God created everything from nothingness.

§4.15 *Reply to an objection*

Let me now consider an objection to the view I am defending here. Responding to the objection will help me in making my view more precise. According to Friedman (2011), p. 175, it is possible to envisage a case which has the following structural features. There is a subject who has what she calls an 'epistemically principled non-belief' about a given proposition *p*. An epistemically principled non-belief concerning *p* is very much what I take definitive suspension of judgment to be: it is the absence of belief about *p*, but an absence which is epistemically constrained in the sense that the subject who is suspending judgment about *p* takes herself to have reasons to do so, crucially reasons for believing that there are no conclusive reasons for believing *p* or not-*p*. Friedman doesn't disagree only with the details of my position, but rather with its general spirit, namely with the idea that a subject needs to have reasons for judging that the issue whether *p* is the case can't be settled. In order to sustain her rejection of this view, she offers the following putative counterexample in which a subject who looses her epistemic reasons for avoiding judging that *p*, actually keeps suspending judgment about *p* even if she has reasons for judging that *p* is true:

"Here is an example. Say that S is agnostic about whether Martians exist (p: Martians exist), and that his reasons for non-belief with respect to p have to do with there being no way to know whether Martians exist.These are epistemic reasons. Now say that S comes upon what he takes to be (and is) a reason that defeats his reasons for being in a state of non-belief about Martian life. Perhaps NASA announces that they have developed a new test for discovering whether or not Martians exist (although they haven't yet received the results). Given that, S takes his reasons for

non-belief to be defeated (and they are). Does S, at the very moment he loses his reasons for non-belief, thereby stop being agnostic about whether Martians exist? No. That he has lost his reasons does not guarantee that he has changed his mind about whether Martians exist. S does not automatically give up his position about Martian life—his agnosticism—merely in virtue of discovering (and registering the impact of the discovery) that NASA has the ability to test for Martian life. He's still very much in the dark about whether there is life on Mars, and his reasons having been defeated do not amount to (and need not even prompt) a change in view about p itself.

One may suspect that S simply replaces one reason for non-belief with another in the story from the last paragraph. But we get the same results even if we make sure that this doesn't happen. Let's instead say that S's defeating evidence is evidence that he takes to establish the existence of Martians (say NASA announces their test results) and that he no longer takes himself to have any epistemic reason for non- belief. In that case, even if S recognizes that he now has reason to believe p or reason to stop suspending, this does not mean that he will thereby have given up his agnosticism. It may be that he has been suspending for so long that stopping is difficult even if he thinks he ought to. Even if he takes the evidence to be extremely compelling, he may be slow to respond rationally to it given how much is bound up with his agnosticism. He may, in response to losing the relevant reasons, eventually stop suspending, but he does not automatically stop in virtue of losing his reasons. His reasons for non-belief may well be reasons to suspend, but they are not partly constitutive of his agnostic state. It appears that S can be agnostic about p despite not having the relevant kind of reasons, so being in a state of epistemically principled non-belief with respect to p is not necessary for being in a state of suspended judgment about p …"

Here is my response to this challenge. First of all, let us consider the version of the case were S takes herself to have conclusive[120] evidence that establishes the existence of Martians, and she no longer takes herself to have reason for non-belief. The reason that Friedman provides in order to convince us that in this occasion S might still be suspending judgment about the existence of Martians are the following: it might be that she has suspended judgment for so long that stopping is too difficult even if she thinks she ought to; he may be slow to respond rationally to her new evidence given how much is bound up with her agnosticism. The sort of evidence she provides makes clear that all that Friedman's case establishes is that the *disposition to suspend judgment* can survive one's discovery that she has no reason to suspend judgment but rather reasons to believe in the existence of Martians. If a subject *really* judges that there are conclusive evidence for the existence of Martians then at that moment a subject is not suspending judgment about the existence of Martians. It is simply impossible for a subject to both judge to have conclusive

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120Friedman speaks of S's taking her evidence to *establish* the existence of Martians. I take this to mean that she takes her evidence to be conclusive.

evidence of the existence of Martians and being suspending judgment about whether Martians exist. That being said, the point Friedman makes seems to me to be perfectly fine as far as it is taken to capture a point about our *dispositional* mental state of suspending judgment about a given issue[121].

At one point Friedman says that "it appears that S can be agnostic about *p* despite not having the relevant kind of reasons". This is true in one reading, but false in another. In order to see the point here it is useful to distinguish between the claim that suspending judgment that *p* is committed to there being reasons for so doing, and the claim that suspending judgment that *p* occurs only when the subject explicitly takes herself to have reasons for so doing. The former claim doesn't entail the latter. So, it is perfectly possible – and maybe a quite widespread phenomenon – that someone suspends judgment about *p* without having in mind any explicit reason for so doing. However, by actually suspending judgment one is *presupposing* that there are such reasons, and in this sense she is committed to there being such reasons, even if at the moment in which she suspend judgment she isn't capable of articulating them or even if, as a matter of fact, if she were to bring her attention to the issue she would realize that she has no reason at all to suspend judgment.

In light of the discussion, Friedman's case doesn't establish that having reasons for one's suspension are not constitutive of suspension of judgment. All that it eventually establishes is that our *dispositions* to suspend judgment as to whether *p* might survive what we consciously and comprehendingly believe about our evidence. This is as it should be, given how cognitively imperfect we are. But this doesn't show that consciously and comprehendingly suspending judgment as to whether *p* is not constitutively committed to there being reasons for suspending judgment. This point remains intact, and it is positively supported by what we find out through active engagement with the method of intelligibility.

§4.16   *Concluding remarks*

You might have noticed that I haven't been speaking of a particularly famous suspensive stance that one can take with respect to an issue: namely the Pyrrhonian stance. Reducing

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121In her papers on the subject, Friedman seems to be trying to capture the phenomenon of suspension of judgment conceived as both a disposition and a conscious mental state. However, I think that the two phenomena should be sharply distinguished, as the case of Friedman shows when it is compared with the verdicts of the method of intelligibility. In general, the confusion of the two phenomena seems to me to occur if one lets ordinary language and our intuitions as revealed through the method of cases to guide our philosophical reflection. Ordinary attributions of suspension of judgment are such that they typically cover both dispositional and conscious types of suspension of judgements.

suspension of judgment to judgment about grounds means that suspending judgment is being a dogmatic sceptic – namely someone who positively believes that scepticism (about a given issue) is correct. Pyrrhonian scepticism purportedly differs from dogmatic scepticism since it amounts to a general suspension of judgment about any proposition, included the sceptical proposition about grounds that, according to my view, is what suspending judgment really amounts to. Moreover, Pyrrhonian scepticism is also different from the mere open-mindedness of the new inquirer, for Pyrrhonian scepticism is in some sense an achievement in inquiry, not the first step in it. Isn't then my account failing to capture an important stance? No, for, as I will argue in Chapter VII there is no such a stance as a Pyrrhonian stance. That stance is a philosophical construction which can't exist in reality. In order to make this claim I will have also to analyse wonder and doubt, which will be done in the next chapter.

Chapter V

Doubt

The phenomenology of questioning is a fascinating and profound subject. It puts the inquirer at the heart of herself and her struggle for understanding and finding the truth[122]. In this chapter I will suggest that we think of questioning as the genus and of doubt as one of its species[123]. I will offer an analysis of the normative profile of questioning in the same way in which I did with respect to judgment. The analysis will reveal important connections between judgment, questioning and certainty. Most importantly, I will explain the relationship between doubt and certainty, and will explain that the problem of certainty fundamentally arises because of the nature of doubt.

§5.1   *Open and closed questions*

A first step into the nature of questioning can be made by comparing and distinguishing different kinds of questioning states of mind. I now ask myself: 'what did my neighbour have for breakfast this morning?'. I have no idea whatsoever where to start for answering this question. I simply don't know my neighbour well enough to be able to know what he might have eaten for breakfast today. Compare with this other question: 'has my neighbour had breakfast this morning or has he skipped it?'. Again, I have no idea whatsoever.

    These two questions have two important elements in common. They both concern

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122 The importance and terrific beauty of wonder and doubt is testified throughout the history of human reflection. For a narration of doubt during the Victorian age see Lane (2010). For an history of doubt in human thought from the beginning of Greek philosophy to nowadays see Hecht (2003).

As the Zen maxim says: "Great doubt: great awakening. Little doubt: little awakening. No doubt: no awakening". (Quoted in Batchelor (1990), p. 42). Buddhist practice particularly highlights the importance of doubt in order to achieve progress in the path towards understanding of the truth. To cultivate and meditate a question is a core practice in the Zen tradition. Consider this beautifully intense comment on the famous Zen koan 'Mu' where it is described how one should engage in the questioning practice: "[...] concentrate your whole body, with its three hundred and sixty bones and joints, and eighty four thousand hair-holes, into this Question; day and night, without ceasing, hold it before you. […] It must be like a red-hot iron ball which you have gulped down and which you try to vomit, but cannot". Blyth (1966), p. 32. For the importance of doubt and questioning in the Buddhist practice and tradition, see Yadlapati (2013), Batchelor (1990), especially the chapter on Questioning. I owe to Franco Bertossa the central insights about doubt that I develop in this and subsequent chapters.

123 There are many ways in which we can speak of doubt and wonder, some of which vindicate my contention, whereas others don't. (For an analysis of ways of speaking about doubts see Moon (2017b)). In what follows I will focus on a very particular, though I think widespread and central, way of understanding wonder and doubt, and I will at times introduce phenomena that are sometimes referred to by the same words though they slightly differ from those I am interested in here. Here as elsewhere when we deal with phenomenology, we should be careful in not letting considerations stemming from linguistic use to interfere with an apprehension of the real phenomenology.

a subject matter I don't care anything about. And they both concern a subject matter I have no previous opinions about. They are however significantly different from one another because the first is an *open question* (it is open to a wide range of candidate answers), whereas the second is a question that poses an alternative between two possibilities, either breakfast or no breakfast. More precisely, it is a question where there are only two possibilities involved, namely *p* and not-*p*. We might call these sorts of questions *closed questions*[124].

If we take the moment of questioning as our reference phenomenon[125] we see that whenever we raise a question, we are in a state of mind that has a very specific quality. What quality? Exactly! What is it like to be questioning? Precisely![126] When we ask about the quality of questioning we ipso facto put ourselves in the state to which we should pay attention in order to answer our question. By raising a question and paying attention to the phenomenon of questioning itself we are undergoing in order to investigate questioning itself, we are in a position to appreciate the particular phenomenological quality that comes

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[124]The terminology of 'open' and 'closed' question is sometimes used differently, but here I will follow the use stipulated in the main text. The categorization of questions might be more nuanced and rich, of course. But for our purposes, the distinction between open question and closed question will be enoug. In the literature on questions that investigate the semantics of questions it is customary to distinguish between *whether-questions, which-questions*, and *why-questions*. Whether-questions are what I call closed questions, since they have a definite number of candidate answers. Which-questions and why-questions are typically open questions, since they allow for an indefinite number of answers. I prefer the terminology of open and closed questions because the crucial distinction I am interested in is the one between questions with a definite number of candidate answers, and questions with an indefinite one. Speaking of wether, which and why-questions suggests a relativisation of the distinction to linguistic expression, which is inessential for my purposes.

I put on a side *corrective answers* – that is, answers that reject presuppositions of the question (e.g., Q: How many people will come today at the seminar? Corrective Answer: there will be no seminar). For more on the semantics of questions in which the aforementioned distinctions are made, see Cross & Roelofsen (2016), and the literature referred to therein.

A last introductory point. Take a closed question like: "Is there life after death?". In normal contexts, the question presupposes that either there is life after death or not, so 'There is life after death' and 'There is no life after death' are the two sole candidate direct answers. What about: 'I can't know whether there is life after death?', 'There is and there is not life after death'? Are these direct answers that are recognized as candidate answer by the presupposition of the question in a context, or are they corrective answers that reject some presupposition of the question in a context? The choice here will not be essential. I prefer to take the two last mentioned answers as corrective ones, for in typical contexts when one raises a question whether *p* (rather than not-*p*) is true, one has *p* and not-*p* in mind as candidate answers, and so to deny the knowability of the answer or to reject the law of non-contradiction is to make moves that go against the typical presuppositions of the questioning state.

[125]In this chapter I will confine my attention to the moment in which doubt and questioning arise. I am therefore trying to capture the bare bones of inquiry, the little dense moments of consciousness which animate our inquiring mind. For a description of different ways in which one can relate to one's doubts, see Batchelor (1990), Heidegger (1966) and Marcel (1976).

[126]Here there would be much more to say about the distinction between an inquiry that is directed towards the very acts of inquiry and an inquiry that is directed outside itself, as it were. Here I am drawing on Franco Bertossa's teaching who has devised a plethora of effective ways of inducing the inquirer to redirect her attention to the very act of inquiring rather than searching for an answer to his inquiry elsewhere. See Bitbol (2014), who is also inspired by Bertossa. Bertossa in turn draws from the Zen tradition: Zen koans also feature dialogues where the monk uses dialogic strategies that help the inquirer to redirect her inquiry upon herself as she is living the very act of being inquiring.

with (or, more aptly, is constitutive of) the phenomenon of questioning. This particular quality we will refer to as the moment of questioning. It is a state where the mind is perplexed.

In the case of open questions there is a sense of openness on a scale of possible answers to be explored. In open questions one rarely can clearly see all the candidate correct answers. When I wonder about the nature of consciousness, I might already have some idea about what the candidate answers might be (if I have thought about the issue), but unless I judge that the only remaining candidate correct answers are a few three or four (in which case, the open question comes closer to a closed question), when I raise the question it is as though I am overlooking an unexplored and unclear landscape.

When I engage in closed questioning I have clear in my mind what the two available answers are, namely *p* or not-*p*. Will I die when my body dies...or not? Here two options are posited, either I die or not. When we engage in closed questioning, particularly when the closed questioning concerns issues that we care a lot about (like death), we might also feel the sense of openness into an unknown landscape that we might experience when we engage in open questioning. For, as the mind slowly abandons the proposition she is doubting about, the apprehension of the fact that there might be many alternatives to *p* lends the mind to new open questioning. 'If I don't die when my body dies, then what happens?' 'What does it mean that *I* don't die? …'.

From now on I will speak of a doubt or a wonder as to whether *p* is true in order to refer to cases of closed questioning, and will speak about a wonder about an issue in order to refer to cases of open questioning. So, a doubt is a case of closed questioning[127].

§5.2   *The normative profile of questioning*

The normative profile of questioning is interesting, because it represents a mental state that is not committal – in that, when one is in it, one is not making a claim as to how things

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127Doubt as the inquisitive mental state of raising a question as to whether *p* is true or not should be distinguished from other phenomena we sometimes describe as 'doubts'. Sometimes we speak of a doubt we might have when we are invited to believe something, or when someone expresses her opinion to us and we disagree with her. Thus, someone argues that the cinema will cost half-price on Wednesdays and I reply that I doubt it, by this meaning that I believe that it does not cost half-price and eventually that I have reasons to so believing. When I want to convey this sort of information, I should not say that I am doubt*ing* that the cinema will cost half-price, for this suggests that I haven't already made up my mind about the issue. A related way of speaking consists in referring to a doubt or to doubts as a reason or reasons to disbelieve some proposition. So, instead of saying that I doubt that the cinema will cost half-price on Wednesdays, I might say that I have my doubts about that, thereby conveying the information that I have reasons to think that the cinema will not cost half-price on Wednesdays. Again, this is not the sort of phenomenon we are interested in here.

are, that is, questioning has no thetic or representational component – yet it arguably gives rise to commitments. This is a sui generis normative profile, when compared to the normative profile of judgment (and of its particular varieties, one of which being suspension of judgment).

In the case of judgment, its having standards of correctness which are tied to the sort of alethic commitments that it generates is explained by two facts: first, the fact that judging is in some sense something that we actively do (instead of passively receiving); second, and crucially, the fact that judgments make a claim about the way things are by representing reality as being in a certain way. The difference between judgments and experiences, as we have noticed in the previous chapters, is that even though they both have a representational component, the former belongs to spontaneity and makes a claim about the way things are, whereas the latter belongs to receptivity and suggests or invites a claim about the way things are.

Questioning is interestingly different from both judgments and experiences because it doesn't represent reality as being a certain way; yet, it is like judgments, and different from experiences, because it belongs to spontaneity rather than receptivity. To question and doubt is to actively engage in some mental activity. Its having alethic commitments – that is, to recall, commitments to take further propositions as true – is not due to its being a state which makes a claim about the way things are; it is rather due to its being something that in some sense the subject does, rather than being passively receiving.

I will now engage again in the method of eidetic variation in order to vindicate the claim that questioning gives rise to commitments even if it doesn't represent reality as being some way.

§5.3   *Questioning about an issue is uncotenable with judging any of the recognized candidate answers*

Suppose I wonder about why there is something rather than nothing. Can I wonder about this while at the same time I judge that God created being from nothingness? No, for by so judging the issue is closed, I have already made up my mind about the issue[128].

128*On pretending to be questioning*. We can ask questions in our *foro interno* without really asking them. This is a puzzling phenomenon. It is as real as assertion in one's mind which is not accompanied by real judgment. Suppose you want to find an experience that constitutes a counterexample to my claim about the incompatibility between doubt and judgment. In order to do so, you will be directed to think about an issue where you have a stable belief that *p* (e.g., your occurrent belief that the feet that you see at the bottom of your visual field are yours) and try to ask in your mind the question whether *p* is really the case. Try. Now, if what I observe in myself applies to you, what happens is a very interesting phenomenon. It is easy to form in one's own mind the question – as if one was almost hearing it – yet, it is hard to give

It is instructive to apply the method both to cases of questions about *old* issues and to cases of questions about *new* issues – that is, respectively, issues with respect to which we have already formed some opinions, and issues about which we are completely open minded. As applied to new issues it is easier to appreciate that wonder about a question where *p* is recognized by the subject as representing a candidate answer to the question is incompatible with judgment that *p*. If the issue is new and I am wondering for the first time about it, I don't have already an answer to it and so when I wonder I do not judge any of the candidate answers. But when we consider an old issue, the phenomenon is at first sight harder to detect. Suppose I come to consider an issue about which I already have opinions. We might think of two scenarios here. In the first scenario I bring to my mind a proposition *p* which I already dispositionally believe and which I then come to judge to be true when I entertain it. While I so judge I can't at the same time raise a question about an issue that makes it an open question whether *p* is true or not. Of course, I might do it if I fail to recognize that *p* is a candidate answer of my question. But if I am cognizant of the fact that *p* is a candidate answer of my question, then I won't be able to raise my wonder so long as I judge that *p* is true. In the second scenario I start wondering about an issue without already judging any proposition that I recognize as constituting an answer to my question. Then, since I already have opinions about the issue, at some point my dispositional belief or dispositions to believe are activated, as it were, and I come to judge a proposition that I recognize as constituting an answer to my wonder. When I so judge I have thereby stopped to wonder.

We can see the same point as applied to doubt in particular, that is a case of closed questioning[129]. Here, again, we might think of two cases, one which concerns an old issue and one which concerns a new one[130]. When we doubt about a new issue, since the issue is new we have no opinion about it yet. In the case of old issues, when I raise a doubt as to whether *p*, my belief about *p* is shaken and for a moment I reopen the question whether *p* is really the case. The doubt might last a very short span of time, and I might come back to

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credit to the perplexity that the question is supposed to express (or actually to be identical with). When I see my feet on the floor and give inner voice to the question 'are these feet really mine?', I am typically merely *pretending* to be raising this question. In fact I am not. It is like pretending to assert something. I can now inwardly 'say' that today is really a nice day, but I might be doing this in a way which is a mere pretension – I am not thereby judging that it is a really nice day.

129   See Schellenberg (2005), p. 96 for the claim that belief and doubt are not compatible.

130 It is important to notice that it is more natural for us to speak of a doubt when we are concerned with a closed question that concerns an old issue, rather than a new one, for doubt is often taken to target one's *previously held opinions*. Also, doubt is most naturally associated with closed questioning which concerns issues of great importance for the subject. In the main text, I will keep speaking of doubt in order to refer to closed questioning in general. If you find it linguistically odd, then take my proposal as stipulative. Needless to say, what matters is the nature of closed questioning, not whether this is the mental phenomenon which we call 'doubt' in our speech.

my belief. This of course happens in most cases since it is often painful to abandon one's convictions (indeed very painful when the convictions matter a lot for the subject). A punctual doubt rarely deactivates one's belief. If the doubt is cultivated and the subject has the strength to push forward the inquiry, then one's previous belief might be removed, if the doubt is sustained by good evidence to think that one's previously held belief might be false. But this is not likely to be what typically occurs[131].

Even if it doesn't matter for phenomenology, we might look for confirmation or falsification of the previous points by noticing the following putative linguistic data (I don't give much weight to these considerations, but I mention them for the reader inclined to take them as decisive).

It seems odd to assert the following:

(A) It is raining, but I wonder whether it is raining
(B) It is raining, but I wonder what is the weather like

In case (B), the oddity occurs only if the subject is cognizant of the fact that the presence of rain is an answer to a question about the weather. The oddity here is naturally explained by noticing that people are sensitive to the fact that it is unintelligible to raise a question while one thinks to possess the answer to that question.

Yet, there is a way of speaking about belief that might seem to oppose my view. Consider

(A') I believe that it is raining, but I wonder whether it is (really) raining
(B') I believe it is raining, but I wonder what the weather is (really) like

Are these odd? I think they obviously are if what one is doing here is just saying that she is judging that p while wondering about it. There are however a couple of cases in which one can speak felicitously using A' and B'. It is fair to say that in most cases one would

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131There are interesting mixed cases. Typically, when we doubt about the significance or relevance of our grounds for judging that p, we can't at the same time also keep judging that p, at least so long as one is keeping in mind the fact that one's judging that p is based on such grounds. Thus, to illustrate, suppose I judge that the Jardin des plantes is in the fifth arrondissement on the ground that a friend of mine who lives in Paris told me so. Suppose further that while I walk towards the fifth arrondissement I am saddled with a doubt about the reliability of my friend. Maybe she is wrong, for, after all, she lives in Paris but she has a very bad memory, and anyway she likes to give her opinion on any matter, so maybe she wasn't really sure about the localization of the garden... Since this doubt takes place in a context in which I am clearly keeping in mind the fact that all I have as a ground for judging that the garden is in the fifth arrondissement is my friend's testimony, I can't at the same time keeping judging what she told to me to be true.

intelligibly and felicitously speak in these ways about her own opinion if she wants to say that she is inclined to think that *p* though she is not yet sure that *p*. It is a way of expressing the fact that one possesses some good grounds for thinking that *p* is the case, while also communicating that one still isn't sure about it and so wonder about it.

Another way of using belief that makes the above cases felicitous involves the report of one's dispositional beliefs[132]. So, consider a person who goes to the psychoanalyst and finds out that she believes that her husband is unfaithful. She finds out this belief of her by observing her behaviour, the things she said to the psychoanalysts, and similar evidence. Yet, she is not fully endorsing her recalcitrant belief, and this is why she can happily say that though she believes that her husband is unfaithful, she is still wondering whether he really is.

So, questioning (both closed and open) seems to be incompatible with judgment, though it might be compatible with dispositional beliefs. If we look at the way in which we speak about doubt, and if by doubt we refer only to a closed old questioning, we will see that it is possible to argue that language is sensitive to fact that doubting is not compatible with judging. So consider

(C) 'God exists, but I am having a doubt as to whether He really exists'
(C') 'I believe that God exists, but I am having a doubt as to whether He really exists'

With respect to (C) the sense of oddity is clear. With respect to (C'), depending on the readings, the assertion might strike us as odd or not. Here is a context which makes it natural to find (C') odds. Suppose people are having an animated conversation about God's existence. People are trying to express their views about the subject matter, they offer arguments for thinking one way or another. There is a person who is forcefully offering reasons to doubt God's existence. So people say to him something like: 'So you do *not* believe that God exists?', and he replies: No! I do *believe* that God exists, but I am just having a doubt as to whether He really exists'. This is a very odd reply. It invites people to wonder whether this person really understands what it means to be believing something or to be doubting something.

There is however another much more common context in which asserting (C') is entirely fine. It is precisely the context of a believer who is entering in the painful process of hesitation about his own belief. This is an assertion that a believer might say to a priest during a confession. Yet, the fact that this is a fine assertion in this context doesn't falsify

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132Coliva discusses many such cases in her work on self-knowledge. See Coliva (2016), (ms).

the point that while one is doubting one is not judging the proposition that the doubt targets. For, what we typically want to say when we say things along the lines of (C') in contexts analogous to the one in which a believer is confessing his painful hesitations to a priest, is that we are undergoing a phase of uncertainty. What we previously firmly believed is shaken by questions to which one is unable to find satisfactory answers. Even though during the process one might keep having the dispositional belief that, say, God exists, this doesn't mean that in the very moment in which the doubt occurs one is also judging that God exists.

Moon (2017b) argues that belief is compatible with doubt on the basis of such linguistic evidence.

"Consider that

(11) "Fred believes that it will rain tomorrow, although he has a little bit of doubt that it will."

(12) "Fred believes that it will rain tomorrow, although he has some doubt that it will."

are consistent. Not only are they possibly true; it also seems that Fred could *rationally* believe and *rationally* have some (or a little) doubt". Moon (2017).

This is a further instance in which linguistic analysis, when performed in a context where one is not paying attention to phenomenology itself leads our theorizing astray. There is a very natural understanding of (11) and (12) that make them compatible with mine. What one is saying in asserting them is that one has some evidence for thinking that it might not be raining tomorrow. Or maybe one is communicating that he has some evidence not to take as fully convincing the considerations one is relying on in order to assess whether it will rain tomorrow or not. Either way, this doesn't show that it is possible, while one is having a doubt as to whether it will rain tomorrow, to also judge that it will. Moreover, this use of doubt – 'having *some* doubt' – naturally suggests a reading which doesn't refer to the very act of doubting – understood, as I do here, as being an act of questioning – but rather to judgments or beliefs about grounds. This is another phenomenon which is easily conflated with doubt, for, as we are going to see in the next paragraph, questioning commits one to truths about grounds, though questioning is not reducible to these commitments.

§5.4   *Questioning about an issue is uncotenable with judging that there are conclusive grounds*

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Here we touch a very important point that lets us see the intimate connection between questioning and our quest for certainty. We have seen that a question about *p* – or about an issue involving *p* as a candidate recognized answer – is incompatible with judging that *p* is true. Given the normative profile of judgment, this has further important consequences.

Let us first look at questioning from some distance. Why is it that we raise questions? Because we want to discover the truth, we want answers about issues we are interested in. But if we want this it is of course because we take it that we don't already have an answer to these questions. Why is it that we doubt? Because we don't want to be mislead into judging what is false. And we don't want to judge falsely because we want to judge truly. Thus, when doubting whether *p* is really true one is displaying the fact that she is not yet certain about whether *p* is the case – though she is inclined to judge that it is the case, and might have a strong dispositional belief that *p*. When one doubts about *p* the fate of *p* is open again. In so doing we are presupposing that *p* might be false in two senses. Metaphysically, we take it that the world might be such that *p* is not the case. Epistemically, we take it that we are not yet in a position to exclude that *p* is false.

These platitudinous observations are confirmed if we try to look at what happens when we engage in both open and close questioning. When I am doubting as to whether *p* is really true, I can't at very same time comprehendingly judge that I have conclusive grounds for believing *p*. For, if I so judge, then I take it that it is not possible for *p* to be false. Relatedly, while I doubt whether *p* is really true, I can't judge that it is not the case that *p* might be false. The same applies to wonder. When I wonder about an issue, I can't at the same time judge that I have conclusive grounds for a proposition that I recognize as being an answer to my question. For, by so judging, I have already settled the issue I am supposed to be wondering about.

What about might-judgments? When I wonder about an issue, I can at the same time judge that *some* of the initially candidate propositions are in fact false – and that it is not the case that they might be true. However, there are some judgments that it is not intelligible, hence possible for me to make. So, I can't at the same time wonder about an issue and judge that a given candidate answer to my question can't be wrong. I can't judge that it is not the case that it might be false. For, by comprehendingly so judging I am thereby also judging that that proposition is true. Similarly, unless I am facing a question which has no answer[133], I can't judge with respect to all candidate answers to the question

133See Chapter IV, §4.7 for the discussion of the distinction between ignorance and knowledge that one is

(except one) that it is not the case that they might be true and that these are all and the only candidate answers to the question. There are many other combinations of uncotenability claims that can be described, but this much I hope that gives the fundamental cases that help in figuring out all the others.

Both a question about an issue and doubt about *p* can be held in the following circumstances. I can wonder about an issue even if I judge that there are *some* grounds (though not conclusive ones) for (or against) a recognized candidate answer. I can also doubt about *p* while I judge that there are *some* grounds for/against *p*, and this is normal since doubt typically targets a proposition we already believe or are strongly inclined to believe.

These uncotenability claims ground claims about commitments. When I doubt about *p* I am committed to judge that *p* might be false (and also that it might be true, and the same applies to not-*p*). Relatedly, when I doubt about *p* I am committed to refrain from judging that I have conclusive grounds for *p* (the same applies to not-*p*). Similarly, when I wonder about an issue, I am committed to take it that the candidate answers might be false (and true, otherwise they wouldn't even be considered as candidate answers). Relatedly, for any recognized candidate answer, I am committed to take it that I have no conclusive ground for judging it to be true.

However, notice that a question about an issue where *p* is a recognized candidate answer and a doubt about *p* are not committed to there being in principle conclusive grounds for *p* (we might be facing an issue where suspension of judgment ends up being the right attitude). Moreover, they are not even committed to there being in principle grounds at all for *p*.

These points about incompatibility and commitments highlight the connection between questioning and certainty. When I wonder about an issue I can't also take myself to be certain that one candidate answer is true. When I doubt about *p* I can't also take myself to be certain that *p*. Conversely, if I take myself to be certain that *p*, then I can't be wondering about an issue where *p* is a recognized candidate answer to the question. And if I take myself to be certain that *p*, then I can't be doubting whether *p* is the case. Questioning and judgment mutually excludes each other.

Again, linguistic practice seems to reflect these facts. Consider the following:

(D) 'It is certain that it is raining, but I am wondering whether it is raining'[134]

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    facing a mystery.
134See Stanley (2011), p. 42, for a discussion of similar assertions having to do with knowledge and wonder

(E) 'It is certain that it is raining, but I am having a doubt as to whether it is raining'

(F) 'I am certain that it is raining, but I am wondering whether it is raining'

(G) 'I am certain that it is raining, but I am having a doubt as to whether it is raining'

They all are very odd. A natural explanation is that speakers are sensitive to the incompatibility between the two states and the corresponding commitments[135].

§5.5   *Does wonder about an issue and doubt about* p *commit one to judge that the question and the doubt are correct?*

We have seen that the display of commitments in the case of judgment (and suspension of judgement) is intimately related to the fact that judgment is the sort of thing that can be evaluated as correct or incorrect according to the relevant alethic dimension of evaluation. Open questions and doubts might naturally be evaluated as correct and incorrect as well, though this evaluative practice is of course less natural than the practice of evaluating judgments in terms of correctness. Maybe the word 'correctness' in connection with open questions and doubts is not a word we find ourselves comfortable with. This is maybe due to the fact that correctness is predicated of judgments when they are true and to experiences when they correctly represent the environment. This makes correctness a property that supervenes on features of the representational or thetic content of a mental state. But, as we have seen, even though it is natural to think of open questions and doubts as propositional attitudes, they are not representational or thetic – they do not represent the world as being one way or another.

There are however related normative notions that are naturally predicated of open questions and doubts – like justified, legitimate, appropriate, rational, reasonable … This fact can't be due to their being representational mental states. It is probably due, I suggest, to their belonging to spontaneity rather than receptivity. It is intelligible to ask: am I justified to keep wondering about why there is something rather than nothing? Am I justified in doubting whether I exist? Since these questions are intelligible, there is a clear sense in which by being in that inquisitive state one is committing herself to the fact that being in that inquisitive state is correct, or justified, or legitimate (here we should let the

ascriptions.

[135] My point does not conflict with the thought that one might at the same time know or have stored conclusive evidence for *p* while wondering about *p*. This is possible if while wondering one is not recalling the possessed knowledge or the possessed evidence. Of course the kind of knowledge that gives rise to these cases is externalist in nature. See Friedman (2015) for a case in which one both knows a proposition and wonder whether it is true.

vocabulary be settled by what we find natural enough, nothing profound hinges on the choice of the word). So, by doubting whether God really exists, I am also committing myself to the fact that it is reasonable to so doubting. Why is it reasonable? Because I am also committed to the fact that I do not yet possess conclusive grounds for thinking one way or another. Were I to knowingly possess such grounds, I would not be in a position to doubt God's existence. Conversely, if I take it that my existence is certain, then there is a fairly recognizable sense in which it is not reasonable for me to doubt whether I really exist. The doubt is excluded by it being taken as certain that I exist.

These notions of correctness or reasonableness do not concern the question whether I have non-alethic reasons to doubt or not to doubt. They rather concern the alethic normative dimension only. This brings us to the next paragraph, which concerns the relationship between non-alethic reasons for questioning and alethic constraints on questioning.

§5.6   *Is questioning responsive to alethic considerations only?*

A *prima facie* evidence to think that it is not so responsive is that it seems to be possible to raise a question at will. Just ask the question. It is not possible to judge at will, and one consideration that is often mentioned in order to explain why this is so is precisely the fact that judging is responsive to alethic considerations only. Since I can raise a question at will, if the responsiveness to alethic considerations only is what explains the impossibility of judging at will, then we have evidence to think that questioning is not responsive to alethic considerations only.

Moreover, there is a more straightforward ground to give a negative answer to the question of this paragraph. Questioning simply doesn't seem to be the sort of mental state that can be grounded on evidential grounds. The sort of relation we are thinking of is the act of taking something as a ground for judging something to be true. Questioning, not being a judgment, is simply not the sort of thing that can stand in *this* relation. Open questioning and doubt are not mental states that make a claim about the world. For this reason, they are not the sort of things that can be based *in this way* on evidential grounds. When I begin wondering about an issue, in order to enter into a questioning state, I do not base anything on any ground. There is nothing to be based on ground, whether evidential or not.

Yet, the situation is much more complicated. Even though open questioning and

doubt differ from judgments in that they are not alethically committed, they are alike judgment in that they give rise to alethic commitments. This significantly constraints the extent and way in which a question can be formed at will and the way in which our reasons for questioning can operate. In order to appreciate the interplay between reasons for doubting and the way in which alethic considerations constraint doubt we should distinguish the following four possible scenarios (in what follows recall the following linguistic stipulation: I speak of *reasons* in order to refer to reasons for *action* only (thus reasons are never alethic, but always moral or prudential, if there are varieties of them) and speak of *grounds* in order to refer to grounds for *judging* only (thus grounds are always alethic)– the stipulation will be vindicated in Chapter IX).

(1)   there are reasons to doubt whether p, and there are no conclusive grounds for p.

This is the most common scenario. It might occur for instance when I want (this is the prudential reason) to make up my mind about p – for I still have no grounds for judging one way or another –, and in order to make up my mind I inquire about p.

(2)   there are reasons to doubt whether p, and there are conclusive grounds for p.

I don't know how many cases of this sort there are out there, but in my case I often do take myself to have reasons to doubt whether p even if I know that were I to raise a doubt as to whether p I would have conclusive grounds for it. I take myself to have reasons to doubt whether p precisely because by so doubting I can further appreciate and understand the way in which truth is manifested in particular cognitive performances that put the subject in front of the very fact whose reality is under investigation. Thus, since I care about cognitive phenomenology and want to know what it feels like to have a question, I have prudential reasons to start raising questions of the form: 'is this a question?'. Crucially, by raising it I bring to being the fact that answers it. Or, consider the question whether I exist or whether I think. I have been raising this question plenty of times in order to better understand Descartes, Husserl and, more generally, the way in which certainty works. But I have always taken myself to possess conclusive grounds for so judging, and, crucially, the very moment in which I raised the questions I presented myself to the evidence that conclusively answers it.

(3)   there are no reasons to doubt whether p, and there are no conclusive grounds for p.

This might the case of a religious person who is undergoing a moment of great doubt about God's existence and wonder whether it is not sinful to doubt God's benevolence. She might reason in this way: "am I not doubting Him just because I am feeling bad and unlucky? Who am I to feel entitled to doubt Him just because of *my* suffering?!"

Eventually, this person might end up judging that she should not doubt Him *because* it is morally wrong, even though he keeps judging that God might not exist (thus, he keeps failing to possess conclusive grounds for God's existence).

(4)   there are no reasons to doubt whether *p*, and there are conclusive grounds for *p*.

An illustration of such scenario might be the following. A person is wondering whether it is prudentially fine to doubt of her own existence, and eventually end up judging that it is not – for it would be the cause of great suffering, maybe madness, and no benefit would come from it. Yet, the person has conclusive grounds for judging that she exists.

These combinations teach us something important. The first point concerns the extent and nature of our will in the case of questioning. Questioning at will is possible, but it is constrained by alethic grounds in an important way. Compare with supposition and assumption. I can keep supposing and assuming that *p* even if I am completely aware of the fact (and so judge that) *p* is false. This is just normal counterfactual reasoning. This is possible because, to put it colourfully, supposing and assuming are not moves within the game of truth and so do not conflict with moves within that game. But the same liberty doesn't occur with doubt. I can raise a doubt at will, but *once* it is raised it is hostage to alethic considerations in a way in which supposition and assumptions are not. Thus, *once* a doubt as to whether I exist is genuinely raised, then if I am confronted with what I take to be evidence for answering affirmatively, then the answer makes the doubt disappears. This fact can be nicely experienced if you now ask yourself a question as to whether you are now asking a question. I just gave you a prudential reason for asking a question – you want to understand my point better. And note that you have just been able to raise it, for questions can be formed at will. But as soon as you ask the question, the questioning state is immediately shut down, as it were, by the recognition that what you are doing just is the answer to the question. And, crucially, you are not free to keep questioning whether your are asking a question if you understand that you are in fact asking a question.

The second important point to be noticed is that truth trumps other non-alethic considerations. It is not possible to shut down *in a stable way* a question on the basis of non-alethic reasons, for so long as one doesn't have conclusive grounds for an answer, it would always be possible for one to raise the relevant question. So long as one cares about a given issue even if one tries to persuade oneself that she ought to avoid doubting it, if she cares and she doesn't possess conclusive evidence yet, then it is always possible for her to raise a doubt about the issue, whenever the subject considers it.

Judging that *p* commits to judging that one has conclusive grounds for judging *p* to be true. Does questioning also commits one to judge that there are grounds for questioning? As we have seen in the previous sections, there are no such things as evidential grounds for questioning, because there is no *p* which is represented as being true in wonder and doubt. Yet, as we have also seen, when one is questioning one is committing herself to judge several propositions to be true (and to refrain from judging several propositions to be true). Doubt as to whether *p* commits one to judge that there are not conclusive grounds for *p*. But to judge that there are not conclusive grounds for *p* commits one to have grounds for judging that there are not conclusive grounds for *p*. These might be seen as the grounds that one is committing himself to when one is having a doubt. After all, we doubt because we think that we don't know the truth yet, but if we took ourselves to have conclusive grounds for an answer, we would also take ourselves to know the truth already. The point here is that to doubt that *p* is to be committed to take *p* as dubitable.

So, questioning is committed to the possession of having grounds for questioning in a *derivative* sense, namely by being committed to the possession of grounds for judging some propositions that questioning is committed to, namely the propositions that there are no conclusive grounds yet for any candidate answer to our questions.

This point about commitment vindicates the point often credited to Wittgenstein that doubt presupposes certainty[136]. But my point should be distinguished from other ways in which one can make the Wittgensteinian point that doubt presupposes certainty. One way is to argue that the possession of concepts requires one to make alethic commitments (we must take some propositions to be true in order to possess a given concept), and to add that by raising a doubt I am employing concepts and therefore committing myself to those propositions to which I must be committed to in order to possess the relevant concepts. Thus, by doubting whether there is an external world, I can't also be doubting the fact that an external world is spatially extended, for if I don't accept that proposition it

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136Wittgenstein expresses something like the idea that one can't be doubting something unless one is certain of something in various ways. It is not clear whether there is a single idea there or rather a cluster of different ideas. The important point to notice is the difference between my way of making the point by appealing to the phenomenology of cognition and his way of making the point.
"If you tried to doubt everything you would not get as far as doubting anything. The game of doubting itself presupposes certainty" (OC 115, see also OC 125, 163, 337).
For a defence and interpretation of Wittgenstein's claim that doubt presupposes certainty, see Hamilton (2014), Chapter 11, and the works referred to therein.

is no longer clear whether my doubt has a *content* at all[137]. Another way of arguing that doubt presupposes certainty is by arguing that the circumstances in which doubt might occur are such as to engender alethic commitments. Thus, one might argue that the practice of asking and giving grounds for believing presupposes that some propositions are accepted as true and beyond doubt[138]. A yet further way of making the point is this: it seems that to doubt whether *p* is true presupposes that one's thoughts about *p* make room for the possibility of *p*'s being false, and the most obvious way of explaining how this is so is by saying that one proceeds by presupposing that some propositions are true, namely those propositions whose truth will make it possible for *p* to be false. Thus, if I can doubt whether this experience is an experience of an external world it is because I judge that it is conceivable that there be such an experience completely disconnected from what it is meant to be representing. Or, less dramatically, if I doubt whether it is true that the street I am looking for is on the right after having heard the testimony of a person, it might be because I judge that this person might have desired to give me help just for the pleasure of it, and not because she really knows where the street is to be found. These are instances of scenarios in which one's doubts presuppose certainty in that sense that one's doubt is made intelligible by the presupposition of some truths which are the grounds for judging that the doubted *p* might be false[139]. Finally, some doubts occur in contexts which are made possible by the unquestioned acceptance of some very general propositions. Thus, when I wonder about the exact location of my keys in my house, I can so doubt in the way I am doubting (that is, by thinking of the house as a really spatially extended huge thing in which I am placed) because I take it that there is an external world, for instance. This sense is different from the previous one, for the fact that there is an external world is not itself a positive grounds for judging that the relevant *p* might be false, but rather constitute the framework within which the very practice of appealing to some grounds for thinking that *p* might be false is possible at all[140].

Whatever the merits (or lack thereof) of these strategies, they should be distinguished from the point I am making here about commitments, namely that by having

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137 "If you are not certain of any fact, you cannot be certain of the meaning of your words either" (OC 114)

138 If we generalise the point that "a doubt about existence only works in a language-game" (OC 23–24), we get that a doubt about some issue only works in a language game, and a language game presumably can be played only if some things are taken as true beyond doubt.

139 "One cannot make experiments if there are not some things that one does not doubt" (OC 337).

140 "[O]ur doubts depend on the fact that some propositions are exempt from doubt, are as it were like hinges on which those turn" (OC 341). This is the way of making the claim that appeal to Wittgenstein's conception of hinge propositions. Maybe he would deny that there is a sharp distinction between the last two ways of making the point that doubt presupposes certainty, since he notoriously denies the fixity of hinges.

a doubt I am committing myself to take some propositions as true, like the proposition that the doubted proposition might be false. The main difference, which is going to take central stage in Chapter XII is that the commitments I am talking about are constitutive of cognition, and their constitutivity is grounded on phenomenology. The sort of commitments Wittgenstein is talking about are less formal than mine, as it were, and do not express the normative profile of the basic moves of cognition. In Chapter XII I will highlight the point by distinguishing between empirical hinges – those on which Wittgenstein was focusing – and transcendental hinges – those on which I am focusing.

§5.8   *Questioning is not reducible to judgment about grounds*

We have seen that questioning about whether p is the case commits one to the proposition that p is questionable, namely to the proposition that p might be false (or that one's grounds for p are not conclusive). This might give one the temptation to take a *reductionist* line on questioning and understands it as reducible to judgments about grounds or to judgments about what epistemically might be the case – or about conceptually equivalent contents. But this temptation should be resisted. Phenomenological evidence is, I think, crystal clear in this respect. There is a significant difference between raising a question and answering a question. Ask yourself: is there a difference between question and answer? If you answer, you have already left the questioning state. Whereas, if you are asking the question, you are still questioning and you are not yet answering it. When you answer you make a judgment. When you are questioning, you haven't settled yet how things are. Questioning is not like a suspension of judgment – where you judge that some propositions can't be known (and where the sort of suspension of judgment varies depending on how you understand the modal and the epistemic quality). Suspension of judgment is itself a potential *answer* to a questioning state. Is there life after death? Yes, no, we don't know. Each possible reactions – as well as all the other possible reactions that we have seen in the chapter on suspension of judgment – are different mental state from the state of questioning itself.

Even if one resists the reductionist temptation, there is a connected temptation that consists in thinking that in order to be doubting whether p is the case one should actually have the judgment that p might be false (and maybe even the judgment that p might be true)[141]. My account doesn't require the actual presence of a judgment about grounds or

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141 According to Moon (2017b)'s account of doubt it is a necessary condition for having a doubt about the truth value of p that one has the belief that p might be false.

epistemic possibility. This judgment is not typically there when we raise doubts and question.

§5.9   *Universal doubt as untenable*

Is doubt with respect to all propositions at the same time possible[142]? In a sense, the answer is obviously not, for by doubting I should be entertaining a proposition, and I can't entertain all propositions at once. Yet, there is a way of capturing what one might want to capture in saying that it is possible to doubt all propositions at the same time. It might be possible to doubt whether all the propositions I might entertain are true. One is not here doubting all propositions by doubting each one of them, but she is rather trying to be having a doubt about all propositions by doubting a single proposition – namely the proposition that all the propositions that one might happen to judge as true are *really* true. We might think of this particular standpoint as the one that Descartes was trying to depict when he considered the supposition that there might be an all powerful evil demon who is deceiving us into believing the false. By so supposing, we are thinking of ourselves as possibly being in a scenario such that all the things that we might happen to find true are in fact false.

However, such a standpoint is not reflexively stable because it leads to incoherent commitments[143]. Surely, it is a *possible* one, so long as one is not making explicit to oneself the commitments of this doubt. Yet, the commitments are not co-tenable. If I doubt whether p is the case, then I am committed to judge that I haven't conclusive grounds for p. Hence, if I am doubting whether all the propositions that I might happen to find true are really true, then I am committing myself to the fact that I have not conclusive grounds for any p that I might find as true. But then, there is at least one p which I must judge to be true, namely the proposition that there is no p such that I have conclusive grounds for it. But by being committed to judge this proposition to be true, I am also committing myself to judge that I have conclusive grounds for judging that this proposition is true, namely I am committed to judging that I have conclusive grounds for judging that there is no

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[142] I will put the point here about doubt – that is closed questioning – but the same point can be made with respect to open questioning as well. In the next Chapter I will speak of the pyrrhonist attitude, an attitude which closely resembles that of a universal questioner, both open and closed.

[143] Notice the difference between these two standpoints. One consists in *judging* that all our judgments are false. This standpoint is arguably *absolutely* self-refuting, for it entails that the very proposition that all propositions are false is false. The other standpoint consists in *doubting* whether all our judgments are really true. This doubt is committed to take it that there are no conclusive grounds for any proposition whatsoever, hence it is committed to take a proposition as true. It is self-refuting, but not absolutely so. See Mackie (1964) for the notion of absolute self-refutation and for other kinds of self-refutation. See Castagnoli (2010) for a beautiful discussion of self-refutation in ancient philosophy.

proposition that has conclusive grounds. These are the contradictory propositions to which I am committed by doubting whether all the propositions I will find true are really true. We might put the point here by saying that a fully reflexive agent will not be in a position to hold this universal doubt.

What I have just done is one way to unpack the incoherence of a standpoint of a universal doubter. Here are two others ways of showing the untenability of this standpoint. First, if I am to judge that it is possible that an evil demon is deceiving me into believing the false whenever I believe something, then what should I think of this very judgment? Since I am having it, I think that it is true, but then I am also committed to think that it is false that an evil demon is *always* deceiving me into judging to be true what is actually false, for this very judgment about the power of the evil demon is taken as true. Second, Descartes himself provided another way of showing the untenability of this standpoint, and that is Descartes' *cogito* and *sum*. If I am doubting whether every proposition that I might find plausible is really true, then there is at least one thing of which I can't doubt: namely that there is a doubting going on[144].

We might think of another way of making sense the idea of universal doubt. Namely as a dubitative attitude such that, whenever one is presented with a candidate believable proposition, one doubts whether it is really true.

Here we are considering a very complicated stance. The best way I have to describe to myself in a realistic manner what would be like to be in such a stance is this: whenever one is presented with a candidate proposition to be believed, the subject enters in a state of doubt; the subject has a certain disposition to enter into that state of doubt; the subject is

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144That there is doubting going on is less committal than the contention that *I* am doubting. This is Litchenberg's point. See Zanetti (ms5) for more discussion of Descartes's cogito and Litchenberg's objection. Descartes's move is different from the one that consists in pointing out the propositions to which I am committed by having a doubt. His move rather consists in showing that by having a doubt one is in a position to discover with certainty the truth of some propositions. In his case, then, the doubt is shown as incoherent because one can be certain of some truth. Whereas in the response to the universal doubter that I have suggested the universal doubt is shown to be incoherent because it commits one to contradictory judgments. But this commitment doesn't suffice to make the commitments true. Here we see the difference between two ways in which a view might be shown to be in some way self-defeating. The cogito and the sum are *self-verifying* in that by doubting them one is making them true. Yet they are not *absolutely* self-refuting – it is not the case that the falsity of the cogito logically entails a contradiction. My points was not to show that the commitment that there is a certainty is self-verifying; rather the point was to show that by doubting whether there is any certainty we are committing ourselves to there being some. Here it would be important to work on a taxonomy of kinds of self-refutations and see their relationship with the points about tenability I make here and in the following chapters. Unfortunately, this will have to be done in another occasion (see Zanetti ms). Here is some useful references on the varieties of self-refutation: Fitch (1946), Jorgenson (1953), Popper (1954), Johnstone (1959), (1989), Passmore (1961), Hintikka (1962), Mackie (1964), Bonney (1966), Jordan (1969), Shaper (1972), Ripley (1972), Boyle (1972), Snydey (1972), Feldman (1973), Boyle et al. (1976), Walton (1977), Meiland (1979), Stack (1983), the papers contained in Bartlett & Suber (1987), Boyle (1987), Bartlett (1988), Sorensen (1988), White (1989), Lonergan (1989), Page (1992), Haslanger (1992), Skidmore (2002), Broughton (2002), Bardon (2005), Castagnoli (2010).

not explicitly committed to all propositions being dubitable, because if that were so, he would fall into the previous untenable attitude. So, the subject is not committed to the correctness of his own disposition. He simply has it.

Is this stance tenable? On the face of it, it doesn't seem so, and for the same reasons as before. Whenever one doubts whether p is true, one exhibits some commitments, of which the subject is potentially aware, and whose potential awareness make the doubt intelligible as such. Thus, the view is not reflexively stable: if one makes explicit one's commitments whenever one has a doubt, then one has to judge the alethic commitments in order to keep having the doubt, but then if she judges them to be true she no longer doubts every proposition.

But here is a reply. A universal doubter of this sort could doubt every propositions, though she cannot doubt all of them at the same time. Whenever she encounters a proposition, she has a doubt about its truth value. If she doubts whether p, and this commit her to judge that q, when she is presented with q she will also doubt whether q. So, it is true that when so doubting she will no longer be doubting whether p, but she is not judging anything either! She never judges anything to be the case, even if she commits herself to judge many things, like we do, whenever she entertains a doubt.

Can we really make sense of this stance as a stance that *we* can occupy? This mind will be a relentless free-floating mind than never takes any stance. For my part, I can't make sense of *me* as being in that game. I will discuss further this stance in Chapter VII, in connection to a discussion of Pyrrhonian scepticism.

There is a kind of *methodological* doubt which is however possible. This sort of doubt is in fact widely practiced, knowingly or not. It consists in proceeding *as if* one was not believing a certain class of propositions. A universal methodological doubt will consist in proceeding as if one was not believing anything at all.

Speculating about this sort of doubt can be very useful: it might offer a way to appreciate whether there is an unmoved mover of epistemological reflection, something like experiences or intuitions. So, by so pretending to doubt, one might eventually realise that there are cases in which experiences are enough in order to justify belief in a suitable class of propositions. This claim might of course be challenged in various way. I mentioned it as an example of the sort of work that a universal methodological doubt might be taken to perform.

A methodological doubt which is not universal proceeds by putting into brackets truths that belong to a suitably isolated class of claims. Thus, one might stop relying on

propositions belonging to the empirical realm, in order to see what can be known independently of any empirical information. This methodological doubt is the sort of doubt that, I think, Descartes was really performing in his *Meditations* – also because it is impossible to *be* universal doubters – but this exegetical point goes beyond our present purposes[145].

§5.10   *Doubt, the problem of certainty, and the condition of possibility for its solution*

Let us start by noticing that it seems prima facie plausible that it is *psychologically* possible to doubt *any proposition* in *any circumstance*. After all, we might think, there are no limits to the perversity of the human mind[146]. Moreover, the fact that whenever we doubt a given proposition p we are also committed to there being some true propositions – like the proposition that the doubted proposition is dubitable – does not, by itself, show that it is impossible to doubt any proposition. In fact, the commitments can be doubted as well, though in *another moment*.

It is not obvious then, at least prima facie, that a doubt could not be raised with respect to any proposition. In order to show that there are limits to the psychological possibility of doubt we would have to show that there are special circumstances in which, by psychological necessity, we can't form a doubt. The best candidate such situation is one in which one takes oneself to possess conclusive grounds for a given proposition. More specifically, if we suppose that one is *in presence* of these grounds and their conclusiveness (like when I am aware of the fact that there is experience going on while I ask whether there is experience going on), then it seems that it is impossible to have a doubt for the corresponding proposition.

But let us put this argumentative strategy on a side for the time being and let us proceed under the assumption that it is possible to doubt any proposition whatsoever in

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145See for Frankfurt (1970) ch. 2 for an exegetical account that is sympathetic with mine.

146Since I make constitutive claims about doubt – it is constitutive of a doubt that it is possible to raise it if p is not absolutely certain – I am committed to say that if there are people who have doubt-like states that don't respect my constitutive claims, then they are not really having doubts, but some entirely different mental state altogether. A way of weakening my point will be to relativise it to a human mind that satisfies some suitably specified conditions C for being a *normal* questioner. In order to know whether this relativisation is needed, one would have to do empirical work and check whether there actually are people with respect to which we can't deny that they have doubts, yet their dubitative states are different from ours because of some factors (like illness). I haven't done this empirical research (see Billon (2014) for a philosophically minded survey of psychological literature on doubt and of those capacities that seem implicit in the capacity to run through Descartes's cogito). The question whether we must introduce some conditions C in my constitutive claims hinges on the larger question whether we should understand cognition and its structures transcendentally or naturalistically. As soon as some conditions C are put in the constitutive claim, there appears the spectre of naturalistic relativisation of the features that make knowledge possible (for us!). This is why I am reluctant to so relativise my claims.

any circumstance whatsoever. If this is true, how is it that one can *resolve* one's doubt?

There are ways of stopping a doubt about a proposition that do not amount to *resolutions* of a doubt. A doubt could be stopped due to factors which are completely irrelevant to the question whether the doubted proposition is true or not. Thus, I might stop doubting that the external world exists simply because I stop philosophizing and go have a beer with colleagues. Or I might stop doubting a given proposition because keeping my mind in a state of doubt makes me suffer too much[147].

So the question is not how to just stop doubting, but rather how to stop it in a rational way. One way of rationally removing it is by finding evidence for a proposition and taking it as a ground for judging accordingly. But suppose that the evidence is merely fallible. If it is fallible, then it is possible to *reopen* the question of the truth of that proposition. It is always possible for us to doubt a proposition so long as we don't have conclusive grounds for it. Hence, this sort of rational resolution of a doubt will at best be temporary. If one comes back to the issue, for whatever reason, then the doubt will still be there.

So, what we are looking for is a *definitive rational resolution* of a doubt. Suppose that it is impossible to remove a doubt in this definitive rational way. If it is so, then we also have to concede that certainty is impossible. The impossibility of a rational definitive resolution of doubting is compatible with the fact that we might be psychologically incapable to doubt some proposition. But this impossibility will be *merely* psychological – it would be grounded on some feature of our psychology, and it would not be in the light of the truth.

Can we rationally and definitively resolve at least some of our doubts? The point I wish to stress now is that *if* we proceed by assuming that it is psychologically possible to doubt any proposition whatsoever in any circumstance, then it seems that we can't. This is why.

Suppose I consider the proposition *p*. *Ex hypothesis*, we have the possibility of doubting it, and in so doubting we are asking for a conclusive ground for judging that it is true[148]. (Recall: if one offers a fallible ground for judging, then doubt is still possible, hence

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147What makes one suffer can vary upon many many factors. Take for instance the belief in the existence of God. There was a time during which doubting whether God really exists or not was an extremely painful and courageous performance (see books on doubt in the Victorian England). Nowadays it is arguably less painful for many of us to come to doubt whether God really exists or not. I myself am in a state of doubt when I think about the issue – I neither believe that he exists, nor that he doesn't, I take myself to have conclusive evidence for neither option – but the doubt is not a cause of suffering. The reason is that I do not regard that particular issue as crucial for me, I do not think that any salvation or progress will come from the resolution of *this* doubt.

148Of course, we might judge that *p* is true, and simply refrain from raising the question whether *p* is really true. If we refrain from raising the question, then there is no epistemological problem from the subject's own personal perspective. The question we are addressing now, however, is how to solve the problem

we need a conclusive ground to rationally and *definitively* remove the doubt).

In order to resolve my doubt, I might consider another proposition *q* as a candidate ground. The problem is that I *can* doubt whether *q* is true itself. And if I do, then his pushes the search for grounds further.

Suppose that, after a while, *p* itself is proposed as a ground for some proposition (which belongs to the chain of propositions purporting to show that *p* is true). I can doubt again whether it is true, hence I can't resolve my doubt by relying on *p* itself.

The point here is not just that relying on *p* itself will not remove my doubt since I am precisely doubting about whether *p* is true. The point here is that the simple *possibility* of raising a doubt as to whether *p* or any other proposition *q* is true will *ipso facto* block the possibility for me of relying on *p* or *q* as grounds for resolving my initial doubt whether *p* is true. In order to use some proposition as a ground for judging I must take the proposition as true. But to doubt it is precisely to suspend its truth and to wonder whether it is indeed true.

Suppose that I then try another route for resolving my doubt. I consider *cr*: that circular reasoning is fine (maybe with the proviso: in such and such circumstances).

Now, either *cr* is *used* as ground for judging that *p* or not. If not, then it is completely irrelevant for our purposes, for we are trying to remove a doubt as to whether *p* is true, and this is *my* doubt and so it is me who has to resolve it, regardless of whether there is some external point of view whose perspective is such as to make sense of my doubt as solved.

If *cr* is *used* as a ground for judging that *p* then it means that circular reasoning *by itself* is not enough to resolve my doubt, for it is not the circular reasoning simpliciter that is resolving my doubt, but the judgment that circular reasoning is fine. In fact, the fact that the reasoning is circular doesn't play any role whatsoever – all that matters is the chain of grounds on which I rely in order to judge that *p*, and as it happens the chain includes *p* and *cr*.

Anyway, the crucial problem here is the following: I can ask whether *cr* itself is true. But if I can do so, then I haven't resolved my initial doubt yet.

Suppose, instead, that I consider proposition *r*: that infinite regress is fine (maybe with the proviso: in such and such circumstances).

Again, *r* need to be among the grounds for my judgment, otherwise I won't be in a

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were the problem to be raised by the subject. The point is that *if* the subject raises the question, and keeps inquiring, then, assuming that doubt with respect to any proposition is always possible, the subject will be incapable of definitively resolving one's own doubts – that is, the subject will be incapable of achieving a reflexively stable judgment, and hence absolute certainty.

position to solve my doubt. Yet, *ex hypothesis*, I can doubt *r* itself. Hence we need more.

Suppose that I consider *a*: that to arbitrarily stop at some point the chain of grounds is epistemically sound. But again, since I can doubt this very proposition, I haven't resolved my initial doubt.

Suppose that various externalist proposals to the effect that I am justified to judge that *p* are proposed. Maybe I consider a proposition of the following sort: that it is fine to judge that *p* if my environment is propitious.

Now, one problem is of course that even assuming the externalist proposition to be true, I would like to know whether I am in such propitious conditions. But the pressing problem we are interested in here is another one. Namely that I *can* doubt this very externalist proposition, and so I won't have satisfied my initial doubt.

We might thus think that the problem with all these routes to the resolution of a doubt is the fact that they all try to remove it by relying on a *doxastic* ground, that is, on another proposition with respect to which is then possible to raise a doubt.

But if we move to non-doxastic grounds, then we have the same problem. Suppose that experience *e* is proposed as a ground for judging that *p* and so for resolving the initial doubt about *p*. We are in a position to doubt whether *e* is a good ground for *p*. And when we doubt in this way we stop taking *e* as a ground for judging that *p*. I can't take what I read on the newspaper as a ground for judging accordingly while I doubt whether this newspaper is trustworthy. Hence, we haven't solved our initial doubt about *p*.

But then, there is no other way in which we can come to judge some *p* as being true. The only way is to appeal to some ground, either doxastic or non-doxastic. (See, Chapter XII for an argument for this claim).

The moral is this: if we start assuming that it is always in every circumstances possible to raise a doubt about any given proposition, then a rational definitive resolution of a doubt is impossible. For, with respect to *any* candidate ground for resolving my doubt (that is, for judging a proposition *p* which is the target of my doubt) I will always be in a position to doubt either its truth (in the case of doxastic grounds) or its goodness *qua* ground (in the case of both doxastic and non-doxastic grounds). Since to rationally resolve a doubt in a definitive fashion is to have certainty, the possibility of doubting any proposition in any circumstance entails that certainty is impossible.

In order to further appreciate the source of our problem, consider the following reply that is likely to be already in your mind. Surely, even if we grant that doubt is possible with respect to every proposition in every circumstance, still there is a distinction to be

drawn between rational and irrational doubts. It is plausible to think that some of the doubts that are psychologically possible are not rational. So doubt is resolved when we encounter cases where *rational* doubt is impossible, though still psychologically possible. This reply, however, fails to appreciate the problem. To see why, consider this question: how do I know whether a given doubt is rational or not? When confronted with a proposition, our initial *p*, I am psychologically capable, given the hypothesis assumed here, to doubt it. Then, according to the present proposal, we should be capable of doing the following: to ask ourselves whether the doubt is rational or not. The idea is that if this doubt is irrational (or some further doubt that comes later in the chain of the attempted resolution) then we have solved our initial doubt about *p*. But since, *ex hypothesis,* doubt is always psychologically possible, then we can also doubt whether any given doubt is rational or not. Hence, we can't rely on the judgment that a given doubt is rational or not in order to solve our initial doubt about *p*. We are then back to our problem.

The idea is that if doubt is always possible, then there never is any secure *ground* on which we can rely in order to remove some doubt. As we say, Wittgenstein is right (though not (only) for the reasons he offered) in saying that *doubt* is possible only if something remains still. And we must now add that *resolution of a doubt* is possible only if something remains still – that is, only if some candidate ground for judgment is not itself susceptible of being doubted.

This gives us a very important clue for solving the problem of certainty: the resolution should deny that a doubt is possible with respect to any proposition and in all circumstances. To deny this is either to assert that there are propositions that it is impossible to doubt, whatever the circumstances of doubt might be, or it is to grant that any proposition can be doubted in *some* circumstance, yet insist that there are circumstances in which a doubt is simply *impossible*. The first option is implausible. To doubt a proposition is just to raise a question about whether it is true. This seems to be possible with respect to every proposition, at least in most circumstances[149]. In this respect judgment and question seems to be essentially tied: it is possible to judge that *p* only if I can raise a question as to whether *p* is true, and I can ask a question as to whether *p* is true only if I can judge it to be true. The second option seems much more plausible. Think of the *cogito* – the proposition that *there is thinking now*. Once you have understood what it takes for it to be true, and once you have comprehendingly raised the question whether there is thinking going on, then you simply can't keep doubting whether there is thinking. There are moments in which the

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149See Chapter XII for a defence of the possibility of there being, for any proposition *p*, at least some
    circumstances in which it is possible to doubt it.

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evidence that you are thinking – the fact that you are now raising a question as to whether you are thinking – shuts down the doubt. The doubt might reappear (as we saw, it is possible to doubt at will), but it can't survive the appreciation that you are thinking.

If cases like the one just described are genuine, then rational definitive resolution of a doubt is possible. The case of the *cogito* is one in which given certain circumstances – namely, those in which one is considering the question whether there is thinking going on, one is attentive to the fact that one is questioning, one appreciates that for there to be thinking going on is just for there being precisely what is going on now, and maybe other conditions – it is impossible to raise a doubt, or anyway a doubt that has been raised is shut down. Also, this impossibility is not *merely* psychological, because it is connected and explained by an appreciation of the *evidence* for the judgment that shuts down the doubt. But in what sense is the resolution *definitive*, beside being rational? Since it is possible to doubt at will it will be always possible to reopen a doubt. *Yet*, there is a sense in which the resolution is definitive because one is not only in a position to doubt it again, but one is also in a position to rehearse again the evidence that conclusively establishes the doubted proposition.

I have just described the *form* of a possible view which denies that doubt is possible in every circumstances. This is just the beginning of a resolution of the problem of certainty we encountered in Chapter I. In this Dissertation I won't focus on a complete resolution of the problem, but only reflect on its conditions of possibility – one such a condition is that there be cases in which a doubt is impossible where the impossibility is not just understood as a mere psychological impossibility but rather as a psychological impossibility that responds to rational evidence. Indeed, what I have offered above can be seen as a transcendental argument for the claim that there are psychological impossibilities which are *rational* responses to evidence. The argument starts from the fact that *absolute certainty* is possible – it is possible to have an access to the truth in such a way that we can be absolutely certain of having accessed it. It then argues that a condition of possibility of this fact is that doubt is sometimes psychological impossible. However, it argues that psychological impossibility as such is not sufficient – it might be a contingency of our human psychology that we find some thing to be true in a way that we can't doubt whether it is true. Thus, the condition of possibility is not just psychological impossibility but *rationally based* psychological impossibility. The argument is that some doubt should be impossible *because* the subject is *apprehending* evidence that makes the doubt irrational. It should be evidence that shows to one that she is confronting conclusive evidence for a

proposition. The transcendental argument establishes the conclusion that there must be such evidence. This is an highly significant argument. It describes the form that the source of certainty should take: it should be a rational source that psychologically compels the mind to judge the truth in a way which is responsive to the truth, hence in a rational way, and not merely in a way which is a-rational or even irrational.

This conclusion has a further important consequence: to the extent that cognition is committed to there being certainties, it is not possible for us to endorse in a reflexively stable fashion a theory which makes the conditions for knowledge contingent upon factors which might have been different and such that if they were different they would deliver different truths – in other words, in order to make sense of the possibility of certainty, we should endorse a view which doesn't make the psychological impossibilities that ground certainties *mere* psychological impossibilities, where the relativization 'psychological' can be further relativised in such a fashion that what we find certain is nothing but what *we* find certain, though if we were slightly different we would find certain other things.

This point about the untenability of a standpoint that doesn't make room for certainty can be fruitfully used in order to respond to a powerful standard criticism against any project whose aim is to secure apodictic or certain knowledge. As remarked, whatever we end up judging is based on some ground. Also, as noted, it is necessary that the ground doesn't provide only subjective (or psychological) certainty, but should also provide objective or epistemic certainty. Yet, the standard objection goes, how are we to distinguish mere subjective certainty from objective one[150]. This is indeed an apparently desperate task, but at least we can say that one condition for solving the task is to say that the objective certainty should be grounded on grounds whose comprehension makes it impossible to raise a doubt about the corresponding proposition. Yet, having noticed the previous point about tenability, we have two further resources at our disposal for responding to the challenge: the first is to say that even a critics who pushes the argument with the intent to show that it is impossible to achieve absolute certainty is bound to rely on some ground for making its claim, and if the claim is established with certainty then it is self-defeating, whereas if it delivers mere fallible grounds for the conclusion is open to doubt; the second is that anyway since the very employment of cognition is committed to the existence of certainties we can't hold in a reflexively stable fashion a view which makes it impossible to discover some truth with certainty. This reply doesn't show *how* to individuate grounds for objective certainties by distinguishing them from grounds that deliver mere psychological impossibilities to doubt. Yet, it offers a first response that silences the objection.

150See, for instance, Kolakowski (1975).

Chapter VI

Phenomenology and Constitutive Norms

In the previous chapters I have argued that questioning and judging constitutively give rise to alethic commitments. Alethic commitments are normative phenomena. Thus, the claim defended in the previous chapters is that there are normative phenomena that are constitutive of cognition, that is the phenomenologically individuated activity of asking questions and answering them in the form of judgment based on alethic grounds.

In this Chapter I will argue that if one wants to claim that some normative phenomenon is constitutive of cognition, then one needs to show how the normativity is grounded and exhibited in the very phenomenology of cognition. In order to argue for this claim I will use the case of logical normativity as my example. Then I will come back to the talk of commitments I have made in the previous chapters and explain what are the candidate phenomenological phenomena that exhibit the legitimacy of this commitment talk.

This Chapter is in many ways highly speculative, but it has a central role in the whole Dissertation. First, it defends the contention which vindicates the overall spirit of this work, namely that phenomenology is needed if one wants to defend a transcendental constitutivist strategy. Second, it reflects on foundational issues about what it means to ground normativity in the phenomenology of cognition. There is little work in contemporary literature that recognises the need of phenomenology for constitutivists and that actually attempt to explain how phenomenology can help in grounding normativity, yet if the contentions of this Chapter are right, we need to seriously work on these issues.

§6.1 *Constitutive norms of cognition*

To recall, a transcendental constitutivist is someone who wants to ground the validity of some norm or the truth or specialness of some belief on what is constitutive of cognition[151]. When a transcendental constitutivist arguer focuses on norms, rather than on alethic commitments, we might see the structure of her overall strategy as proceeding

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[151] See Tubert (2010), Katsafanas (forthcoming) for an overview of this strategy, particularly in connection with practical reason. In Chapter XII we will see how people like Strawson (1985), Stroud (1999), and Coliva (2015) apply this strategy to belief, particularly the belief in the existence of the external world and other minds.

along the following steps – though the following structure shouldn't be taken too rigidly but only as a useful tool:

Constitutivity step.	It is argued that some norms[152] are constitutive of some practice or activity.
Inescapability step.	It is argued that the activity is suitably inescapable.
Transcendental step.	Depending on the ambitiousness or modesty of the theory, different conclusions are then drawn from the fact that some norm is constitutive of cognition. To illustrate, can we conclude from the fact that we are unavoidably committed to the validity of modus ponens that modus ponens is indeed valid? Or should we conclude that modus ponens possesses some special kind of justification? Can we conclude from the fact that we unavoidably aim at truth that truth is indeed valuable?
Explanatory step.	Some deeper explanation is provided of why the constitutive claim holds true. Thus, to illustrate, is modus ponens constitutive of reasoning because our social linguistic practice makes it so, or is it constitutive because it is an a priori scheme of transcendental consciousness? Does judgment aim at truth because of evolution, because of a culturally shaped genealogy, or what else?

The work conducted in the previous chapters provides the resources for the constitutivity and inescapability steps of the constitutivist strategy. Particularly, as I will argue in Chapter XI, the work on commitments (constitutivity step) provides the resources for arguing that some epistemic norms are indeed valid (ambitious argument at the transcendental step) *because* they are (weakly) constitutive of cognition – like the norm that a judgment that *p* is epistemically correct only if it is grounded, or the norm that a judgment that *p* is epistemically correct only if it is certain. Also, the whole work on the most fundamental ingredients of cognition – namely judging and questioning – provides the resources to explain in which sense cognition is fundamentally inescapable – because to criticise it or more generally to inquire about it is to engage in it, namely to raise questions and doubts about it and to form judgments about it. Finally, the work conducted in the previous

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152Here 'norm' should be taken as a place holder for some normatively relevant ingredient. So, instead of a norm, a constitutivist might claim that some aim or value or commitment is constitutive of a given activity.

chapters also offers the ground to clarify the idea of transcendental hinges, namely constitutive alethic commitments of cognition, which I will discuss in the concluding chapter of this work.

In order to defend the constitutivity claims and inescapability claims made in the previous chapters I have heavily relied on phenomenological considerations. In this chapter I want to explain in more detail why phenomenology is crucial in order to construct a persuasive constitutivist account of some normative realm. In order to explain why it is crucial, I will focus on a form of constitutivism which is not central in the whole Dissertation, namely constitutivism about logical normativity, the idea that it is constitutive for cognition either to respect or to be evaluated according to some logical norms. I will focus on logic for four reasons: first, this constitutivism has to be present in an ideally complete constitutivist account of the normative nature of cognition, for logic arguably concerns the primary dimension of evaluation of the transitions among judgments, hence I want to touch at least briefly upon it in order to explain why phenomenology is important in that foundational context as well; second, focusing on logic will allow us to see the overall structure of constitutivism about normativity with particular clarity, omitting complexities that will have to emerge gradually when we reach the stage in which I introduce constitutivism about alethic and epistemic normativity; third, it is important to address the issue of the constitutivity of logic for thought in order to give voice to the debate between naturalist and transcendentalist understandings of the mind which I will briefly touch upon in the last concluding chapter; finally, and perhaps most importantly for our purposes, in the previous chapters I have often made claims to the effect that it is impossible to hold incompatible judgments (that is, judgments whose contents are incompatible) while recognising their incompatibility, and this is a claim paradigmatically defended by (strong) constitutivist about logical normativity.

§6.2 *Strong constitutivism about the laws of logic*

Norms can be constitutive for some activity in two main ways: by being *strongly* constitutive or by being *weakly* constitutive. A norm is *strongly* constitutive for some activity if for it to be that sort of activity is for it to *respect* the norm. A norm is *weakly* constitutive for some activity if for it to be that sort of activity is for it to *be evaluated* as correct/incorrect (or good/bad, right/wrong, …) according to that norm. Thus, to illustrate the distinction with the truth norm – the norm that a judgment is alethically correct only if it is true – this

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norm is surely not strongly constitutive of cognition, for there can be false judgments; yet, it is arguably weakly constitutive of cognition in so far as it seems essential for judgment to be the sort of thing that is evaluated as correct/incorrect according to whether it is true or not.

Are there norms that are either weakly or strongly constitutive for cognition? It is quite easy to think of constitutive norms in the case of activities that we have created, and whose act of creation imposed the relevant normativity on some activity. Yet, in the case of cognition, it doesn't seem easy to even understand what it means for there to be constitutive norms. The very idea of a strongly constitutive norm seems mysterious, for, if something always behaves in a certain way, how could the phenomenon amounts to the 'respecting of a norm', given that one can't even fail to behave otherwise? Why shouldn't we then take laws of nature as strongly constitutive norms of nature? After all, nature behaves according to them. What does add the normative property to a mere natural necessity? Weakly constitutive norms don't seem less mysterious: what is it that make some mental transitions constitutively evaluable according to some norm? Is it the way in which cognition itself behaves? If it so, then why don't we have weakly constitutive norms within Nature as well? But if it is not the way in which cognition itself is structured that explains why some norms are weakly constitutive of it, then what else could it be? It seems that if we think of the relevant norms as imposed on cognition by some external source (maybe social conventions, or our conceptual scheme?) then we loose grip on the idea that these norms are really constitutive *of cognition,* rather than *of our conception* of cognition.

I want now to address these questions and problems by focusing on the case of logical laws. And I will start by offering a qualified defence of strong constitutivism about logical normativity. As noticed before, one important reason to focus on logic is the following. In the previous chapters (and in the next ones) I relied (and will sometimes rely) on the claim that it is *impossible*, and not only irrational, to have incompatible judgments. I haven't argued for that claim, and it is now time to do so. If it were possible to judge incompatible contents, it would then be incredible that there are any other combinations of mental acts that are actually impossible. If anything seems impossible, it is to judge contents that are recognized as being incompatible, but if it turns out that it is not impossible, then why thinking that more complicated and less obvious combinations of mental acts are impossible? If we are free to hold recognized incompatible contents as true, then our mental arena must be a quite anarchic place.

To defend the impossibility of judging recognized incompatible contents is then

arguably necessary if there can be any credibility in the overall project of grounding normativity on phenomenology according to the strategy that I have pursue in previous chapters relying on the method of eidetic variation. If it is possible to judge recognized incompatible contents, then why wouldn't it be also possible to have other combinations of mental states like judging that *p* and that there are no grounds for *p*, say? But if all these combinations of mental states are cotenable, then it is hard to see how there could be enough (or even some!) constitutive laws of cognition on the basis of which one might then hope to ground alethic and epistemic normativity. The normativity, if genuine, will then have to come from elsewhere.

My tentative view is that it is *impossible* to *judge* contradictory contents as true just in case the contents are *recognized as incompatible* by the subject. Here is what that means.

First, I don't deny that it is possible to *entertain* – and, in this sense, to *think* – incompatible contents. I might entertain the thought that there is a square circle in this room, and upon little reflection judge that it is false that there is such a square circle because I understand that there can't be any such thing.

Second, and relatedly, I don't deny that one can have judgments whose contents are incompatible. I can judge that *p* and that *q*, where *q* is incompatible with *p*, when I don't understand that they are incompatible. I might judge that Clark Kent is in front of me, and that Superman is not, so long as I don't know that they are the very same person.

Third, we should distinguish two impossibilities: the first is to have two judgments, one in *p* and the other in *q*, where *p* and *q* are recognized as incompatible contents; the second is to have two judgments, one in *p* the other in *q*, where *p* and *q* are not incompatible, and yet the believer takes them to be incompatible. I am claiming that it is impossible to judge that *p* and to judge that *q* at the same time when the contents *p* and *q* are recognized as incompatible. My claim is primarily meant to apply to cases where the contents actually are incompatible, and not merely taken as incompatible by the subject. I think that the cases in which the contents are incompatible are the central ones, for in those cases the impossibility to have both judgments involves a *responsiveness* to the incompatibility of the contents to be judged, whereas in the case in which the contents are not incompatible, the incapacity, if any, of the subject to judge both of them cannot be explained by reference to the subject's responsiveness to the incompatibility between contents. For the sake of simplicity, I will hereafter assume that when I deal with uncotenable judgments their uncotenability involves a responsiveness to the actual incompatibility of the contents entertained. I will leave it as an open question whether

taking some contents to be incompatible is sufficient to generate uncotenability between mental states.

Fourth, though I can't judge as *true* contents that I recognize as being incompatible, I can judge that they can't be true at the same time. I can judge that it is false that there is a square circle here. Here the content of my judgment is *that it is false that there is a square circle*, but there is no incompatibility involved in the ascription made with this judgment.

Fifth, I am here assuming that there are no states of rejection. All there is is judgment, and what we call rejection can be understood in terms of judgment to the effect that things are not in a certain way, or that it is false that things are in a certain way. This is a claim about philosophy of mind, more precisely about the phenomenology of cognition. I will assume this view here, though nothing will substantially change if you think that rejection is a further sui generis mental act.

Sixth, when I claim that it is impossible to judge contents that are recognized as being incompatible I do not mean to imply that it is necessary for a subject to possess the concept of incompatibility or contradiction or anyway to bring to bear such concepts in the mental event that consists in entertaining a contradictory proposition and eventually conclude that it can't be true. When I consider whether there is a square circle in the world, I don't need to possess or rely on the concept of incompatibility in order to realise that it can't be true that there is such a thing. All I need to do is to understand that for a thing to be square requires that it is not round, and the other way around. The concept of incompatibility might then be used in order to articulate this bit of understanding, but one needs not use it in order to recognize that something can't be round and square at the same time. Relatedly, and *a fortiori,* in order to recognize that some contents are incompatible in the relevant sense, one needs not *judge* that they are incompatible. It is enough to *understand* it, and we need not understand understanding as being some form of judgment.

The main argument for this view, though by no means the only one, is phenomenological: I submit that once the relevant restrictions are carefully made, none of us is capable of judging recognized incompatible contents to be true at the same time[153].

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153 Upton (1982) argues on the basis of introspection that judging contradictions is impossible. Priest (2005) comments Upton's view as follows: "The unsatisfactoriness of trying to establish psychological laws in this way hardly needs to be laboured". Footnote 9. However, if we are talking about laws about the way things appear, then the appeal introspective evidence is unavoidable – you can't appeal to third personal evidence alone, for you can decide whether the third-personal evidence bears on the issue only if you establish that it corresponds to the relevant phenomena as first-personally, that is, phenomenologically, individuated. Also, Priest's remark is unfair, given that his main argument for the possibility of judging contradictions is, as he says, based on his own experience. If the point is, however, that it is fine to rely on experience in order to falsify an empirical psychological generalisation whereas it is wrong to rely on experience in order to verify it (for there is Hume's problem of induction), then we should insist that there is no other means than to appeal to experience in order to make claims about the way things appear.

This appeal to phenomenological evidence can be further articulated by commenting on examples like the following. Consider again the case of the round square. Upon hearing or reading this sentence, one doesn't need to immediately understand what would it take for there to be a round square. If one however thinks about the issue, then one might eventually understand that if something is square it isn't round, and that if something is round it isn't square. When one understands that, and keeps this bit of understanding before one's mind, one can't comprehendingly judge that there is something square and round.

The other arguments are mainly negative: the arguments purported to show that it is possible to believe contradictions are defective. It is now useful to consider some objections to this strong constitutivism and respond to them. I submit that once the main objections are discarded the impossibility claim might start to look very plausible. I will start by discussing a nice recent paper by Jessica Leech (2015). Leech's focus is on the Kantian and Fregean idea that the laws of logic are in some sense the *laws of thought*[154]. She distinguishes[155] three ways of understanding the idea that logical laws are the laws of thought. According to strong constitutivism, one can't reason without respecting them; according to weak constitutivism, one can reason without respecting them, though reasoning is what it is in virtue of the fact that it is evaluated as good or bad depending on whether it respects the laws of logic; according to evaluativism, the laws provide optional standards for evaluation of reasoning. Leech's aim is to defend the idea that the laws of thoughts are *weakly* constitutive.

Before considering her arguments against the idea that the the laws of logic can't be strongly constitutive for thought, we should be clear on what she means by 'thought', for this point is I think responsible for her readiness to reject strong constitutivism. Here is her clarification on this point:

"I have in mind a conception which includes something as minimal as 'entertaining a proposition', as well as more robust thoughts such as 'opining that p', beliefs, propositional knowledge, drawing inferences, and so on. The core idea is that some propositional content should be involved. So, for example, cases which are not obviously propositional, *e. g.*, cases of mental imagery, or trying to remember a melody, will count as cases of thinking in my sense only if they are accompanied by some propositional content. This isn't a very demanding condition; *e. g.*, in trying to imagine a scenario, I may often have a description in mind to guide my imagining, which is propositional in

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Moreover, one does not need to rely on induction in order to make the constitutivist claim: one might rely on eidetic variation or more generally on methods that would support conceivability claims.

154 See MacFarlane (2002) for a discussion of Kant and Frege's views.

155 I have chosen different labels from Leech.

form. If the reader nevertheless takes this to be too strong a condition, then the present discussion should be read as being about laws of propositional thought. I take it that this is still a sufficiently wide-ranging phenomenon to render the laws of such a phenomenon philosophically interesting". p. 2

The problem, in my opinion, is not, as she says, that her condition for 'thought' might be too demanding. Rather, the problem is that it is not restrictive enough in that it groups together very different things. It is clear that by 'thought' we might mean many things, and we surely might intelligibly refer to a phenomenon as wide as that which consists in playing with propositional contents, both conscious and unconscious, dispositional and not, experiential and doxastic. So, I have no lexical objection to Leech, that wouldn't be very interesting. The point is that if we carve our mental reality in the way in which she does we fail to identify a phenomenon which is unified enough and as a consequence we end up missing important differences in the way in which logic can be constitutive or normative for our cognition. Here is why.

First of all, Leech doesn't clearly distinguish between conscious and unconscious thought. My claim about the idea that some basic logical laws are constitutive of thought is confined to *conscious* thought. I have nothing to say about unconscious thought, *if any*. The claim here is grounded on phenomenology and confined to phenomenology. By grouping together conscious and unconscious thoughts Leech is missing important distinctions, as we will see.

Second, and relatedly, my claim is confined to derivative mental acts, as opposed to received ones (see Chapter II, for the distinction between derivative and received mental phenomena). I am here referring to the activity we engage in when we make commitments about how things are. I don't want to claim here (though I think that the claim would be correct) that it is impossible to experience, imagine, dream incompatible contents[156]. All I want to claim is that it is impossible to *judge* contents which are recognised as incompatible by the judger.

Third, and crucially, Leech takes thought as including both the mere act of *entertaining* a proposition, and also the act of *judging* it to be true. But these are two very different kinds of phenomena: the latter is committal, the former is not; the former can be formed at will, the latter can't; the latter must stand in the ground relation (one must judge that p on the basis of grounds that speaks in favour of p), whereas the former can't (I can't entertain p on the basis of grounds that speak in favour of p, for entertaining that p is not

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156Priest (2006), Chapter 3, argues that it is possible to experience contradictions.

to take a commitment as to whether *p* is true or not). As we will see, although her objections to the idea that logical laws are constitutive for thought easily apply if by 'thought' we refer to the mere act of entertaining a proposition, it is far from obvious whether they apply if by thought we mean judgment. I suspect, as we will see, that the apparent force of her objections is based on the ambiguity of the notion of 'thought' that she uses, namely as referring both to acts of entertaining and acts of judging.

Leech objects both to the idea that it is impossible for us to infer invalidly and to the idea that it is impossible for us to think contradictions. She particularly focuses on the latter impossibility, which is the one I am interested in here (though see below for a discussion of the possibility of inferring invalidly). According to the view that Leech is discussing,

"[a]ny purported instance of a thought that p&¬p will violate the law [of non-contradiction], and hence should not count as thinking. The implication is that we cannot even *entertain* propositions with such a contradictory content, but we can" (italics is mine).

As a first evidence for this claim she says that we might count on anecdotal or introspective evidence. But notice that the troublesome implication of the view that she is plausibly taking to be false is the fact that we can't *entertain* contradictory contents. This is surely false, I am not denying it, and introspective evidence (what else?!) can prove the point. However, it is not clear to me that introspective evidence establishes also the *further* claim (that I am making) that *judging* contents recognized as contradictory is possible, and indeed I take it t establish exactly the contrary.

She then offers another argument.

"First, we are often able to recognise our logical mistakes, either by ourselves or through the help of others, and go on to correct ourselves in a reasonable way. Suppose someone makes a logical error, but is corrected. It is plausible to assume that reasonable thinkers are capable of <u>recognising</u> where they went wrong and adjusting their reasoning accordingly. However, if what one does when one makes a logical error isn't even *thought*, how is it that one is able to rationally reflect on what one is doing, and relate it in a suitable way to genuine, logically correct thoughts, in order to correct mistakes and transform one's activity into correct inference? I contend that it doesn't make sense to characterize such cases in terms of two different kinds of mental activity, thought and something else. Rather, this is simply a case of mistaken thought and inference, followed by corrected thought and inference".

We might read it as some form of transcendental argument which has the following structure: first, it starts from a fundamental fact about cognition, namely the fact that we can recognize and correct our mistakes[157]; then, it argues that in order to be capable of correcting our previous mistakes, there should be unity in the *nature* of the states that need to be corrected and the states that corrects them; finally, it concludes that the states we are in when we make logical mistakes should be the same as the states we are in when we recognize the mistakes and correct them. Hence strong constitutivism must be false. Let us now see with some detail each step of the argument.

Let us first see what are the relevant facts about cognition from which the transcendental argument starts. First, we are capable of recognizing that we have made mistakes, either by reasoning invalidly, or by judging contradictory contents, or by having more incompatible beliefs. Here we should clearly distinguish between two main kinds of *mistakes* (I will first confine myself to conscious thought, then I will move to dispositional belief) that *can* occur, and a kind of mistake that, I argue, *cannot* occur:

1)   having incompatible judgments, where this doesn't require that the single judgments have contradictory contents: e.g., I judge that Clarke Kent is in front of me, and I (separately) judge that Superman is not;

2)   Inferring invalidly, e.g., when I move from *q* and *if p then q*, to *p*.

These are mistakes that can occur at the level of conscious thought[158]. However, at that level, it is impossible for one to incur in the two following situations:

3)   having a judgment whose content is contradictory and is recognized as such;

4)   having judgments in contents which are recognized as being incompatible.

One might also think of other ways in which a mistake can occur. This might occur at the sub-personal level, when one (1) has dispositional beliefs in contradictory contents, (2) has incompatible beliefs, (3) or makes invalid transitions (apply *mutatis mutandis* to the case of dispositions to believe). But we might also think of "mistakes" that occur because of incompatibilities between what we judge and what we believe or have the disposition to believe. This occurs, for instance, when I judge that *p*, yet I also have the dispositional belief that *q*, where *q* is incompatible with *p*; or I judge that *p*, yet I also have the

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157See Burge (1996) for another transcendental argument which starts from the very same fundamental fact of cognition, namely our capacity to rationally revise our thoughts, and lead to a conclusion about the nature of self-knowledge and its justification.

158With the possible exception of *some* errors of kind (3), namely invalid inferences. Surely we do make invalid inferences, even when our reasoning is conscious and reflexive. But maybe *some* very basic logical mistakes can't be made when we are fully conscious and reflexive. I will tentatively try to defend a view of this sort below; Wright (2004b) can also be read a defending a view of this sort with respect to modus ponens.

disposition to believe that *q*, where *q* is incompatible with *p*[159].

Now, (1) and (2) are possible mistakes, while (3) and (4) are not, in my view. How is it that we *recognize* the mistakes we make? One natural way is by having judgments to the effect that we have made a mistake. Suppose I judge that there is Clarke Kent in front of me and that Superman is not in town. Once I then learn, in a later moment, that they are the same person, I might remember what I was judging (it might have been ten second ago, as well as one year ago), and judge that I was wrong. By so judging, if everything goes fine sub-consciously, I will then also abandon the contradictory beliefs, if I had dispositional beliefs beside the relevant judgments, and in this way I will have corrected my mistakes. This way of recognizing mistakes applies *mutatis mutandis* both to the case in which one recognizes judgment in contradictory contents and the cases in which one recognises incompatible judgments[160][161].

Now, the question is whether in order for *this* way of *recognising* and *correcting* mistakes to take place we need to deny strong constitutivism. That we need to do so is what the second step of Leech's transcendental argument is supposed to show. In fact, Leech doesn't really offer an explicit argument for that step, but implies one by asking the following question:

"if what one does when one makes a logical error isn't even *thought*, how is it that one is able to rationally reflect on what one is doing, and <u>relate it in a suitable way</u> to genuine, logically correct thoughts, in order to correct mistakes and <u>transform</u> one's activity into correct inference?"

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159 For these sort of cases, see Coliva (2016), (ms).

160 The case of the recognition of fallacious inferences occur pretty much in the same way. I make the mistaken inference, I think again about the issue, and I judge that I have made a mistake. By so judging, if everything goes smoothly, I revise my conclusion, if revision is needed; if it is not needed, I revise my grounds for taking it.

161 The impression that revision occurs otherwise is due to many metaphors that we unwittingly use when we think about our mind. The metaphor of our cognition as the process of building and maintaining a house (Descartes) or the metaphor of a ship that has to be maintained (Neurath) naturally suggest a picture of revision according to which there is *first* the recognition that there is something wrong in our attitudes, and this recognition occurs by actually witnessing the presence of inconsistent commitment, and *second* that something must be *done* in order to put the house or the ship in good order. But this is not how things actually go. The first step is the simple recognition of a new truth (plus eventually the judgment/memory that I judged otherwise), and there is no second step to be made in order to rearrange things right. Things got rearranged by the very recognition of the initial truth – they got rearranged at the first step. To accept the truth is to have made the *revision*, if we want to talk in that way. There is a sense in which there is something else that we can *do* (according to the repairing ship metaphor). The new truth might have deep consequences in our overall picture of the world. It might lead to profound changes in what we believe. In order to generate these changes we should – and this is a natural way of repairing one's own doxastic life – keep thinking about the issue and exploring the consequences. But it will never occur in this process that we will have on the one hand a judgment that *p*, the judgment that this is inconsistent with *q*, and the judgment that *q*. What we will have is, for instance, the judgment that *p* and the judgment that *p* is inconsistent with *q*, plus eventually the memory or the judgment that *q* was what I believed, or what I am inclined to accept, or what I would like to be true, or what I am committed to given other things that I accepted, or things of the sort.

(underscores are mine).

What she seems to have in mind is the fact that for correction to occur some sort of *contact* or *relationship* should take place between the states to be corrected and those that correct the mistakes. This is suggested by her talk of 'transformation'. The imagery is powerful and suggestive – we imagine new thoughts to actively modify through contact old ones[162]. But this imagery is out of place in the case of *conscious* cognition – and maybe also in the case of unconscious ones, if the adjustments are meant to be conscious and *touch upon* unconscious dispositional states. In order to correct a previous mistake I don't need to act on the mistake; I need to form a *new* judgment *about* the previous mistake. And while I form it, the old one is no longer there. Thus, there is no need to think of some contact between correcting thoughts and corrected ones. But then, there is no pressure to think that the states to be corrected and those that correct must be of the same nature. Of course, they might, when they respectively occur (so, when I judge that Clark Kent is in front of me but Superman is not, I am having the same mental state that I have at a later moment when I judge that Clark Kent and Superman are the very same person); but when the judgment about the past mental acts occurs, the past mental acts need not be still existing; and even if they exist, they might exist as unconscious dispositional states, and hence as having a nature that is different from conscious ones.

This is one part of the reply. It concedes that logical mistakes of the sort (1)-(2) can be had. This is compatible with my claim that it is impossible to judge recognised incompatible contents.

Notice, however, that the claim that it is impossible to *judge* recognized incompatible contents can be understood in two ways. One is that there are states or acts that consist in taking some recognized incompatible contents as true, yet these states *don't qualify as genuine mental states*, or something of the sort; the other is to say that there simply aren't any acts or quasi-acts or shmacts consisting in taking recognized incompatible contents as true. Sometimes Leech speaks as if the former was the view of the constitutivist.

"However, the problem with this proposal [my proposal, namely that we correct previous mistakes by making judgments about our past contradictions or fallacies] is that it still isn't clear how the thought *that the proposition that p&¬p is contradictory* could interact appropriately, as part of a rational process, with a mistaken pseudo-thought that p&¬p, if the latter is not a *thought*, but something

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162See previous footnote.

else. If I do something with the content p&¬p, and if that isn't a thought, then it isn't subject to the laws of thought. So what if I also think that the proposition that p&¬p is contradictory? The laws governing my thinking might well require, in the light of this thought, that I reject any thought of the form p&¬p. But according to the constitutive account, if I make this kind of mistake, there is no thought to be corrected. I'm left with my mistaken pseudo-thought, and no logical means to reject it. It may be that the thought *that the proposition that p&¬p is contradictory* can interact with my mistake in other ways: for example, there might be a causal link between this thought and the subsequent loss of the contradictory pseudo-thought. But anything other than a logical relation between thoughts isn't going to count as a rational, logical process of correction. It seems plausible that we should be able to correct our logical mistakes *rationally and logically*, not due to other, perhaps merely causal, processes. Hence we face the problem again, that to account for our rational recognition and correction of logical mistakes, we need to be able to think contradictions"

As it is clear in the quotation, she thinks that a strong constitutivist will have to be committed to the existence of pseudo-thoughts about incompatible contents. But this is not so. I think that she thinks so because she fails to properly distinguish all the ways in which we can make mistakes, and to distinguish the case in which we make a mistake without recognizing it from the case in which we would knowingly make a mistake. So, I concur with Leech that cases (1) to (2) are cases of genuine thought, yet I deny that cases like (3) and (4) ever occur in something like pseudo-judgment. All we need in order to make sense of our practice of recognition and correction of previous logical mistakes is to accept cases (1) and (2) and judgments about previous doxastic deliberation.

I have tried to do my best to defend the claim that it is impossible to judge recognized incompatible contents. Yet, I admit that the impression that we are capable of doing so is very hard to remove. And maybe the impression is right, we can – of course much phenomenological work should be done in that direction[163].

Let us now move to another point which concerns the debate between strong and weak forms of constitutivism about logic, namely the claim that if logic is not strongly constitutivie for cognition, then it is not clear whether a constitutive view of a weak kind can have the resources to respond to a sceptical challenge against logic.

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[163] I have developed the sketchy view about the impossibility of judging incompatible contents within a classical framework. It is interesting to see whether these claims can be reformulated in such a way as to make it compatible within other non-classical frameworks. Particularly, it is interesting to see how the view formulated here interacts with dialethism. I can grant to the dialethist the possibility of judging *some* contradictory contents when we are dealing with special contents; all I am saying is that some incompatible contents can't be judged at the same time when they are recognized as incompatible. The point about uncotenability should be checked on a case by case basis. This is where phenomenological work is important.

As said, constitutivist views about normativity might be either strong or weak. To recall, a norm is *strongly* constitutive for some activity if for it to be that sort of activity is for it to *respect* the norm. A norm is *weakly* constitutive for some activity if for it to be that sort of activity is for it to *be evaluated* as correct/incorrect (or good/bad, right/wrong, …) according to that norm. Here are some illustrations of weak constitutivist views about normativity[164].

(1)   *Weak constitutivism about logical normativity.* Leech (2005) offers a weak form of constitutivism about the normativity of logic, for she argues that our reasonings might fail to respect logical laws, yet she insists that it is constitutive of thought that it is evaluated as good or bad depending on whether it respects some basic logical laws. Kant and Frege might be read as weak constitutivist about logical laws.

(2)   *Weak constitutivism about alethic normativity.* Theorists according to which it is correct to judge that *p* (if and) only if *p* is true can be seen as offering a weak constitutive account of the truth-norm, for they do not claim that for something to be a judgment it must be true, but rather that for something to be a judgment it must be evaluated as correct if and only if it is true[165].

(3)   Weak constitutivism about epistemic normativity. According to this view some epistemic norms – like the norm to judge only what we have good grounds to take as true – might be weakly constitutive of cognition in the sense that for something to be a judgment is for it to be evaluable as justified/unjustified only if it is based on good grounds[166].

(4)   Weak constitutivism about moral normativity. According to this view, for something to qualify as an action at all it must be subject to some moral norm, though it might qualify as an action even if it is a bad or wrong one.

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[164]A weak constitutivism might be confined to a specific kind of normativity, or might be less specific by being about several kinds of normative dimensions. Also, it might be confined to particular aspects of the mind, or it might have a wider scope and concern more aspects. Zangwill, N. (2005) endorses a general weak constitutivsm about propositional attitudes which provides a nice example of how one can take weak constitutivism about normativity as a fundamental thesis about the nature of the mind. His view is that "it is essential to a [propositional attitude] to occupy a node in a network of rational relations with respect to other [propositional attitudes]. Normative Essentialism can be stated even more concisely in only five words. It is the thesis that propositional attitudes have rational essences". p. 3 These normative properties are properties like the following: having that [propositional attitude] is such that you ought to have that other propositional attitude (or you ought to refrain from having this other PA), and so forth. As the arguments in the main texts are meant to show, if such form of Normative Essentialism is not grounded on phenomenology, then it is explanatory wanting.

[165]In Chapter IX I will defend a weak constitutivism about the truth-norm, but I will ground it on a strong constitutivism according to which it is strongly constitutive of cognition that it aims at truth.

[166]In Chapter XI I will defend a weak constitutivism about some epistemic norms.

As I see it, there are two main challenges for weak constitutivism. The first is conditional upon the fact that one wants to rely on weak constitutivism in order to respond to a sceptic who challenges the corresponding normative realm. The problem is that weak constitutivism has not enough resources to reply in a non-question begging manner to the sceptic. Thus, this first problem doesn't target the *truth* of the view, but only its anti-sceptical aspirations. The second problem is more serious (and it is not conditional upon an arguably unnecessary desire to respond to a sceptic) and purports to show that weak constitutivism has no resources to *explain* why the putative weakly constitutive norms are indeed constitutive of cognition. In other words, the problem here is that since we lack an explanation why some norms are weakly constitutive of some activity, we lack the grounds to take the weak constitutivist claim as true. In order to provide an explanation it must rely on phenomenology, or so I will argue.

Let us start with the first problem. Since it is not strongly constitutive of the activity that it follows the relevant rules, sometimes the activity does respect them, sometimes it doesn't[167]. If this is so, then the sceptic attacks as follows: why is reasoning that respects norm N the *right* one, and not the other reasoning which doesn't respect it?

The constitutivist who aims to take seriously the sceptic needs to provide an answer which doesn't beg the question against the sceptic. Obviously, it won't do to say that respecting norm N is constitutive of *rational* reasoning, because whether respecting N is to be rational is precisely what is at stake in the confrontation with the sceptical challenge.

Now, here is how a constitutivist might try to answer this challenge. My aim, the weak constitutivist says, is to *silence* the sceptic. To silence him, all I need to show is that her challenge is self-defeating. And this much I can achieve *whenever* the sceptical challenge is raised in a way that respect norm N. If the challenge is purporting to show that respecting N is not rational, yet it relies on it, then the challenge is self-defeated.

This reply is fine. But the problem is that the constitutivist strategy so far has just provided what we might call a *temporary* response to a sceptical challenge as to whether respecting N is rational. For, the constitutivist reply so far consists in considering the various sceptical challenges that are actually produced against N, and see whether they rely on N or not. If they do, then they are not problematic, because they are self-defeating.

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167 I assume, for the argument's sake that at least *sometimes* the relevant norms are respected (after all, if they are never respected the very weakly constitutive claim that being evaluated according to that norm is constitutive of the relevant activity looses much ground). If this assumption is wrong, however, then the sceptical attack is even more powerful. The skeptical attacks remains alive even if the activity almost always respect the relevant norm. It is enough if it fails to respect it at least sometimes.

Since so far they all do respect N, there is no actual challenge really. The problem with such a temporary strategy is that it leaves open the possibility of a challenge that has the following features: it concludes that N is not rational, and it does so by following other norms. Suppose that it is indeed possible to construct a challenge of this sort (more on this possibility below), that is a challenge that concludes against N without respecting it, that is, by following other norms. Then it is unclear whether the weak constitutivist could have any resources to answer the sceptic. For, ex hypothesi, we can both reason according to N and reason according to other norms that are incompatible with N (they deliver incompatible verdicts). But then, if the reply is made by relying on N-reasoning, it is question-begging. If, however, the reply is made by relying on non-N-reasoning, then the reply is self-defeating for the constitutivist, for it seems that by so non-N-reasoning she is committing herself to the claim that reasoning according to non-N is rational, but the constitutivist view is that only reasoning according to N is rational.

To illustrate, suppose that we are dealing with a rule of inference S that licenses the following transitions:

p,
if q, then p,
therefore, q

where q is the sceptical claim. Here one is using a rule of inference that the constitutivist wants to claim to be invalid. But if the weak constitutivist says that it is possible to so reason, then she has no non-question begging resources to argue against that.

One possible reply for the constitutivist would be to use the very rule used by the sceptic in order to show that scepticism is itself inconsistent. On this ground, the constitutivist would have shown that our resources are such that they show that it is better to reason according to N rather than according to S (the sceptical rule). Maybe this can be done. Suppose that the strategy works. Still it relies on the validity of the law of non-contradiction. How is this law vindicated? Again, either temporarily by means of a self-refutational move, if the sceptical challenge under consideration happens to be accepting the law of non-contradiction. But then, if there is a sceptic who purports to raise a challenge that doesn't use it, the constitutivist will have two options: either to be a weak constitutivist about the law of non-contradiction itself, but in that case the same problem of question-beggingness reappears with respect to that very law; or it might appeal to a

strong form of constitutivism about the law of non-contradiction and on that ground claim that the sceptic is not really raising a challenge but only pretending to do so; but in that case we would have abandoned a global weak constitutivism, and this much would prove my contention that we need strong constitutivism (at least a strong constitutivism about *some* logical norms) in order to silence the sceptic.

Another option is to say that of course when we reflect on S we realise that it can't be valid. But again, how so? By argument, it is circular[168]. It should be by some sort of direct intuition or understanding[169]. This might be correct, but then the sceptic is not silenced by relying on weak constitutivism; it is silenced by relying on an independent epistemological story as to how we know the validity of some rule.

There is another attempt for the weak strategy. It is to appeal to a difference between reflexive and irreflexive reasoning. Reflexive reasoning is roughly the one that occurs when the subject engages in doxastic deliberation, whereas irreflexive reasoning is one that roughly occurs when the subject doesn't focus her attention to doxastic deliberation itself. The idea is that even though N is *strongly* constitutive of *reflexive* reasoning, it is merely *weakly* constitutive for *irreflexive* reasoning. Then it is claimed that when the sceptical challenges are raised relying on rules like S, we can't reason through the argument *if* we are reflexive, for reflexive reasoning always respect N[170], though we can if we are irreflexive. Then one adds that being reflective is the truth-conducive reliable mode of reasoning, whereas being irreflexive is not the reliable one. Thus, the sceptic is disarmed.

For one thing, this move doesn't really preserve weak constitutivism. It might be said to be a weak constitutivist theory because it says that reasoning in general (be that reflexive or irreflexive) can occur without respecting R, yet the price for so saying is that one has made a strong metaphysical distinction between reflexive and irreflexive reasoning. And with respect to the former strong constitutivism is true. Thus, despite superficial reasons of labelling, the resulting view is indeed a form of strong constitutivism, though it makes room for irreflexive non-N-respecting reasoning.

But there is another major problem for this view: namely how to distinguish in a non-question begging way between reflexive and irreflexive reasoning. One can't appeal to the fact that reflexive reasoning is rational, whereas irreflexive is (at least sometimes)

168This point has been stressed and discussed several times in the literature on the epistemology of basic laws of inference. See, for instance, Boghossian (2003) and Wright (2004b).

169See Boghossian (2003b) and Wright (2007) against the possibility of knowing through intuition the validity of basic law of inference.

170Wright (2004b) can be read as defending a strong constitutivism of this sort when he claims that modus ponens is a presupposition of any cognitive project that involves reasoning.

irrational. One should appeal to something else.

One proposal, which I think has much to recommend to it and which I will adopt, is to distinguish reflexive and irreflexive reasoning on *phenomenological* grounds. Given that the phenomenological considerations are not obviously question-begging (since they are not normative considerations but merely descriptive ones), one can then appeal to them in order to distinguish between reflexive and irreflexive reasoning.

The problem, as we will see in the Chapters on alethic and epistemic constitutivism, is that the benefit of having a non-question begging distinction on the basis of merely descriptive considerations is counterbalanced by the fact that merely descriptive considerations don't seem to carry normative implications: even if one concedes the difference between reflexive and irreflexive reasoning, and even if one concedes that some rules are strongly constitutive of the former, but not of the latter, why thinking that reflexive reasoning is reliable and irreflexive one is not? Here much work should be done in order to make the point in a non-question begging way. But here is how the answer might go. It is true that we *can* reason in ways that fail to respect N. And it is just because we *know* that we can so reason that we then have the capacity to make intelligible to ourselves the sceptical challenge. But, and this is the crucial bit, when we make intelligible to ourselves the sceptical challenge we are reasoning in a reflexive manner and as such we are respecting N. N is thus strongly constitutive whenever we raise the challenge because raising a challenge is to engage in reflexive reasoning. More generally, whenever we seriously evaluate the pros and cons of a view, we can't but reason reflexively. Hence, in a sense, reflexive reason is the locus where *I* make *my* doxastic decisions. It is the locus whose verdicts have authority for me. In a sense, what I think irreflexively it is not *my* thinking, and its verdicts are not mine, they are not endorsed by me, thought they can influence me, and also influence my future endorsements. The legislation of reflexive reasoning trumps that of irreflexive reasoning – or, more aptly, reflexive reasoning is legislative, whereas irreflexive reasoning is not. Consider this parallel with desires. Irreflexively, I might be animated by all sorts of desires that push me in all sorts of directions. But desires becomes *mine* when they are endorsed or authorised. The reflexive rejection of a desire might confront itself with the recalcitrant presence of the desire which keeps determining the psychic life of the individual despite its opposition to it. Yet, it is at the level of conscious reflection that the desire can be endorsed or rejected and thus can become the subject's desire, rather than a force that she passively undergo. The same goes for irreflexive reasonings that culminate in judgment. I might form all sort of judgments irreflexively, but

when I want to *check* my beliefs I do so reflexively, and relfection is the locus where I can endorse judgments as mine.

The most important point here is that there is an asymmetry in authority between reflexive and irreflexive cognition. The sort of source of judgment that *I* authorise is the one that is conducted reflexively. This can be appreciated by noticing that whereas it makes sense that we try to *authorise* previously irrelfexively formed opinions by engaging in more conscious reflexive doxastic deliberation, it does *not* make sense to say that irreflexive reasoning is used by us to authorise the verdicts we reach through reflexive cognition. Reflexive cognition is the locus where *I* can be persuaded of a given proposal as to how things are. Hence, if a strong constitutivism about normativity is true for reflexive cognition, then the sceptic is answered. Even if the sceptic (who can be me) might raise his challenge by reasoning irreflexively, she can't raise it in a way that is not self-defeating when she is reasoning in a reflexive manner

To sum up, weak constitutivism alone doesn't seem to have the resources to respond to sceptical challenges. Only a strong form of constitutivism seems to possess anti-sceptical resources, even though this doesn't mean that it can easily be shown how a strong constitutivist can defend a credible anti-sceptical story. But there is a price to be paid: being strong constitutivist about logic seems to run afoul of the fact that we sometimes reason illogically and irrationally. A strong constitutivist has the burden to individuate a suitably confined activity which does issue only correct performances. Thus, if we like, we might see the discussion conducted so far as showing that there is a challenge that takes the form of a dilemma for those who want to ground normativity in what is constitutive of some practice or activity: on the one hand, if one wants to make room for mistaken moves in the activity, one will loose anti-sceptical weapons; on the other hand, if one wants to have anti sceptical weapons, one must shrink the border of the activity in such a fashion as to find a core which doesn't issue mistaken moves, yet it is difficult to find such a core, and the risk is that it will turn out to be so minimal that its powerful anti-sceptical weapons can only defeat very few forms of scepticism, leaving much of the normative realm to be without a vindication against the sceptic. As we will see when discussing constitutivism about alethic and epistemic normativity, this is indeed the case: many sceptical attacks on the idea that truth and certainty are valuable or normative for us will remain wide open. But this is as it should be, I will argue, and anyway the most significant sceptical attack will turn out to be satisfactorily responded to.

The explanatory problem goes as follows. Weak constitutivism claims that it is constitutive of a given activity that it is evaluated with norm N. But why is it so? Why is it that a given activity is to be evaluated with norm in N in order to *be* that activity? If it is because of our conceptual scheme, then there is an apparently unbridgeable gap between how we think of the normativity of some activity, and whether it is really weakly constitutive of that activity to be evaluated accordingly. The only option to bridge the gap is to appeal to phenomenology. But then, what does the fact that our phenomenology is as it happens to be explain? If it is because of our conceptual scheme, then the previous gap is re-opened again. If it is not, then it is unclear how we should think of phenomenology. To put the problem in other terms: if we think of reality along with naturalistic lines – that is, lines which understands the current phenomenology as being the effect of some genealogy captured by available scientific explanations – then we can't explain why some norms are weakly constitutive of the phenomenology; but if we want to think otherwise of phenomenology, then we don't really know how to think of it – we feel that the alternative to a naturalistic picture would be too mysterious.

Let us first consider an activity which has been created by us: chess. Arguably, the reason why it is constitutive of certain moves made in a certain contexts that they are evaluated as correct or not according to the norms of chess is that we have so decided[171]. We have created a practice and rules governing it. If one looks at the sum of physical movements that all chess players have ever made while playing what we call chess, there is nothing in the physical movements themselves that make them constitutively evaluable in terms of the norms of chess. Thus, this is a case in which the source of the normativity is external from the nature of the very activity whose workings are constitutively evaluated in terms of some norms.

Suppose that this anti-realist model for weak constitutive normativity is applied to some candidate constitutive norms for cognition. This model has the advantage of providing a clear explanation, that is an explanation whose details and workings are easy to grasp and understand. Thus, to illustrate, a creationist of this sort about the normativity of logic for cognition might say that a given transition is logically correct only if it follows rule N because we have so decided, and we all understand what it means to so decide. Or, one

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[171]Let us put on a side the controversial question whether the normativity of rules of chess is strongly or weakly constitutive of it, and let us assume for the sake of argument that it is merely weakly constitutive; nothing hinge on that.

might apply the idea to the truth-norm by saying that it is weakly constitutive of judgment because we have decided that it must be so. These creationist views about logical and alethic normativity rightly strike us as utterly implausible. Surely, no one ever decided that these norms are the right ones; also, what we want to capture when we think of the normativity of these realms in constitutive terms is that the relevant normativity is there anyway, that is regardless of what we decide about these realms. Thus, if we were to choose that a judgment that *p* is correct only if it makes us happy, we would readily find this decision as having no bearing at all on the nature of judgment itself – the decision won't make it constitutive of judgment that it has to be evaluated according to its effects on our sentiment. Yet, in some normative realms this kind of creationist model might be the right one: this might plausibly be the field of *social reality*[172], where our decisions have the power to create the relevant activities for which it is constitutive to be evaluated by the norms we have decided. When such creationist versions of onstitutivism are true, it seems that the relevant activity must be in some sense created along with the creation of the relevant web of weakly constitutive norms[173].

Being a creationist is not the only way of being an anti-realist about a given normative realm. The real enemy to a constitutivist view grounded on phenomenology is in fact this subtle form of anti-realism which doesn't go as far as claiming that the relevant normativity is there because of our *decision* and *creations*, but claims that it depends on our representational means anyway. According to this mild anti-realism – I will call it *conceptualism* – the norms that constitutively govern our cognition are there because of the conceptual resources that we happen to have. Let me illustrate the view by using a couple of examples for the alethic, the epistemic, and the logical domain.

In the alethic domain we have, as an example, a quite popular conception of alethic normativity (see Shah (2003) and Shah & Velleman (2005)) which we are going to discuss

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172See Searle (1995) and (2010) for an account of the way in which normativity in these realms is created. See Searle (1969), section 2.5, and Rawls (1955), section 3 for an introduction of the idea of constitutive norm or rule (as contrasted with, respectively, regulative rules and maximes or rules of thumbs). Interestingly, both Searle and Rawls use the case of games in order to illustrate the notion of constitutive norms. The reason is that it is easy to think of constitutive norms of some activity when they also at least partially *create* that activity; when the activity is there regardless of our creation of the relevant norms governing it, it is harder to make even sense of the idea of some norm being constitutive of that activity. That is exactly the problem for constitutivist theories of normativity of the mind that I am trying to highlight right now.

173What has to be created is not the *brute* reality, as Searle, following Anscombe, might put it, like the physical movements that are made when people play at chess. What is created is their *being chess moves*, and it is created along with the creation of the relevant norms. Again, if you disagree with the examples, this won't matter; what matters is the structural point. So, strictly speaking, we should distinguish between two sorts of creation: creation of something from some raw material; and creation as *counting-as*, that is creation as imposition of some new status, qualification, or role to something that is already there. Compare also with Haugelang's insightful discussion in his 'Truth and Rule-Following', in Haugeland (1998), particularly his discussion of constitutive rules.

in great detail in Chapter IX. According to this view, it is true that we should judge only what is true *because* our *concept* of truth is such as to embed the presupposition that truth is weakly normative for judgment.

In the logical domain the view will be that it is constitutive of our reasoning to be evaluated as correct or not if it complies with, say, modus ponens, *because* our concept of *if...then...* is such as to embed the presupposition that transitions are correct only if they respect modus ponens. Boghossian (2003b), for instance, can be read as defending this version of conceptualism[174].

In the epistemic domain the view will be strictly analogous with the one in the alethic domain, and it will be something to the effect that our concept of judgment and/or of justification are such as to embed the presupposition that a judgment is correct only if it is suitably justified. Since most people in the theory of justification believes that justification is not a natural kind, and actually believe that what we are discovering is the right conceptual analysis of the *concept* of justification, most contemporary theories can be read as belonging to this conceptualist view, at least to the extent that they take the discoveries about the concept of justification to have a bearing on what is constitutive of judgment itself.

Now, this kind of conceptualist view – which I take to be quite widespread, though it is hard to find people explicitly endorsing it *in these terms* and in the context of the discussion of a source for constitutivity claims about norms of the mind – has at least three problems. The first problem, which is connected with the explanatory step of the constitutivist strategy, is that by making normativity dependent upon our conceptual resources, it makes the relevant normative realms *contingent*. We might have had other concepts, (that is, different concepts of judgment, different concepts for connectives, different concepts of truth, and different epistemic concepts). The sort of picture we have of concept-possession is such that they could have easily been otherwise[175]. According to

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174To be more precise, his claim is that inferring according to modus ponens is justified because the ability to so reason is constitutive of our understanding of the concept *if...then...*. However, since according to Boghossian's theory an unwillingness to reason according to modus ponens is an indication that the subject doesn't possess the relevant concept, a willingness to reason according to modus ponens is in turn to be explained by reference to the possession of the relevant concepts, and thus one might understand the view as implying that modus ponens is in some way normative for thought.

175The point holds regardless of how stance on the innateness of our concepts. Suppose that a constitutivist wants to claim that some of the concepts that we possess and that ground the relevant normativity are in fact innate. Maybe this is true, but this doesn't make them any less contingent in the sense that we might have been equipped with different sets of innate concepts.

Nor is the point avoided if one thinks of concepts along with more realistic Fregean lines. The point about the contingency of our conceptual resources is of course easier to appreciate if one thinks of them as psychological capacities. But even if one thinks of concepts as something to which we have an access, the point can be recast in terms of the contingency of our *capacity to access* that we happen to possess. Given the picture of the mind that we have when we think in naturalistic terms, it is entirely contingent

this mild form of anti-realism there is no obvious reason why we couldn't ended up having other concepts than those we actually have and as a result have different weak constitutive norms, or no norms at all. Yet, this point is in tension with the fact that we want to say that even if we had different concepts, the relevant norms would have been true all the same. Thus, even if we had a concept of judgment (or, if you prefer, of shmjudgment) such that it is correct to judge that *p* only if so judging makes the judger happy, we would still say that this will be a *wrong* concept(ion) that fails to capture the real normativity of cognition. Similarly, if we had concepts that made it primitively compelling transitions of the form *S* (*p*, *q* then *p*, hence *q*), then we would like to say that these concepts are the wrong ones to have. Analogously, in the epistemic case, if we had a concept of judgment that makes it accountable to prudential considerations, we would have different concepts of justification that are not connected with the aim of believing truly, and as a result that give rise to norms that are not recognisable as correct from our present perspective. The general point is that the norms in question are not such that we can make sense to a relativistic view of the sort that is made possible by explaining their weak constitutivity by reference to our conceptual scheme.

The second problem is a related one. If these norms depend on concepts, and if our concepts might change or might have been different, then it is no longer clear in which sense these norms are weakly constitutive *of* cognition. For, unless there is some suitable link between the concepts that we have and the kind of phenomenology that we have, then, since the relevant normativity is built in our concepts, it is only according to our own conceptual scheme that our cognition has to be governed by certain norms, but cognition itself might be otherwise than our conceptual scheme supposes it to be. That our cognition is to be evaluated according to a given norm is simply a piece of our overall representation of the way things are, not of the way things really are. It is not that for something to *be* the sort of thing that it is – the phenomenon of judgment, or of reasoning – it has to be evaluated by norm N; rather it is for *our concept of that something* that in order to be *counted* as that thing instead of some other thing it has to be evaluated by norm N. To bridge this gap the conceptualist will have to make some link between our concepts and phenomenology, or rather going creationist about the relevant activity – *cognition* – but cognition is not the

the fact that we have an access to some concepts instead of others.
Of course, the conceptualist will add that even though it is contingent that we possess the concepts that we possess (or that we have access to these concepts instead of other concepts), the contingency is a lucky one: for, as it happens, there is an *harmony* between our psychological resources and the truth (the right concepts that allow us to conceptualise the reality as it really is). This is exactly the article of faith that a transcendentalist who is moved by critical concerns ('critical' in the Kantian sense) is reluctant to accept.

sort of thing, like the game of chess or any other social activity, that can be thought of according to these strong anti-realistic creationist lines. Cognition is there independently of how we think of it; and how we think of it is itself a move within cognition, hence it is impossible to think of the relevant act of creation about cognition, for to be created it would to have been there already. What is conceivable, however, is the fact that as cognition evolves and we form opinions about it (or as a conceptual scheme involving cognition itself evolves), the interplay between cognition and the conceptual scheme leads to a change of the former in the light of the presuppositions that come to be embedded in the latter. This picture will make a link between our conceptual scheme and the phenomenology, but there is a price to be paid, as we will see.

A third related problem is that these conceptualist views don't have obvious resources to explain *why* the concepts that we now happen to possess are the *right* ones. These views are indeed committed to take the concepts that we now possess as the right ones, otherwise we would loose grip of the idea that the relevant norms are weakly constitutive of cognition itself, instead of cognition *as it is represented by our conceptual scheme*. To explain this rightness, they can either appeal to the phenomenology of cognition, or not. If they don't, then it is unclear why these must be the right concepts. If these concepts are meant to be the source of norms the subjugation under which is constitutive of judgment (individuated phenomenologically), then there must be some link between these concepts and the relevant phenomenology. Otherwise the constitutive claim that is embedded in our conceptual scheme can be arbitrary – it might be a *false* constitutive claim.

This moves us to consider the prospects of an appeal to phenomenology in order to explain why the concepts that we happen to possess are the right ones. One fairly natural move is to say that the reason why these norms (and the corresponding concepts) are the right ones is that the phenomenology itself is such as to ground the relevant weakly constitutive norms. To put it in other terms, the *source* of the normativity is not external to the activity of which the norms is meant to be constitutive; rather, the source is internal to the activity itself, and since the activity is individuated phenomenologically, the source is exhibited in the phenomenology itself. Somehow, it can be evinced from the very structural features of the phenomenology of cognition that the relevant norms are weakly constitutive of it. But then, if this is so, there is no longer a need to appeal to our concepts in order to explain the application of the norms. If the phenomenology by itself explains why it is correct to regard some norms as weakly constitutive of it, then we don't need to appeal to our conceptual scheme (and to the presuppositions build therein) in order to

explain why the relevant norms apply. Or at least we don't need to invoke our conceptual scheme if we take a view of the phenomenology of cognition such that it is independent from our conceptual scheme – the relevant structural features of cognition are as they are regardless of what we think of cognition and what our conceptual scheme implicitly presupposes about it. This is the outline of a view which grounds the normativity in the phenomenology of cognition – and that is the kind of view which I defend throughout this work.

Another option – which is a variation of a phenomenologically-based explanation of why some weak norm is constitutive of cognition – is of course to claim that the concepts that we possess actually constitute, at least partly, the very phenomenology that we happen to possess, and that the phenomenology is such as to make it correct to explain why the relevant norms apply. This view has the problem that, again, it doesn't really explain why the concepts we actually possess are the right ones. Since they might have been different, we might have had, ex hypothesis, a different phenomenology, which in turn would have had different (weakly or strongly) constitutive normative profile, or a complete lack of it. But then the question about the rightness of the present conceptual scheme is not answered, it is still there: why thinking that this is the right phenomenology to have, instead of some different one, given that it depends on a conceptual scheme that might have been different? Why preferring a phenomenology (and its corresponding conceptual scheme) that makes it normative for us to judge only on the basis of alethic considerations instead of prudential ones, say? Why preferring a phenomenology (and a conceptual scheme) that makes it correct to say that our reasoning is to be evaluated as correct or not depending on whether it respects modus ponens instead of, say, any of the rule of inference that we now firmly regard as invalid?

Beside this problem, there is an even more troublesome consequence for such a view: it fails to explain how we can give credit to the result of our inquiry. If the norms that guide the inquiry are explained by the phenomenology, which in turn is partially explained by the concepts we happen to possess, then we also are in a position to judge that were we to have different concepts we would have had a different phenomenology and a different set of weakly constitutive norms. If that were the case, we would be playing a very different game. But then, which game is the best one in order to discover how things are? Since the relevant norms under considerations are all connected with a true representation of the way things are (logical, alethic, and epistemic norms), the idea that they could have been different had our conceptual scheme been different puts pressure on

the idea that the norms that we are actually bound to try to respect are the right ones to have in order to have a true representation of how things are. But if this is so, then by being a conceptualist one is occupying a self-defeating standpoint: by judging according to the conceptualist lines, one is at the same time taking cognition as delivering the truth (in that case, the truth about cognition itself!) but one is also taking cognition as the result of a contingent process, which might have been otherwise, and such that had it been otherwise it would have possibly delivered a cognition which would have led us to give credit to other propositions.

To sum up, I have argued that only a view which appeals to phenomenology can make sense of the idea that some norms are weakly constitutive of cognition. Then, we have seen that there are two views about phenomenology: one which makes it independent from our conceptual scheme (and rather makes the latter dependent on the former – that is, it takes the realist horn of the Euthypro contrast), the other which makes it dependent, at least partially[176], on our conceptual scheme (that is, it takes the anti-realist horn of the Euthypro contrast)[177]. I have pointed to a couple of problems that arguably beset the latter view. But much more must to be said about it. (I will come back to this view in the last Chapter, where we touch the opposition between a naturalistic understanding of the mind and a transcendentalist one).

Now, in order to move further, we should ask how we can ground a weakly constitutive claim on phenomenology. We must somehow try to show that it is built in the very phenomenology of cognition the fact that only a given norm N or set thereof (and not other norms) is the one subjugation under which is constitutive for cognition. Now, one way of doing so is to show that it is always true that our cognition respects norm N. But this, besides its own problems (we will see them below), would make one wonders why preferring weak constitutivism to strong constitutivism. One can be a strong constitutivist if cognition always respects N – this is the strong constitutivist claim – and on this basis one can further endorse weak constitutivism. If this should not be the move, something else must be found in the very phenomenology that justifies the weak constitutive claim. What can it be? I will answer to this question in §6.6 and §6.7, relying on the previous work on the normative profile of judgment and questioning. Before moving to that, we should

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176That is, it doesn't make phenomenology so much dependent on our conceptual scheme as falling into an implausible view according to which our conceptual scheme *creates* not only the relevant weakly constitutive norms but also cognition itself.

177See Wright (1992) for a use of the Euthypro contrast in the context of an articulation of the opposition between realism and anti-realism for a given area of thought. It is particularly interesting to see how the contrast applies when the relevant 'reality' to be put in the contrast is that which is typically taken as *contrasting* reality, namely experience itself.

tackle another important explanatory problem which concerns strong constitutivism, and to connect the problem with the importance of phenomenology.

§6.5 *Explanatory problem for strong constitutivism*

If we are lucky enough, some of the norms we think are true are such that we already can't but follow them. The question now is how to make sense of the idea that the fact that our cognition behaves in a given way might be legitimately conceptualised as being a normatively guided behaviour, instead of a simple regularity of nature.

To see the problem, take any candidate law of nature. From the fact that, say, when a ball is hit in such-and-such conditions it always follows a certain behaviour (it moves in such-and-such a fashion), it doesn't follow that the ball is respecting a norm (move in such-and-such a fashion!). Now, suppose that our cognition, when it works reflexively enough, happens to always follow a given rule of inference like modus ponens – we know that this is hardly true, but let us suppose it is for the argument's sake. What is it that bridges the gap between this descriptive fact and the further claim that there is a norm – 'reason according to modus ponens!' – which our cognition is respecting? Here it won't do to appeal to any intention of the agent to so reason, for here the thought that we want to capture is that cognition is respecting a norm whatever we think of it, whether we intend to respect it or not. What can we say to bridge the gap?

Let us take another case, which is going to be our focus in Chapter IX and XI. Exclusivity is the phenomenon according to which judgments are formed always and only on the basis of considerations that speak in favour of the truth of the judged proposition. The corresponding norm is that one should form a judgment on the basis of alethic grounds only. How is the gap bridged here?

A first condition that we must respect if we want to bridge these gaps is to find the relevant ingredient that motivates the transition from the regularity to the norm at the phenomenological level. This is exactly the same requirement for a satisfactory phenomenological grounding of constitutive normativity for cognition that we found in the case of weak constitutive norms: somehow, it must be evinced from phenomenology itself that there is some norm which cognition is respecting. This is not going to be evinced from the presence of some intention to respect it; rather, the normativity should emerge from the very structure of the act of intending, if we are talking about constitutive norms of intentions. Nor is the normativity going to be captured by our judging that we

should respect some norm, for again we want to capture the idea that the normativity is there anyway, regardless of what we think about cognition. So, to make the point with respect to the case of judgment, the normativity should somehow emerge from the structure of the act of judging itself. The proposal should therefore have the following form: somehow, from the very perspective of the cognitive agent, there must be a sensibility to the fact that cognition *proceeds as it should* (strong constitutive normativity) or *should proceed as it should* (weak constitutive normativity). This sensitivity should be transparent in the very phenomenology, as it were. To anticipate, one tentative way to go is to claim that when we cognize we have experiences of rational necessitation or normative pressure which are either accompanied by actual compliance with the relevant norm (when the norm is strongly constitutive) or that pushes us towards making some moves in the game of truth even if we can fail to make them (when the norm is weakly constitutive).

Even if we are persuaded that something like this account is correct, there are still many questions that are left unanswered. One might think that even if there are these experiences of normative pressure, still all that has been given to us is only a richer *descriptive* account of the committal nature of cognition. But from the fact that there is this experience of normative pressure nothing obviously follows as to whether there is a corresponding norm to the effect that one should reason according to the way these pressures comprehendingly incline us to. It is important to appreciate that this is a *further* challenge, and it is *different* from the one to explain how mere regularities can count as respecting a norm. This would be answered by providing a dimension of intelligibility internal to the phenomenology of cognition that explains why it makes sense to think of the railways along which cognition proceeds as being candidate for having a normative status. But it is a further question whether this much is enough to show that there really *is* a genuine norm to the effect that one should reason in a certain way, and not just the *internal* pressure to proceed according to a norm. This further problem will be dealt with in the chapters on constitutivism, in which we will discuss the charge that a constitutivist account of normativity is committing a naturalistic fallacy.

§6.6   *Experience of rational necessitation and commitments*

Having made these general remarks about the interplay between the constitutivist theory of normativity and phenomenology, I want now to tentatively suggest a path that someone willing to ground normativity in the phenomenology can take. As I argued, if we want to

argue that some norm is constitutive of cognition, we must have an account which makes normativity somehow transparent in the phenomenology itself. And this is true both for strongly constitutive norms and for weakly constitutive ones. So, what we need is first a phenomenological indication that we are entitled in speaking of our cognition as exhibiting *commitments*, for then on that basis we are eventually[178] capable of grounding the talk of constitutive norms of cognition – since the presence of these commitments and the sensitivity to their presence is what can be then used to explain the sense in which some norms are constitutive *of* cognition[179].

We can speak of *uncotenability* or *co-impossibility* between mental states when some mental states that can't be held at the same time. And we can speak of *incompatibility* between contents when some contents can't be both true at the same time. Thus, there are uncotenable mental states that are incompatible (like judging that *p* and that *not-p*) and there are other uncotenable mental states that are not incompatible, since they can be true at the same time (like judging that *p* and that *p* might be false).

How can we make sense of the 'commitment' talk? Sheer impossibility doesn't suffice to make sense of the talk of commitment – like sheer necessity doesn't ground the talk of strongly constitutive norms (natural necessities are not norms). Surely, by putting a foot in a shoe I am not committed to refraining from putting the other foot in the same shoe. If I were to try to do so, I would not succeed – so the two physical states are co-impossible. But this co-impossibility here doesn't ground any legitimate use of the commitment talk. The commitment talk got introduced if we move at the level on intentional action. If I intend to put a foot in a shoe, then, if I recognize that both feet

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[178]Notice, again, the important distinction between two tasks: 1) showing that we are entitled to speak about the presence of normative phenomena in experience; and 2) grounding on that basis the claim that some norm is indeed a valid constitutive one. The first task consists in showing that the phenomenology exhibits normative features; the second consists in bridging the gap between the descriptive point that the phemenology exhibits normative features and the *normative* point that there is indeed a valid constitutive norm. Here we are still dealing with the first problem; the second, which touches on the problem of the naturalistic fallacy of deriving ought from is, is a problem that we will discuss in connection with the transcendental steps made in transcendental constitutivist views about alethic and epistemic normativity in chapters X and XI respectively.

[179]There is in fact another form of constitutivism that can ground the claim that some logical norms are valid on the phenomenology without however arguing that the norm is either strongly or weakly constitutive. The idea would be that it is inescapable for us, given the cognition that we have, that when we reflect on the truth/validity of some logical laws, we find this law truth/valid. The idea here would be that even if, say, it is possible to reason illogically, still when we deeply contemplate the relevant candidate logical laws (like the law of non-contradiction, modus ponens, and so on) we can't but find them valid/true. This might be described as a *platonist form of constitutivism* because it builds a platonic element in the phenomenology of cognition itself: when we reason about some issue, we can't but find that thing are one way rather than another because we kind of *see* that these is how things are. Yet, this view needs not to be committed to the actual existence of platonic entities. All it does is to build this platonic element in the structure of cognition – it seems to us as if we are apprehending the truth, and we can't see things otherwise. This view is worth of further investigation, I think, but I can't work on it any further here.

don't fit, I am committed (in a recognizable sense of commitment) to avoid putting the other foot in it, other things being equal, of course. But in this case, we are not merely dealing with brute co-impossibility, there is something more, namely the presence of an intention and the recognition of the relevant co-impossibility.

What is it that we should add in the case of cognition to brute co-impossibility in order to sustain the commitment talk? Should we add some intention in the mind of the agent, maybe an intention to be rational, or something of the sort? Appealing to some intention won't do, for cognitive activities aren't systematically accompanied by some relevant intention to be rational or consistent. Nor will it do to claim that the relevant intention is a background intention, for then if its presence isn't transparent in the phenomenology of cognition we aren't in possession of an account that sustains the commitment talk (and, relatedly, the norm talk) at the phenomenological level itself. What should we appeal to then?

As we have seen, there are two cases of uncotenable states: cases involving mental states that can't be both true, and cases involving mental states that can be both true, and yet can't be held at the same time. In the case of incompatible mental acts we might suppose that what sustains the legitimacy of a commitment talk is the fact that the subject is sensitive to the fact that the two contents can't be true at the same time. Thus, to illustrate, suppose I judge that it is snowing. I am thereby committed to judge that it is not sunny because *I understand* that it can't be snowing and be sunny at the same time. Even if while judging that it is snowing I do not think of the sun, its relationship with snow, and similar connected things, I am still committed to judge that it is not sunny, because I am a competent speaker and understands what sunny means, what snowing means, and so on, in such a way that were I to be invited to consider the proposition that it is sunny I will feel compelled to judge that it is not. Sensitivity to facts about compatibility and the corresponding normative pressure to refrain from judging contradictory contents might be the candidate phenomenological ingredients that can sustain a talk of commitments.

The recognizability of the 'commitment' talk fades the more we think of unobvious incompatible contents or anyway contents that the subject doesn't already recognize as being incompatible. Thus, suppose that someone judges that the animal in the cage is a zebra – to take a well known example. Surely, by so judging, she is also committed in some sense to judge that it is not a cleverly disguised mule. But the fact that this consequence is so remote makes the talk of commitment fading, for when the subject judges that there is a zebra in the cage she might not already think of the fact that if there

is a zebra there is no cleverly disguised mule in the cage. The situation is even clearer if we think of a consequence which the subject is not even in a position to contemplate. Right now, it might be that our mind is not in a position and never will be in a position to understand some propositions and the connection between them and our body of knowledge. By judging as we do, we are also in some sense committed to take some of these propositions as true, and to refrain from judging some of these propositions, yet we will never be in a position to understand them and their relationship with our body of knowledge. In this case, the sense of commitment is even less rooted in our ordinary understanding of the term.

So it seems that the more we consider incompatible claims that are remote from the subject's own understanding of and attention to the logical space, the more we loose grip on the idea of commitment. But there is a core that allows us to speak of commitment in a meaningful and understandable way nonetheless. Here is what it is, I think. We can think of the performances of our mind as being picturing reality. By having a certain judgment, some combinations are excluded. By refraining from making a certain judgment, some combinations are possible again. Thus, by making a judgment, we understand that even very remote possibilities might be excluded. Yet, we also understand that they might be so remote that we can't be aware of them while judging. So understood, in this abstract sense, we can speak of commitments also about very remote possibilities. Yet, typically, what is deliberatively pertinent are only near possibilities, those that are relevant in the relevant context. If sensitivity to the incompatibility between contents is what sustains at the phenomenological level the talk of commitments, then when we consider remote possibilities or simply when some proposition is not present before one's mind, there is nothing at the phenomenological level that anchors the commitment talk. We can then distinguish two ways of talking about commitments: a *primary* talk which is immediately grounded in the presence of a sensisitivity to incompatibilities or entailments between the contnet judged and the proposition under conscious consideration; and a *derivative* talk which is only mediately grounded on the phenomenology, because we can intelligibly speak of commitments to accept (or reject) contents with respect to which, if the subject were to consciously consider them, she would be sensitive to their being entailed by the content judged (or to their incompatibility with the content judged).

So, we have just seen the relatively easy case, those of co-impossibilities which involve having incompatible judgments. What does sustain, if anything does, the talk of commitment in the case of uncotenable yet compatible mental states? What is it that

commits me to judge that there are grounds for judging that *p* if I judge that *p*? Now, one easy approach to this question is to appeal to our social practice of giving and asking for reasons as that which explains why the relevant commitment is in place[180]. But this is too superficial. It is not that we ask for reasons because some social structure made it necessary or relevant, rather we ask for reasons because we need evidence in order to judge something to be the case – it is a fundamental fact about cognition that explains the practice, not the other way around. What is so fundamental about cognition that explains this fact? I offer as a speculation to be further justified the following hypothesis: it is our capacity for questioning. We are capable of questioning – that is reflexive distancing – and a question survives so long as we don't have conclusive grounds for an answer. This is why we need grounds – and, in particular, conclusive ones – because without grounds we can't answer our questions. Since we can raise a question about *p* so long as *p* is uncertain, and since by raising a question about the truth-value of *p* we are no longer judging it to be true, when we take it to be true, we *understand* that we must have grounds if we want to have an answer. So, in this case, the phenomenological elements that sustain the commitment talk are again some sort of sensitivity or understanding and a corresponding normative pressure. The sensitivity is to the need of grounds in order to have an answer and stick to it in the face of invitation to think otherwise (that is, in the face of doubts).

These rough suggestions about the ground for the talk of commitments should be further supported by exploring the phenomenological ingredients that are meant to ground it. To see the initial attraction of the proposal that appeals to phenomenology in order to ground the commitment talk, let us try to imagine what would it be like for a robot or a software to 'think'. If we were to try to imagine it – though of course we can't make sense of its having any phenomenology at all, let alone a phenomenology analogous with ours, – we would imagine a list of operations that occur one after the other, linked by mechanisms which follow instructions built in the software. Imagine that the phenomenological counterpart of what happens in the robot is shown on a screen. The robot receives the input, which is presented on the screen, then the machine follows a rule that 'says' that from the given input some output 'must' follow, and hence be presented on the screen (for simplicity's sake we can imagine that for any input there is a rule which will fix a single output – that is, the 'norms' here are strongly constitutive; if that is not sophisticated enough for a robot, think of it as a bad robot). So, we first see

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180This would be the approach that is followed by those who focus on practice in order to ground normativity. See Brandon (1994), for instance.

$$p, p \rightarrow q$$

which is the input, and after a second we see under the input the output, namely,

$$q$$

Cognition for a robot goes like this: give it an input, and it will give you an output, according to the rules that have been encoded in the software[181].

When we don't pay attention to the phenomenology itself, we might be tempted to think of our own cognition as proceeding in the same way: we receive inputs, and we give outputs, and a list of thoughts pop up in our mental arena. But this is not how it goes. There are at least two things that our phenomenology exhibits of which we loose track if we think of our cognition according to the robotic model just presented: 1) *understanding* of the contents of our thoughts; 2) *sensitivity* to relationship between our judgments and the thoughts we entertain; 3) a corresponding feeling of *normative pressure* to proceed in such a way as to avoid inconsistencies and to adjust our judgments according to what we end up thinking of our grounds for them. What we need in order to ground the commitment talk and normativity on the phenomenology is to find this understanding, sensitivity and normative pressure present in our experience. Here is a couple of ways in which they get manifested.

One very simple instance occurs when there is a conflict in my thoughts or my rational expectations. Thus, I walk towards Sebastiano's office in order to ask him a perplexing philosophical question, I open the door and in the office there is another person, and the things are arranged in a way that don't match the memory I have of Sebastiano's office. Beside the experiential shock, there is also a pressure to revise or reconsider my judgment that I am entering into Sebastiano's office. In fact it is not his office but the one at the left of his office. This normative pressure is the sensitivity to the

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181This simple picture doesn't make room for weakly constitutive norms: there are only, if any, strongly constitutive norms, since for any input there always is a single possible output. More generally, there is no sense we can make of the operations of a robot as enjoying some sort of weakly constitutive normativity. Suppose that for some input, there is more than one available output (this condition is required in order to make sense of the possibility of weakly constitutive norms). Now, by itself, the physical movements of the robot can be described as being subjected to any sort of norm: once we fix the relevant norms, we can then describe the operations of the robot in such a fashion that it makes sense to say that in one case it has failed to respect a norm. The norm will be constitutive for the activity of the robot being the kind of activity that it is only in the sense of a *creationist account of normativity*, namely the sort of thing we do when we create social reality. So, it is not that the relevant norms are weakly constitutive *of* the operations of the robot; rather, they are at best weakly constitutive for (or within) *our conception* of the sort of activity that this robot is exhibiting. The very same activity could have been conceptualised in a different way.

fact that the judgment that this is Sebastiano's office conflicts with the ground for so judging. It isn't simply that the input (the experience) moves me to some output (the abandonment of the judgment that this is Sebastiano's office) in the way in which transitions in robots occur: there is an experience to the effect that I should revise my expectation.

Or take another, maybe better example that involves less distracting elements. Suppose I judge that *p* and that *q* follows from *p*. Here I do have a rational pressure to judge that *q*. The pressure is not irresistible. But the pressure is present, and it explains why my thoughts take the familiar forms that they typically take in these circumstances. I see that *q* follows from *p*, yet I wonder whether *q* is really true, whether it is plausible despite *p*, then I eventually wonder again whether *p* is the case, or I simply accept both *p* and *q* and wonder how else I should see things if I have accepted them, and so on.

When I judge that *p*, it is not only the case that I can't judge at the same time that *p* is false. I also *understand* that it is wrong to so judge. This understanding doesn't have the form of a *further* judgment to the effect that it would be wrong, or bad, or incorrect, to also judge that *p* is false while I judge that *p*. The understanding rather takes the form of a comprehending rational pressure not to judge that *p* is false. In order to see the presence of this pressure, one can put oneself in (or try to conceive of) a situation in which she is invited to consider the proposition that *p* is false when one is already judging that it is true. The invitation should not be thought of as an invitation to check again the credentials of *p* (this is another phenomenon). The invitation should rather be taken as being asking whether one can *also* take *p* to be false if one judges that *p*. If one tries to endorse that *p* is false and also that *p* one feels the pressure not to do so. The pressure is not a blind meaningless feeling, but it resembles more the understanding that it would be wrong to so judge, and that it would be wrong because it *can't* be *true* that *p* and that *p* is false at the same time. This is a case where the pressure is negative, it is a pressure to *refrain from* doing something. And the pressure seems to be grounded on an understanding of the conditions in which things might be like. It can't be the case that *p* and that *p* is false.

Consider again the case where you judge that *p* and you are invited to take notice of the fact that some proposition *q* logically follows from *p*. Here there also is an experienced pressure, but the pressure is positive, for it is a pressure to endorse some further proposition as true. The pressure again is not experienced as an alien pressure. Is not like having one's own body pushed on a street that one doesn't want to take. Here the pressure is a form of understanding that *q* is also true and in this case there is a pressure to judge

that it is, given that *p* is judging as true by *me*.

Both these cases seem to arise because the subject has some understanding of how things should be like in order for them to *be* at all. Things can't be such that it is both the case that *p* and that not-*p*. As a result of this understanding there is a pressure to conform one's judgments to the way things are. Using the case where one judges that *p*, that *p* entails *q,* and feels the pressure to judge that *q*, we might sum up the relevant features of this pressure as follows:

- the pressure is not experienced as an alien force; it is a pressure which is rather somehow experienced as something which *has to* be followed; it is as though one finds judging *p* as immediately compelling, as the thing to be done.

- the pressure is not (or at least not primarily and not necessarily accompanied by) the *thought* that I should believe that q, nor is it a more complicated thought having to do with what I do have to do in this occasion;

- there are two ways in which we can conceptualise the pressure. Here the pressure is not first-personally conceptualised as being a pressure to *judge* that *q* is true. The pressure rather is first-personally experienced as a pressure to *q* being true. Here language leads us astray. It is not that one understands that *q* should be *judged*, but rather that *q* should be the case.

This much is not enough in order to defend the claim that phenomenology itself sustains a commitment talk. Much more should be done in order to properly describe this phenomenon. I hope that these brief remarks can at least give an idea of the sort of work that we should do in order to settle the issue whether there is any ground that justifies the claim that some norms are constitutive of cognition[182].

§6.7   *Uncotenability within the same mental breath*

I have repeatedly made claims about uncotenability, that is claims to the effect that it is impossible to have two mental states *at the same time,* or *within the same mental breath*, as I have sometime put it. I have to say more on this, for there is a powerful objection against the whole work on facts about uncotenability as grounds for commitment-talk that I have made so far.

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[182] Compare the discussion with Korsgaard (2009b)'s description of the phenomenon of rational necessitation. Compare also with Scanlon (2007) and Kolodny (2005) talk of normative pressure. The investigation into the phenomenological grounds for finding constitutive norms of cognition should also take into consideration the Wittgensteinian worries to the effect that mental compulsion (like the famous so-called logical compulsion) have any non-mythological role to play in our understanding of cognition.

The objection hinges on a certain natural picture of the phenomenology of cognition. This picture sees cognition as the succession of punctual isolated mental acts. An useful visual metaphor that can be used to sustain this picture is to think of experience as being something that occurs along the line of time. Time is thought of as discrete, and different experiences arise in different times along the lines of temporal succession. So, at t1, there is an isolated mental act, at t2, another isolated mental act, at t3 yet another one, at t4 the same cognition that was present at t3 is present again, and so on and so forth. Thus, to illustrate, at t1 there is a closed question about *p* (e.g., is there life after organic death?), at t2 there is a judgment (e.g., I am nothing but 'my' organism), at t3 there is another judgment (e.g., I die when my organism dies), at t4 there is a doubt (e.g., is it really the case that I am nothing but my organism?), at t5 I distract myself from the issue and have another judgment (e.g., I want a beer), and so on and so forth. If we think of the phenomenology of our cognition in this way, the claims I have made about uncotenability between different mental states become either trivial or very hard to sustain in a principled manner. If the uncotenability claims are about a specific time – so, if the claims have this structure: *for any time t, at t* mental act *A*, say, is uncotenable with mental act *B* (e.g., for any time *t*, at *t* a doubt about *p* is uncotenable with a judgment that *p*) – then the claims are trivially true. For, at any given instant, there is just *one* cognition that can occupy my experience. The incompatibility claims are therefore trivial and uninformative – particularly, they don't highlight facts about commitments – because any given cognition will be uncotenable with all other cognitions. So, I can't at the same time judge that it is sunny and judge that I like that it is sunny, for there is one judgment at a time that can cross my mind – if I am judging that it is sunny I am obviously not judging that I like that it is sunny, and *viceversa*. But this uncotenability, beside being trivial, doesn't engender any corresponding interesting sense of commitment – by judging that it is sunny I am not thereby committing myself to refrain from judging that I like that it is sunny.

So, if we endorse this picture of experience, we should not think of uncotenability claims as holding at a time. But then how can we think of them? The natural suggestion is to think of them as holding at *intervals*. But does it really help? How many instants make up the relevant slice of time at which we can make interesting and commitment-revealing uncotenability claims?

There are several assumptions about time in this picture, and some of them might be taken to be responsible for the generation of the problem. One such assumption is that for any instant there can be only *one* cognitive act. If we drop this assumption, then

incompatibility claims start to make sense and to be revealing again. So, we might say that at the same time one can both judge that it is sunny and that one likes that it is sunny, yet we might argue for the uncotenability claim that one can't both judge that it is sunny and doubting whether it is sunny. But there is another general strategy to avoid the problem. The problem arguably arises because we are thinking of cognition and time from a third-personal perspective. If we take experience at face value without trying to understand it by using resources from a detached understanding of reality – the notion of discrete instants, for instance – the problem evaporates. Phenomenologically speaking, it is very easy to detect what I have loosely called mental breaths. Here are some examples. Suppose you are drawing an inference from p and $p \rightarrow q$, to q. By drawing an inference here I mean to refer to the phenomenon which consists in first endorsing the truth of a proposition and then the truth of another proposition, then appreciating the logical relation between them, and finally *on that basis* coming to make a further judgment in the truth of the conclusion. This is both a simple and a complex mental achievement. It is simple when compared to the achievement of making a long deduction (with, say, 55 premises), yet it is complex when compared with the simple act of raising a question as to whether p is true. When I deduce a conclusion from 55 premises I am not capable of *drawing* the conclusion *on the basis* of the cognition of *all* the premises and the logical relationship between them. It is not that I have in mind all the premises and *while cognizing all of them* I then judge on the basis of this cognition that a further proposition that is recognized as following from them is true. Rather, what I do is to proceed by means of little steps, that is, I proceed in several more or less self-contained mental breaths. The steps couldn't be as little as many isolated acts of cognition, as we have previously seen. If cognition is understood as the sequence of isolated acts, then cognition becomes impossible. If I don't somehow take into consideration in the *same* mental breath both the fact that a given proposition is true and the fact that it entails another given proposition, there would be no *drawing* inferences. So, proceeding by means of little steps means drawing short inferences, then taking for granted the conclusions and drawing further inferences, and so on and so forth. How complex and long could be a little step? I have no principled answer to this question, and we need not have such an answer for our present purposes. Surely, inferring a conclusion on the basis of 55 premises is impossible. Surely, inferring on the basis of one premise is possible. More fundamentally, a very little step which *is* possible – and that represents the minimal bone of the skeleton of cognition – is the act of taking something as a ground for believing something else. If this act is not possible, then there would be no cognition.

Thus, the uncotenability claims made above are meant to be relativised not to an instant of time, but to what we might understand as little deliberative contexts or performances.

Summing up, in this chapter I have first tried to defend a qualified version of strong constitutivism about logical normativity, by trying to defend the claim that it is impossible to judge recognized contradictory contents. This defence was important in order to sustain some of the uncotenability claims I have made in previous chapters. Then I have explained why phenomenology is needed if we want to make sense of the idea that some norms are constitutive of cognition, rather than being merely constitutive of our conception of cognition. Finally I have tried to show that there is something in the phenomenology of cognition that can be appealed to in order to ground the talk of commitment that I have made in this and the previous chapters. As said at the beginning of the chapter, some of the discussion conducted here is highly speculative in programmatic in many ways. In the next chapters I will try to do some more progress in the attempt to explain how normativity is grounded in the phenomenology. Before discussing this part of the transcendental constitutivist program that focuses on normativity, in the next two chapters I will come back to the part of the transcendental constitutivist program that focuses on alethic commitments, for I will explain how the work on the alethic commitments of cognition conducted in previous chapters help us in reshaping the landscape of contemporary epistemology.

Chapter VII

Global Scepticism and
Pyrrhonian Scepticism as Untenable

In this Chapter I begin a complex argument to the effect that the only tenable standpoint is the one that consists in judging that there are certainties. The argument will be completed in the next Chapter. I will consider candidate alternative standpoints and will argue on a piecemeal basis that they are untenable. In this Chapter I argue that Global Scepticism and Pyrrhonian Scepticism are untenable. In the next Chapter I argue that the standpoints of Monistic Fallibilism (the judgment that all our beliefs are at best only fallibly justified) and Monistic Externalism (the judgment that all our beliefs are at best only externalistically justified), or any mixed standpoint that combines them, are untenable as well.

§7.1   *Standpoints and propositions*

In order to properly understand the sort of philosophical work which I am doing here we should spend some time asking ourselves what is it that we evaluate when we do philosophy. Typically, when we assess *views* or evaluate philosophical *positions*, as we say, we are just evaluating *propositions* taken in abstracto. Essentially, we look at the logical consequences of a given proposition, we look at the evidence for thinking that it is true, and look at other propositions we think are true in order to check incompatibilities between them and the proposition under scrutiny. I say that this is what we 'essentially' do because of course we do many many other things. But what is crucial to notice here is the fact that when we evaluate a philosophical view we rarely wonder about what it takes to *hold* or *endorse* that view.

There is a natural explanation why we tend to be oblivious of facts about what it takes to hold a view: when we are interested in some subject matter, what we are interested in is the truth about that subject matter, and not about our way of apprehending and holding what we eventually take to be the truth about the issue under scrutiny[183]. And there

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183Of course, if the subject matter is mental, like the nature of belief, there is a sense in which we are also interested in the way in which we apprehend and hold what we take to be true, but this sense is irrelevant here. We don't take facts about how we believe things about belief to be important in our understanding of the truth about belief, if not in the sense that these facts are precisely the facts we are trying to

is a simple reason why we take facts about what it takes to hold a philosophical view to be irrelevant with respect to the issue at hand. Pre-philosophically, we regard truth as objective, as mind-independent, as not being reducible or dependent on what we believe. So, to illustrate, even if Hume is right when he says that we are incapable of stopping to believe that the external world exists, this fact about our mental life doesn't have anything to do with the question whether the external world really exists or not, not even with the question whether we can know or not that there is an external world – in fact, this compulsion, if real, to believe in the existence of the external world is typically regarded as compatible with the non-existence of the external world, as well as compatible with the fact that we do not know whether there is an external world or not[184]. This separation between what is the case and what we believe about what is the case typically holds for many philosophical views which we entertain and evaluate when we philosophize. What should it follow about *X* itself (be that free will, knowledge of external world, the existence of objective values, the meaning of life, and so on) from the fact that we can't but believe in such-and-such a manner about *X*? *X* is as it is, the thought goes, regardless of how we can think of it. To accept this much as a default thought is to accept an apparently platitudinous view of the relationship between the way things are and our finite human capacity for apprehending how things are.

There is however also an important reason why we should pay attention to the possibilities of our cognitive standpoint. When we do philosophy we want to *discover* the truth. We want, that is, to come to *believe* what is true. After all, when we say that the aim of inquiry is truth this is of course a shorthand for saying that the aim of inquiry is having true *beliefs*. If we don't pay attention to what it takes to *believe,* we might proceed under the assumption that an abstract consideration of propositions is all we need to do, and that then we just have to believe the propositions that we find to have enough epistemic support. But there is no *a priori* guarantee that this could be the case. Discussing philosophical propositions in *abstracto* may obscure the important fact that there are views which we can't believe or which we can't but believe. These facts are important, because our aim is neither belief nor truth taken in isolation from one another, but *belief in the truth*, and these are facts about what we can or can't believe.

In this chapter and the next I am mostly concerned with these facts about tenability

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discover.

184 Though of course there are approaches to the problem of scepticism about the external world according to which the fact that it is impossible for us to stop believing in the existence of the external world has some bearing on the question whether we do also *know* that there is an external world. See, for instance Strawson (1987), who in turn relies on a reading of Hume's and Wittgenstein's reactions to the sceptical problem. I will discuss these moves in Chapter XII.

and untenability. I want to argue that the only tenable standpoint is the one which judges that there are certainties. In order to so argue I will consider various standpoints that are candidate *competitive* standpoints, and will either argue that they are untenable, or that they are not real competitive standpoints.

In what follows I will speak of a standpoint in order to refer to the cognitive attitude which is representative of a given position or to a combinations of cognitive attitudes, if to endorse the view is to give a particularly dynamic shape to one's inquiry. Thus, to illustrate, if fallibilism is the view that we can have fallible justification only, then the standpoint which endorses fallibilism is the judgment that we have fallible justification only. If someone is a global sceptic, then her defining cognitive attitude will be a judgment that there is no justified beliefs. Sometimes standpoints might be quite complex and dynamic, like the standpoint of a universal doubter who moves from one doubt to the other, doubting every proposition she is confronted with (we saw that standpoint in Chapter V).

In order to visualise things, it might be useful to introduce the following schematic notation with the help of which I will refer to standpoints:

CA(*P*)

Where 'CA' stands for a given cognitive attitude, and *p* for the content of the attitude. The main cognitive attitudes we will discuss in what follows are the following:

J(*P*), namely the judgment that *p*

D(*P*), namely a doubt as to whether *p*

S(*P*), namely the attitude of pyrrhonian silence as to whether *p*[185]

As we just saw with the examples of fallibilism and global scepticism, some standpoints can be fruitfully considered by taking a single cognitive attitude as its defining core or commitment. Other more complicated standpoints might be needed in order to represent more complicated positions that one might want to hold. When a standpoint is defined by a combination of more than one cognitive attitude, we might represent the standpoint as a set of cognitive attitudes ordered in time. Thus, to represent the standpoint of a universal doubter, we might think of something like that:

D(*P1*) *then* D(*P2*), *then* D(*P3*) *then* …

185Whereas judgment that *p* (J(*P*)) and a doubt as to whether *p* (D(*P*)) are *basic* acts of cognition, being *silent* about the truth of some proposition is a more complex standpoint which I will introduce later on in the Chapter. Since I will argue that there is no understanding of pyrrhonian silence to which there corresponds a real possible cognitive mental attitude, I am not here capable in few words to say what basic ingredients are supposed to constitute this complex state.

The temporal ordering is required by the thought that we only live mental acts one at a time[186]. We will see some more of them in what follows.

One cognitive attitude that defines my standpoint is the following:

J(*C*), namely the judgment that there are certainties.

Where '*C*' I will refer to the proposition that there are certainties.

Now, when we think about propositions and standpoints, it is useful to distinguish between two different properties: one is the property of being compatible (or incompatible), namely the property that holds between propositions when they can (or can't) be true at the same time; the other is the property of being *cotenable* (or *uncotenable*), namely the property that holds between standpoints when they can (or can't) be put together in a joint tenable standpoint.

To illustrate, there is one family of *propositions* which are incompatible with *C*, namely all those which entail the negation of *C*. And there are several *standpoints* which are uncotenable with J(*C*). All those standpoints which consist in judgments of some propositions which entail the negation of *c* are uncotenable with J(*C*) – the uncotenability is inherited by the incompatibility of the contents endorsed by the respective defining cognitive attitudes. Interestingly, however, these are not the sole standpoints which are uncotenable with mine. To illustrate, a universal doubter also occupies a standpoint which is uncotenable with mine. This point is important because it shows that for two standpoints to be uncotenable it is not necessary that one denies what the other affirms – more generally, the uncotenability needs not depend on some incompatibility between contents that one judges true and the other judges false. Recognition of this fact moves the focus from propositions only to an evaluation of the normative profile of our cognitive attitudes, thereby justifying the sort of work I am conducting here.

§7.2   *Ways in which a standpoint might be untenable*

Since I am going to be concerned with the question whether a given standpoint is tenable

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186See the previous Chapter, §, for a discussion on the difference between simple co-untenability which is due to the impossibility of living two different mental acts at the very same time and the richer notion of co-untenability which is tied to the nature of commitments and which consists in the idea that two different mental acts are co-untenable *within* the same deliberative context of mind, or mental breath, as I metaphorically said there.

we need a definition of the conditions in which a standpoint is tenable.

> *Conditions for tenability:* A standpoint is tenable only if it can be occupied in a coherent and reflexively stable fashion.

Let me clarify these conditions. A first obvious way in which a standpoint can be untenable is by being a standpoint that is psychologically impossible, that is, it is simply impossible to occupy it, to be in that standpoint. An example of this standpoint is, perhaps, the standpoint consisting in the judgment that there are and that there are not certainties. If we can't judge contradictions that are recognized as such by the agent (as tentatively argued in Chapter VI, §6), then this is a standpoint that we can't occupy. Another example of a standpoint that can't be occupied is, as I will argue below, the standpoint of the Pyrrhonian. If the standpoint is meant to consist in a systematic absence of judgment in response to the appearance that there aren't sufficient grounds to judge any of the propositions we are presented with, then the standpoint can't be realised psychologically, for responding to the evidence is having judgments.

The fact that a standpoint can be occupied doesn't entail that it is tenable. The standpoint also needs to be coherent and stable. A standpoint is coherent when the totality of its commitments don't give rise to contradictions. Thus, to judge that there are no truths is incoherent in that by so judging one is committed to there being at least one truth, namely that there are no truths, and this contradicts the proposition that there are no truths. The judgment that there are no truths is absolutely self-refuting in that it entails a contradiction. Yet, a standpoint might be incoherent without being absolutely self-refuting. Thus, to illustrate, to judge that the present judgment is not justified doesn't *entail* that the present judgment is justified. Yet, by having it, one is committed to its being justified. In this way the standpoint is incoherent without entailing a contradiction. This point reflects a general feature of commitments: commitments might be generated either by the nature of the *cognitive attitude*, regardless of its content (any judgment that *p*, for any *p*, is committed to there being grounds for taking *p* to be true), or by the nature of the cognitive attitude *given its particular content* (thus, a judgment that there are no truths is committed to there being at least one truth because the content judged entails that there is at least one truth[187]).

When a standpoint is incoherent it might be possible to occupy it, but it is not possible to endorse the totality of its commitments. Since the commitments give rise to a

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187It is actually controversial whether 'there are no truths' gives rise to absolute self-refutation. See Castagnoli (2010).

contradiction, and assuming that it is impossible to judge contradictions while recognizing that they are so, it is impossible to endorse an incoherent standpoint *once its commitments are made explicit*. Thus, coherence is a property of *contents* of a standpoint, particularly of its defining cognitive attitude and the many commitments it give rise to. Occupability is a property of a standpoint and of the combination of the standpoint and of some of its commitments.

Another way in which a standpoint might fail to be tenable is by being reflexively unstable. A standpoint is unstable if it is lost once one makes its commitments explicit or start to reflect about it. Thus, if I am a fallibilist I believe that *all* my beliefs are merely fallibly justified, if justified at all. I am committed to believe that the belief that all our justified beliefs are fallibly justified is itself fallibly justified. But then I am in a position to doubt it, because I recognize that it might be false. But when I doubt it, I am not judging it. This is a belief then that is unstable in that it doesn't survive reflection and is lost in the moment in which its commitments are made explicit. The case of reflexive instability is different from the case in which one is occupying an incoherent standpoint: in the case of reflexive instability, one needs not necessarily be committed to judge contradictory contents once all the commitments are made explicit; rather, the instability arises because there is an incompatibility in cognitive attitudes themselves, as it were: if a standpoint (like fallibilism) is committed to take as true that the fallibilist doctrine itself might be false, then one is in a position to doubt that doctrine, and in so doing one stops endorsing it. Notice that this instability is not straightforwardly reducible to the claim that the fallibilist standpoint is incoherent: it might *also* be the case that since judgment is committed to certainty, then the fallibilist is committed to both there being no certainties and there being at least one certainty (namely fallibilism itself); yet, even if one denies that judgment is committed to certainty, if doubt about p is possible so long as p is uncertain, then the fallibilist standpoint is untenable by being reflexively unstable, since if one makes fully explicit the consequences of the fallibilist doctrine then one realises that the doctrine can be doubted, and if one doubts it, one stops endorsing it.

§7.3 *Varieties of scepticisms*

Having made these important clarifications, let us now see in more details the views that are incompatible with c – the proposition that there are certainties – and the standpoints that are uncotenable with $J(C)$ – the judgment that there are certainties.

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Let us start with the propositions that are incompatible with *C. Scepticism about certainty* is the denial of *C*, namely the claim that there are no certainties. Any view which is committed to scepticism about certainty is incompatible with *C*. Since there are at least three views which are worth considering opponents of *C* I will spend some time explaining what the relevant kind of scepticisms that I will discuss later are.

By scepticism here I will refer to any view which denies the possibility of having *some* positive epistemic status. Scepticism about certainty is a particular kind of scepticism, since it denies the possibility of having the particular epistemic status of certainty. *Global scepticism* is the negation of the possibility of having *any* positive epistemic statuses. It makes room for there being more than one positive epistemic status (thus it makes room for a kind of epistemic pluralism). It simply denies that our judgments can possess any positive epistemic status. Other non-global forms of scepticism denies the possibility of having just *some* positive epistemic status, but might make room for there being the possibility for our beliefs of possessing some positive epistemic status (in the next Chapter we will see Fallibilism and Externalism, that here are understood as forms of scepticisms about certainty, which however are not forms of global scepticism, since they claim that some positive epistemic status might be possessed by our judgments, namely fallible justification, and externalist justification respectively).

The understanding of scepticism can vary depending on its modal strength. Traditionally, the interesting form of scepticism is the one that claims that it is *impossible*, *for beings like us*, to have knowledge. So understood, scepticism doesn't exclude by definition that there could be some standpoint, like God's, from which it is possible to attain knowledge. What we are interested in is whether it is possible *for us* to have knowledge, and not whether it is possible for some Godly entity, if any, to have something which we cannot ever have. So, the sort of possibility we are considering is relativized to a cognitive agent relevantly similar to us.

Another understanding of the view is the one that claims that it is only contingently the case that we don't have knowledge while leaving it an open question whether we could have it or not. True, if we were to discover that we now have knowledge, namely that this contingent form of scepticism is false, we would also have discovered that we can have it, and so we would have discovered that the modally strong form of scepticism is false. But if we were by hypothesis to discover (or to think to have discovered) that we do not, right now, have any kind of knowledge whatsoever, we would still be unsatisfied and ready to wonder whether we could have it or not. So, the interesting

form of global scepticism which I am going to criticise in what follows is the one which denies, for creatures like us, the possibility of having any of the relevant positive epistemic status.

Let us now consider the standpoints which are uncotenable with J(*C*). All those judgments in views which entail scepticism about certainty represent standpoints which are incompatible with J(*C*). A further standpoint which is incompatible with J(*C*) is the one endorsed by Pyrrhonian Scepticism, that is the standpoint consisting in remaining silent about the truth-value of any proposition she happens to consider. A global sceptic doesn't remain silent about every proposition for she judges that scepticism is true. Another standpoint yet is that of the Universal Doubter we saw in the previous Chapter.

There are several standpoints that might seem cotenable with J(*C*), though they are not. We might conceive of a standpoint according to which it is possible both to judge that there are certainties, and also to judge that this latter judgment is not among the certainties. This standpoint happens to be untenable, for by being in J(*C*) one is also ipso facto judge that it is certain that there are certainties[188].

This introductory discussion offers us a perception of the main standpoints that we seem to be in a position to occupy.

J(*C*): the judgment that there are certainties.

All the standpoints that endorse the proposition that there are no certainties are forms of scepticisms about certainty and they are incompatible with J(*c*). These are the main forms of scepticism about certainty I will discuss:

> **Global scepticism – J (*GS*)**: the judgment that none of our judgments enjoy any positive epistemic status.

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[188]There are then various ways in which one can endorse the standpoint J(*c*). My standpoint consists in adding the judgment that it is certain that there are certainties. This contrasts with the following complex standpoint: the judgment that there are certainties, plus the judgment that it is not certain that there are certainties. This latter standpoint can then be declined in different ways. One can add that J(*c*) doesn't possess any positive status. Or, with apparent more plausibility, one might add the judgment that even though J(*c*) is not itself certain, it enjoys some lesser epistemic status (like a fallibilist kind of justification). Depending on the status chosen, we will have variations of the latter standpoint. Another way in which one can hold the judgment that there are certainties without also judging that it is certain that there are certainties is to hold that the judgment that there are certainties is somehow a special judgment which eludes the space of reasons since it is some unavoidable commitment of cognition that must be in place for cognition to work. My view is, again, that the nature of cognition is such that the only tenable standpoint is that there are certainties, and that this commits one to take it that it is certain that there are certainties.

Fallibilism – J(*F*) : the judgment that our judgments can be grounded on fallibilist grounds *only*.

Externalism – J(*E*): the judgment that our judgments can *only* enjoy an externalist kind of justification.

There are other standpoints that are offered as alternative to J(*c*) even if they do not amount to the judgment that there are no certainties

Pyrrhonian scepticism: remaining silent about every proposition one happens to entertain

Universal doubter: a doubt about every proposition she happens to entertain

Alethic deniers: a judgment to the effect that there are no truths

This is just a schematic reminder of the main general options.

§7.4   *Arguments for global scepticism*

The picture I have offered you of the variety of scepticism is quite more complicated than the one which has been typically assumed in the literature. My picture relies on epistemic pluralism, namely the idea that there is a plurality of positive epistemic status. As a consequence, a sceptic could be sceptical of some epistemic status but not all. Since it has been standard to assume monism in epistemology, by global scepticism people have customarily meant the thesis according to which it is impossible to obtain a *particular* kind of positive epistemic status which was equated with justification (or knowledge). So, many of the arguments I will present in what follows were meant to conclude that epistemic justification and knowledge are impossible. Typically, these arguments rely on particularly demanding internalist kind of justification, if not on certainty. Externalist accounts of justification and modest fallibilist internalist accounts of justification are typically conceived of as capable of avoiding widespread sceptical consequences, and hence as providing resources to resist global scepticism. When the dialectic is seen within the pluralist perspective that I favour, we should see externalist and fallibilist internalist

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responses to arguments for global scepticism as pointing out that these arguments, if sound, do indeed establish that certainty is impossible, and yet they do not impugn the possibility of having lower epistemic goods. So, within this pluralist dialectical context, most of the arguments that are standardly presented as arguments for *global* scepticism are really just arguments for scepticism about *certainty*.

What are then the main arguments for scepticism about certainty? The history of philosophy is filled with these sorts of arguments. Here I won't be concerned in offering the details of these arguments, nor will I try to cover all of them. I will just present in rough form the most famous ones.

The problem of certainty. We have already encountered in Chapter I the a version of most famous and challenging argument for scepticism about certainty. The problem, as we saw, was that if we look at the conditions that need to be satisfied in order to have certainty, then certainty will look as impossible. Sometimes these conditions have also been taken to be plausible conditions for justification and knowledge in general, and as a result what I have called the problem of certainty was rather presented as an argument for global scepticism.

The problem of the evil demon. Descartes famously conceived of an all powerful evil demon capable of misleading us into judging propositions that turn out to be false. How can't we exclude its existence without being mislead in the very process of trying to do so? Again, though this argument is naturally seen as targeting the possibility of certain knowledge, it might also be presented in a context in which it targets the possibility of knowledge in general. If one presents the argument in a monist frame of mind and takes it that in order to know or be justified in believing that *p* one should be capable of excluding the possibilities incompatible with *p*, then the argument can be seen as in favour of global scepticism.

The problem of the criterion. This is another classical argument that can be read as an argument against the possibility of certainty as well as a global sceptical argument. Here is its rough form. How should we choose what to believe? It seems that in order to answer this question we need general rules about what indicates that a proposition is true. But in order to find these general rules we should first have some particular instances of true propositions from which we can then extract the general rule. If there is no other way of beginning in a justified manner, then how could we possibly ever believe something with justification?

Postmodernist arguments. There is then a huge variety of arguments whose overall aim

is to deny the very possibility of making sense of objective notions of truth, and, as a consequence, they aim at removing the grounds for making sense of the notion of certainty and more generally of knowledge and justification[189].

Schaffer's Debasing Demon. Very recently Schaffer (2010) has offered a new argument in favour of universal scepticism. Shaffer's argument relies on a different demon than Descartes's. It is a debasing demon, that is, a demon which debases all our beliefs. It leaves our beliefs as they are, and it may even leave the world as we take it to be, if our beliefs are actually true; however, contrary to appearances, it makes it the case that all our beliefs are formed in deviant and defective ways. What we take to be believing on the basis of sound reasons is in fact believed through, for instance, mere guessing. Since Shaffer further assumes that having knowledge that p requires also knowledge that one's belief that p is properly based, and since the putative conceivability of a such debasing demon will make it impossible for us to know whether our beliefs are properly debased or not, it turns out that we don't have any knowledge whatsoever[190].

In what follows the details of these arguments will not be relevant. The problem , I will suggest, concerns the very idea of offering an argument in favour of global scepticism.

§7.5   *Global Scepticism as Untenable*

Global Scepticism, namely J(*GS*), the judgment that there are no justified judgments, is

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189 On Rorty's global scepticism – which is *one* form that these so-called postmodernist attacks might take – see Rorty (1980) and the reply by Putnam (1985). Here is how Putman nicely summarises the trouble with such kind of view: "Why should we expend our mental energy in convincing ourselves that we aren't thinkers, that our thoughts aren't really *about* anything, noumenal *or* phenomenal, that there is *no* sense in which any thought is *right* or *wrong* (including the thought that no thought is right or wrong) beyond being the verdict of the moment [or of some longer run], and so on? This is a self-refuting enterprise if there ever was one!". See Thomas-Fogiel (2010) for a detailed critical discussion on these postmodernist attacks on the possibility of philosophical knowledge stemming from both the Anglo-Saxon and continental traditions.

190 Like in Descartes's case, there might be various ways of resisting to this argument, and in fact there have been different strategies in the literature. Brubeckner (2011) simply denies that knowledge requires knowledge that one's belief is properly grounded. Ballantyne & Evans (2013) reject Schaffer's argument by arguing in favour of an account of the basing relation which allows us to have knowledge of basing relations despite the conceivability and possibility of such a demon. Conee (2015) argues that even if the demon is possible, we have no reason to believe that we are in a debasing scenario, whereas we do have reasons to believe that we are not in a debasing scenario. Bondy & Carter (forthcoming) denies that a debasing demon is possible at all, by pointing out that none of the existing plausible accounts of the nature of the basing relation are compatible with the obtainment of such an unlucky scenario.
My argument against Schaffer's debasing case is more general, and depends on the simple fact that an argument is used in order to come to be convinced by universal scepticism. If there is a debasing demon, then it debases the very belief in a debasing demon, hence this possibility can't be threatening, for we can't believe that it is a possibility.
In Chapter XI I will present several arguments whose main purpose is to downplay the importance of certainty. The function of these arguments is not to argue that certainty is impossible, but rather to argue, in one way or another, that we should not care about it, that we should not put certainty at the core of our epistemological theorising.

untenable, and the reasons why it is untenable are very simple and, I think, also well-known by anyone who has given some thought to the issue. This is puzzling though, for, as observed by Alasdair MacIntyre (1982, p. 22), genuinely refutable doctrines only need to be refuted once, and yet *GS* is still a view with which epistemologists engage (we will see some instances later on). Hence I must give an explanation of why the simplicity of these reasons hasn't been enough to put the view on the one side. To anticipate, the explanation is that epistemology has not been conducted in a resolute first-personal manner.

There are two ways of addressing *GS*. One can offer grounds for judging that it is false. Or, one can offer grounds for judging that it can't be held. Of course, *prima facie,* grounds for judging that *GS* can't be held are not also grounds for judging that it is false, unless one provides further bridge premises. I will first offer grounds for judging that *GS* can't be held, then at the end of the next Chapter I will comment on the gap between the untenability of *GS* and its falsity.

Here is the reason why *GS* is untenable. Either *GS* is something which I am supposed to judge without grounds, or it is something which I am supposed to judge on the basis of what I take to be good grounds for thinking that it is true.

The first stance is untenable by being reflexively unstable. I might happen for whatever grounds to judge that *GS* is true, but as soon as I am invited to take a stance with respect to the question whether I have grounds for so judging, if I judge that I have no grounds, then I loose the judgment in *GS*. If I understand that I have nothing that speaks in favour of *GS*, I ipso facto stops to judge that *GS* is true.

The second stance is untenable by being incoherent It is not possible for me to coherently judge that *GS* is true and also to judge that I have grounds for judging that it is true. By judging that *GS* is true, I am committing myself to an incoherent set of commitments: for, by judging that *GS* is true, I commit myself to judge that I have grounds for so judging, but I also commit myself to judge that I have no grounds for so judging. The standpoint is then incoherent, and it is untenable in the sense that it is not possible to judge all of its commitments. The point is not simply that even though *GS* is a standpoint that we can occupy it turns out that it is incoherent. The point is rather that it is a standpoint that can't be fully occupied precisely because it is an incoherent one. Of course it is possible to occupy it in the sense that it is possible to judge that *GS* is true and that there are grounds for so judging. But the problem is that it can't be fully occupied because its commitments are contradictory.

Since the view is obviously untenable, why is it that we should keep arguing for this

claim? There are several reasons. One reason that I will describe in a later paragraph is that the untenability of a view doesn't seem to entail its falsity, and so we have the impression that we should not discard a view just because it is impossible for us to endorse it. Another reason which we are going to appreciate right now is the fact that epistemological reflection about global scepticism is not always conducted in a resolute first-personal manner. The untenability of global scepticism can be appreciated only if one is inquiring for oneself – because *she* wants to know the truth – and only if in so doing one is keeping an eye on what it takes to be inquiring. A third related reason is this: even when reflection tries to be aware of facts about what it takes to endorse a view, the facts that are typically noticed in the analytical literature are facts about the *public endorsement* of a view[191]. For some reasons[192], analytic philosophers tend to give more credit to their opinions about the behaviour of public assertoric practice rather than to their opinions about the nature of cognition itself. This focus has obscured the phenomenon that should be investigated in order to understand whether global scepticism is really tenable.

Gallois (1993) tries to show that global scepticism is self-refuting by analysing what it takes to *assert* that view in a *dialectical* context where there are two opponents trying to convince each other. At the beginning of his paper he starts considering a strategy which is very similar to mine, but then, after having dismissed it, he moves to assertion. Here is the relevant passage where he dismisses something which closely resembles my strategy:

"An anti-sceptic who wishes to show that the global sceptic cannot believe in global scepticism without believing that she is justified in doing so may have recourse to the following argument. A global sceptic believes that none of her beliefs are justified. So, no truth relevant considerations will lead the global sceptic to adopt some beliefs and reject others. Hence, a global sceptic will be prevented from adopting any beliefs.

The preceding argument rests on the following premiss. In the absence of the belief that some beliefs are justified nothing could lead the global sceptic to believe that some, but not all, beliefs are true. This seems to be plainly false. Indeed, a global sceptic may consistently form her beliefs in the

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191 I don't have the inductive basis for making this sociological claim. However, throughout the Dissertation I make reference to philosophers (or whole debates) who (or which) by focusing on language and assertion end up failing to perceive points about phenomenology. Beside the philosophical claim suggested, I think that the sociological claim is a fruitful conjecture that explains much of the tendency which characterises a significant portion of debates in contemporary analytical circles.

192 It would take an historical investigation in order to identify the roots of the current preference for an analysis of public linguistic practice as opposed to a phenomenology of thought itself. I haven't conducted this research, but it easy to point to the facts that such an historical investigation would have to take into account. Since the beginning of analytic philosophy there has been a good deal of scepticism about the inner life (Frege's anti-psychologism, Ryle's behaviourism, Wittgenstein's remarks in *Philosophical Investigation*, Austin's focus on linguistic practice). The insistence on the analysis of language itself goes hand in hand with this tendency to look at what is without and not at what is within. See the essays contained in Rorty (1992), particularly his introductory essay.

following fashion. She comes to hold a belief that she is considering just in case she believes the following. If any beliefs are justified the belief she is considering is. If the global sceptic forms her beliefs in this way then she will discriminate between true and false beliefs in much the same way as the anti-sceptic". p. 38.

Gallois is suggesting that there is a way in which the global sceptic might come to hold her scepticism. He says that it is enough for a sceptic to believe the following: if any beliefs are justified then the belief in global scepticism is. This is, however, not enough. It is not a belief that offers a sufficient ground in favour of global scepticism. This means that there must be further premises that lead the global sceptic to judge global scepticism to be true, and by judging the premises one is thereby committing herself to the possession of justified judgements. But even if we bracket this problem, the main point remains that by judging global scepticism one is committing herself to an incoherent and thereby untenable set of commitments: one is committing herself to both judge that there are no justified judgments and that it is justified to judge that there are no justified judgments.

I have just argued that it is not coherent to argue in favour of global scepticism. As remarked, however, there are plenty of arguments in the history of philosophy in favour of global scepticism. Cling (1994) understands the Problem of the Criterion as an *argument* for global scepticism, and doesn't find anything objectionable in the fact of arguing in favour of universal scepticism. Conee (2004) also thinks that it is possible in general to *argue* in favour of global scepticism, and discusses with some details why there is no incoherence in so proceeding despite initial appearances to the contrary.

According to them, a sceptic might avoid the charge of occupying an incoherent standpoint by proposing an argument for her view as a form of *reductio ad absurdum* of the possibility of having good reasons.

"The argument would then have the following overall structure: if there were any good reasons to believe anything, then this argument would give conclusive reason to deny that there are any good reasons. Hence there are none". Conee (2004) p. 12.

But if you believe that you have no grounds *tout court*, then you have no grounds to judge that there are no grounds. You cannot intelligibly be in a position in which you judge that *because* of this and that (the premises of the argument), there are no grounds, for in so doing you are relying on grounds. You can't even tell to yourself that *because* of that argument, which is a *reductio*, scepticism is true, for again, even if the argument is a *reductio*,

you are taking it to provide grounds for your conclusion.

Nor can you tell to yourself that *since* there are no grounds, your argument for judging that there are no grounds does not provide you with grounds to judge that there are no grounds. The problem with you thinking this is twofold: the first is that it doesn't make any sense to *use* an argument without taking it to provide you with grounds for judging its conclusion; the second is that in thinking that, *since* there are no grounds, my argument for judging that there are no grounds does not provide me with grounds to judge that there are no grounds, you are reasoning, drawing conclusions, relying on grounds. There is no escape.

Conee offers further ingenious ways in which we can try to make sense of the stance of a global sceptic. His proposals are very interesting because they allow us to see how focus on public endorsement of a view obscures facts about real first-personal endorsement of a view. There is as noticed a tendency in the literature to explore the tenability of positions by exploring the way in which a conversation, a debate, between the defenders of two incompatible theses will go. The focus is on assertion, on presenting arguments, on defending positions against a very demanding and crazy sceptic, and so on. This is not bad in itself – it is interesting if one is interested in assertion and dialectical issues, or it is useful if dramatizing helps in understanding the issue – but it unsuited to address the central issue. The central issue is what *I* can possibly *judge* and hold in a rational way. This issue is somehow independent on the following question: what can I *assert* and argue for in the public sphere with an opponent? The focus on the latter issue has obscured several important phenomena, like those I am discussing here.

Conee responds to the objection to global scepticism according to which by relying on an argument the sceptic is committing herself to the claim she is denying – namely there are grounds for judging – as follows:

"The psychological fact that a certain argument is found convincing may prompt a universal reason skeptic [a global sceptic] to present the argument. So the sceptic can offer the argument sincerely while not assuming or implying that it has any rational force." p. 12.

The idea he is proposing is that the sceptic is someone who recognizes that some chain of statements, if presented to an interlocutor as an argument, may have a certain convincing force which may convince the interlocutor to believe in scepticism. Because of this the sceptic may propose the argument without however believing that it offers grounds. But what if *I* am the interlocutor which is presenting the argument and to which the argument

is presented? In no way I can tell to *myself* that I am presenting to myself the argument because I find it convincing and persuasive without however judging that it provides grounds for its conclusion! It is like trying to consciously deceive oneself. And even if it happens that I arrive at judging that global scepticism is true on the basis of a causal story which doesn't include me recognizing that there are grounds for so judging, *once* I have made the judgments I have thereby triggered untenable commitments that I am in a position to make explicit if I start reflecting about the issue. Conee is here describing something that can happen, but he is failing to describe a coherent standpoint, and so he is failing to describe a position that might be stably occupied within inquiry.

Another counterargument to what I am arguing consists in saying that the sort of incoherence I am describing is a mere sociological/pragmatic fact with no epistemic import. Here is what Conee says:

"There may be a sense of commitment whereby the sceptic, just in virtue of presenting an argument, is committed to its cogency. That in turn may include a commitment to the rational defensibility of the argument's premises and form. If so, then these things are just conventional facts about the social role of offering an argument. And again, the sceptic may present the reasoning because she believes its premises and accepts its validity, without regarding any of it as reasonably believed. It is not entailed by someone's presenting an argument that the person asserts or implies that any of its premises, or its form, has some positive epistemic status". p. 12

This sort of answer is a spectacularly clear instance of the sort of philosophical self-alienation which I am trying to make salient in this Dissertation. There are several wrong ideas in this passage. To say that the commitments of cognition – in the present case, the commitment to the cogency of an inference one is making, and the commitment to the rational defensibility of the argument's premises and form – are just conventional facts about the social role of offering an argument is basically to reduce normativity to a social product. Yet, to think of cognition in this way – as we will see with some more details in the last Chapter – is to fail to make sense of the possibility of knowledge. Moreover, this view is implausible when evaluated on the ground of the investigation of the phenomenology of normativity – they do not look as the kind of facts that can be conventional, namely such as to vary with a variation of social convention. It is untenable to judge that it is a social convention that determines that judgment is intelligible only if the agent takes the judged proposition to be well grounded. What can explain Conee's insistence of the social role of offering an argument is that he is not paying attention to

cognition but to public linguistic practice, as it is confirmed by what he says at the end of the quoted passage.

There are other remarkable mistakes in Conee's argument. He says that it is possible to judge that the premises of an argument are true, to judge that the argument is valid, without regarding any of these judgments as justified. This, as we have seen in the previous phenomenological investigation, is simply false, since judging triggers further alethic commitments, some of which having to do with the possession of grounds for so judging. Conee is maybe saying that because he is failing to properly appreciate the interplay between considering propositions in abstracto and considering them while paying attention to the fact that they have to be endorsed in standpoints. He says that "it is not entailed by someone's presenting an argument that the person asserts or implies that any of its premises, or its form, has some positive epistemic status". But in saying this he is focusing on the wrong phenomenon. If we are wondering about whether a given view is tenable – in the sense that it can be endorsed in a coherent fashion, without engendering incoherent commitments – we should not look at what is implied by publicly presenting an argument in its favour. We should look at what it takes to judge that view to be true and to provide for oneself reasons for so judging. The quest for knowledge is a first-personal problem. We should think of scepticism as an option which exists *within each of us*. Each of us should wonder what to think about global scepticism, just as we have to wonder about any other philosophical proposition[193].

Conee has a last attempt to make sense of the global sceptic's standpoint.

"Maybe this sceptical view actually can be rationally accepted. For instance, it seems possible for such a sceptic to see rational force in some argument for her view, and thereby accept it, not noticing that the view entails that she is not thereby justified in believing it. This might be enough for a rational acceptance of the view." Conee 2004. p. 14

This is surely correct, and it is arguably what happens when people come to be persuaded that global scepticism might be true. They understand the arguments (think of the problem of certainty), they come to judge that conclusion, yet they are not fully aware that by so believing one is committing herself to her being justified in so believing. However, as seen,

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[193] This alienation between the philosophical problem and the personal problem is one of the most serious diseases of contemporary philosophy, I think. Philosophical problems are not typically treated as real existential problems – problems such that the truth about them is going to have an impact on the whole life of the philosopher. This is clear in the case of scepticism. As James Conant and Andrea Kern (2014), p1 note: "[the problem of scepticism] is treated as just one philosophical puzzle among others, a puzzle upon which a professional philosopher might or might not sharpen her analytical teeth". We are not here to sharpen our analytical teeth; we are here to understand something about all this before we die.

the standpoint is untenable because it gives rise to an incoherent set of commitments. It is very hard then to see what relevant notion of 'rational acceptance' Conee might be appealing to in the passage, since it entails that it is rational to be in a standpoint such that one is committed to both judge that there are no justified beliefs and that there are justified beliefs. One might characterise a notion – perhaps even an interesting and useful one for our evaluative practice – of 'rational acceptance' such that it might be rational in that sense to accept an untenable standpoint like global scepticism. But this doesn't change the point that the view is incoherent and can't be occupied when its commitments are made explicit. It is not then a stable move in the game of truth that we are playing when we inquire.

One of the crucial point of my defence of Reason against the global sceptic hinges on the fact that we should not think of the sceptical challenge as a challenge that comes from the outside, but rather as a challenge that we raise to ourselves using the very resources of Reason that the challenge is supposed to challenge. This sort of strategy is not new, as I noticed in the beginning of this section. Thomas Nagel (1997), to mention just him, use the same strategy in order to show that logic and Reason more generally cannot be challenged by the sceptic because she will have to rely on these very resources in order to raise the challenge[194]. Putting the points in a first-personal manner makes the point vivid: I can't rely on whatever resources I am employing right now in thinking this thought in order to convince myself that this thought and all other my thoughts might be false... Enoch (2006) has however a challenge to this strategy[195]. It is worth quoting his thought at length.

"But this line of thought—however influential—nevertheless fails. Skeptical challenges […] are best seen, I think, as highlighting tensions within our own commitments, as paradoxes arguing for an unacceptable conclusion from premises we endorse, employing rules of inference to which we are committed. In responding to such challenges, we must not yield to the temptation of the "adversarial stance" (Wright 1991, 89): The philosophical challenge is not to defeat a real person who advocates the skeptical view or occupies the skeptical position (*what* view or position?) but, rather, to solve the paradox, to show how we can avoid the unacceptable conclusion at an acceptable price. If we must think of the situation in dialectical terms, we should think of skeptical challenges as ad hominem arguments, with all of us as the relevant homini. "The skeptic" is entitled to use, say, logic because *we* are committed to the legitimacy of doing so. […] In other words, the skeptic is entitled to use our own weapons against us. If, using these weapons, he can support a

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194The same point is perhaps voiced by Nietzsche when he says (1979), p. 94: "even scepticism contains a belief: the belief in logic".
195Compare with Feldman (2002), p. 120-1.

conclusion we are not willing to swallow—one stating, for instance, that the very weapons he is using are not ones we are entitled to use—then it is *we* who are in trouble, not him, because we have been shown to have inconsistent commitments. Think of the situation as an analogue of a reductio ad absurdum: a good reductio argument assumes a certain claim only to prove it false. And just like a sound (reductio) argument establishing that a certain claim is false may assume that it is true, a sound argument concluding that a certain method of reasoning is incorrect or unjustified may employ that very method." p. 184-5.

There is something correct and something profoundly misguided in this picture of the sceptical challenge. I agree that the sceptical challenge is best seen as a challenge that we raise to ourselves using whatever resources our Reason provides and relying on whatever premises that we think to have reason to take as true. I also agree that once a challenge is raised, and we effectively find the reasoning valid and the premises compelling, then *we* have a problem. Hence, some of *our* commitments must be wrong. But*,* and here I think Enoch is getting the phenomenon wrong, from this it doesn't follow that it is possible to challenge the very resources of Reason that we use in order to raise the challenge. What can be challenged are some of the premises, where the premises that can be challenged are those whose acceptance is in no way constitutive of cognition – namely a premise whose acceptance is a precondition for the very possibility of cognition. Surely, if a sceptical challenge is raised and it is found challenging it is because the argument is found valid and we are inclined to regard the premises as true. But, if we understand that the argument is self-defeating in the way that a global sceptical argument is, then we can't judge that the conclusion might be true. What we should judge is that some of the premises are false, or that the logical form is invalid. In fact, the existence of this challenge is important precisely because it teaches us that some of the premises that we initially found plausible is wrong – the challenge allows us to make order in our commitments, but this is so precisely because we understand that the conclusion can't be true.

Enoch is probably led to accept the view that a sceptical challenge is a paradox that *we* face and, crucially, that a way of facing it is by accepting its conclusion as true, because he is thinking in too general terms about sceptical challenges. Surely, the sceptical challenge to show that the external world really exists might be understood in the way Enoch does, namely by considering it as a paradox, where one of the available legitimate moves is to *embrace* the paradox by accepting its conclusion. However, and this is the crucial point, in the case of scepticism about the existence of external world the conclusion is not a truth

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which is presupposed by the very use of cognition[196], thus it is *possible* to coherently embrace its conclusion. But in the case of scepticism about strongly constitutive rules of inference[197], if any, or scepticism about the very possibility of knowledge and justification, the conclusions can't be embraced, for they are presupposed by the very use of cognition. This is why in the case of these particular sceptical arguments, what they challenge is not the truth of the conclusion but rather the justification we take ourselves to possess in giving credit to the premises that engender the paradox.

We should then distinguish different kinds of paradox. The standard paradoxical situation is the one which is here is summarise by Sainsbury (1995), p. 1:

"This is what I understand by a paradox: an apparently unacceptable conclusions derived by apparently acceptable reasoning from apparently acceptable premises" p. 1.

So understood, the structure of a paradox is silent with respect to the question whether the premises and the conclusion of the argument are constitutive commitments of cognition. If they are not, then the natural reaction to a paradox is the one that Sainsbury adds immediately after to the just quoted passage:

"Appearances have to deceive, since the acceptable cannot lead by acceptable steps to the unacceptable. So, generally, we have a choice: either the conclusion is not really unacceptable, or else the starting point, or the reasoning, has some non-obvious flaw" (p. 1).

But, not all paradoxical arguments are of these kinds. We might further distinguish two kinds of paradoxical situations. Both paradoxical situations are such that there is an argument that leads to a conclusion that we can't accept not only (and not so much) because it is 'apparently unacceptable' but rather because we are committed to its falsity by being engaged in the very activity which we should use in order to argue for that conclusion. Yet, one paradoxical situation (which I think is the one we face with global scepticism) is such that the premises of the argument are merely seemingly plausible but, and this is crucial, they are not propositions to which we are unavoidably committed when

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196At least it is not obvious that it is. It is unclear whether the fact that we believe that there exists an external world (or some claims in the vicinity) would be a precondition of cognition. One might however construct a transcendental argument to the effect that taking the external world to exist is a precondition of inescapable aspects of our cognition or experience. See Chapter XII for an argument to the effect that hinge epistemologies that are inspired by Hume's and Wittgenstein's reactions to scepticism fail to respond to scepticism about the external world because the belief that there is an external world is not inescapable in the required sense.

197See Chapter VI.

we engage in cognition. If they were (and this is the other kind of paradoxical situation), we would be in a really troublesome situation: namely a situation in which our cognition is committed by its very nature to incompatible commitments. This paradoxical situation could not be solved in the way in which I propose to solve the paradoxical nature of the argument for global scepticism. In the latter case, we can indeed find something wrong about the premises (or the logical form of the argument), and this possibility is not blocked by the fact that these premises, whatever evidence we might have about their truth-value, are anyway propositions that we regard as true, however implicitly, when we cognize. In the former case, when all the premises and the conclusion are unavoidable alethic commitments of cognition, the situation is simply irresolvable: this would be a tragical condition, if it were real, because it would mean that we are irremediably committed to incompatible propositions, whatever we do to persuade ourselves that at least some of them are, in fact, false.

Now, having proved that global scepticism is indeed untenable, and having distinguished different paradoxical venues for our reflections, we should check whether the premises that lead to global scepticism are themselves constitutive commitments of cognition (like the proposition that there are justified judgments) or not. Further work should be done in order to conclusively show that all plausible arguments for global scepticism do rely on premises that are not constitutive commitments of cognition.

After this quite long discussion it is worth quoting Hume's comment on the global sceptic. He says:

"Whoever has taken the pains to refute the cavils of this total scepticism has really disputed without an antagonist and endeavoured by arguments to establish a faculty which Nature has antecedently implanted in the mind and rendered unavoidable"[198]

There is something right in this point, but something dangerous in the way in which Hume makes it by reference to Nature. Surely, there might be a global sceptic, if by that we simply mean someone that on a given occasion believes (and eventually asserts) that global scepticism is true. Yet, there can't be any coherent global sceptic, for any involvement in cognition will commit one to the existence of justified beliefs, and thus to the negation of global scepticism. So, in this sense, it is Nature that has implanted in the mind a commitment to the falsity of global scepticism. But the way in which this commitment is implanted is not the same way in which a desire for survival, if unavoidable, could be said

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[198]End of book 1 of the *Treatise*.

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to have been implanted in our mind. The commitment to the existence of justified beliefs is connected with a wider set of commitments that form an intelligible whole. There is some sort of internal coherence and unity among our commitments and the structure of the fundamental ingredients of cognition, namely judgment and questioning. The reference to Nature as that which has implanted in us the commitment to falsity of global scepticism might naturally suggest a detached vision of our cognition that looses sight of the internal coherence and kind of intelligibility that it exhibits. This is an important point to be noticed[199], for this touches the transcendental problematics that I have briefly described at the end of the *Introduction.*

§7.6   *Pyrrhonian silence*

So far I have discussed global scepticism understood as a thesis to be believed. We have seen that the crucial problem with global scepticism is the fact that we can't but take ourselves to be justified in believing it if we believe it. The problem seems thus to be connected with the very nature of the act of believing and with what it involves. This is a problem which is well known, and it is one of the reason why Pyrrhonian scepticism is typically taken to be more promising than dogmatic scepticism.

The crucial difference between global scepticism and pyrrhonian scepticism is that the former involves taking a dogmatic stance in inquiry, whereas the latter is supposed to involve taking a suspensive stance in inquiry. There are several ways in which we can understand a pyrrhonian suspensive stance. In what follows I will try to highlight the most promising ways of understanding the position. I will make my best efforts to make it a tenable stance, though I will ultimately argue that there is no tenable wholly suspensive pyrrhonian sceptical stance. The point won't be that it is irrational to be a pyrrhonian sceptic; the point will simply be that it is impossible.

199This point would have to be elaborated much further than what I have done in the main text. A richer discussion will have to connect it with discussions that focus on the different kinds of *intelligibility* that is exhibited when we put things in the *logical space of reason* and in the *space of nature.* As the labels suggest, the discussion will have to take into account Sellars's influential views on the matter, Davidson's discussion of the distinction between causal relations and normative relations, Wittgenstein (from which both are drawing) as well as Pittgsburg philosophers like Brandon and McDowell who have followed Sellars's Kantian and Wittgensteinian take on the issue. Unfortunately, this is not the place where I can do so. See Wittgenstein (1997), Sellars (1956), McDowell (1994), Brandon (1994). The whole Dissertation can be seen as giving a phenomenological twist to the search for a distinction between space of reason and space of nature that is central in the reflection of these philosophers. The main divide between the present work and these works is that most of them ground the realm of normativity in our social practices and in our concepts, whereas I want to explore the idea that at least some (though of course not all!) normativity is to be grounded in phenomenology itself, in structures whose existence is independent on the way in which our conceptual scheme and practices have developed.

Pyrrhonian sceptics are sometimes said to be suspending judgment about everything. As I prefer to use the term 'suspension of judgment', suspending judgment just is to have a judgment about grounds. Pyrrhonian sceptics are not meant to have any judgments whatsoever, and anyway the core of their standpoint is not meant to be some set of judgments about grounds for judging. This will have to be a revisionary understanding of the position, or anyway the conclusion of an argument to the effect that a Pyrrhonian sceptic *should* understand herself as having judgments about grounds. Before coming to this conclusion, however, we should try to give a more neutral and more faithful characterization of the sort of suspensive attitude that the pyrrhonian is supposed to have. In order to avoid terminological confusion, I will speak of suspension of judgment in order to refer to judgments about grounds, as I did in Chapter IV. I will speak of silence, or of a silent attitude, in order to refer to the core of the Pyrrhonian stance.

What is this silence supposed to be? Mere absence of judgments is not enough, for this makes me silent about pretty much every proposition except the one I am right now judging while writing this very sentence. We should look for a *suitable* absence of judgment.

One option is to consider silence as being the act of simply entertaining a proposition without taking any stance with respect to it. I might now entertain the proposition that 467:13=34,7 without taking any stance about it. I have not even a proclivity to go one way or another, since this division is beyond my automatic arithmetical powers. (If you believe that the example offered does not amount to a proposition that can be entertained, consider an empirical proposition, maybe the proposition that the number of stars is even). The problem is that if silence just is entertaining a proposition, then this is clearly not a competitor of the stance I am defending here, namely judging that there are certainties. Regardless of whether it is possible to spend one's life by simply entertaining propositions, this life won't represent a competitive standpoint to the standpoint of the believer in certainties. It is not even clear whether occupying this stance would constitute a move within inquiry. Surely, to entertain a proposition is necessary in order to then be capable of judging or wondering whether it is true. But mere entertaining is not to take a stance in inquiry but rather to put oneself in a position to then eventually take some stance in inquiry.

Another option is to take silence as being the act of entertaining a proposition while wondering about its truth value, without however judging one way or another. This is what I have previously described as the attitude of open-mindedness. Open-mindedness is relative to some proposition – this is why it requires that it be entertained – and is an

inquisitive attitude, that is an attitude of someone who is considering whether a given proposition is true. Open-mindedness is the default position one finds oneself in when one is wondering about the truth value of a proposition which one isn't already believing or which is such that one doesn't have any disposition to believe it[200]. Now we are depicting the pyrrhonian sceptic as someone who is looking for the truth, yet whenever she wonders about a proposition she remains open minded and refrains from making any judgment. This picture comes closer to what we want. For, there is absence of judgment and there is a move within inquiry – namely questioning.

Is this a tenable standpoint[201]? Before going to answer this question, we should further distinguish between some variations of this standpoint. Why is it that while wondering about the truth-value of a proposition our sceptic doesn't make any judgment? One option is that there are no motivations at all. Our subject is simply so disposed or simply so caused. Another motivation might be that she has a non-alethic reason for preferring an inquisitive silence over judgment. In this case, however, as we will see, the silence won't constitute a move in inquiry and so this silence won't be a genuine competitor to judgment. Another motivation is that the subject has alethic grounds for so preferring. This represents a move within inquiry – for silence is endorsed as being the correct attitude to take with respect to the aim of truth. Moreover, this *seems* to represents a possible move, since there is nothing immediately unintelligible in the supposition that one might remain silent about *p* on the basis of alethic grounds. The question we will raise is, however, whether one can at the same time have alethic grounds and be really silent about any proposition whatsoever, for this seems to be the core of the pyrrhonian attitude: not just a local silence, for that would make all of us pyrrhonians, but a global silence. Also, the question is whether it is possible to avoid having alethic commitments even if we grant that it is possible to remain really silent, at any moment, about the propositions one is considering. These are the questions we are now going to address in a moment.

So, to sum up, to a first approximation we might understand silence as the condition of entertaining a proposition *p* without judging it to be true (or false), while

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200For the distinction between dispositional belief, and disposition to believe see Chapter III, §3.2. For a discussion of open-mindedness see Chapter IV, §4.2-4.5.

201Notice that so understood silence is almost identical with the cognitive attitudes of the Universal Doubter described in Chapter V. The universal doubter raises a doubt about every proposition she comes to entertain, and since raising a doubt is a way of seeking for the truth-value of the proposition doubted, the two standpoints are almost identical, the only difference being that silence as characterised concerns both open and closed questions, and not only closed questions (those that we raise when we doubt). In what follows I will try to see different ways in which one can enrich this silent open-mindedness by making it an attitude that goes towards resembling the one that the Pyrrhonian sceptic is supposed to occupy. In so far as the attitude is a mere silence understood as a form of open-mindedness, it inherits all the problems that I have discussed in connection with the stance of the Universal Doubter.

wondering whether it is true or not. We will then add several elements to this minimal cognitive stance in order to see whether there is any version of it that ends up being tenable.

Here is the overall structure of my argument against Pyrrhonian scepticism. Suppose you ask to yourself: is it possible to be silent about everything? If you judge that the answer is positve, then you are not being silent about everything. If you judge that the answer is negative, you are both failing to be silent about everything – since you are judging something –, and you are also denying the possibility of the very standpoint you were supposed to occupy. Is there any other option? You might remain silent and refrain to answer the question. But why would you ever remain silent? One option is that you remain silent for no reason, but this is not a move within inquiry. Another option is that you remain silent because you *conclude* that you alethically should remain silent, given that you don't want to be mislead into believing the false. This is failing to remain silent, because you conclude something. A last option is that you remain silent because you conclude that you prudentially should. This is failing to remain silent *and* also failing to occupy a move in the game of truth. Is there any other option? No.

Let me now go into the details of the argument. If you find the argument persuasive as it stands, you might skip the following paragraphs and go directly to the next Chapter.

§7.7 *Tranquillity driven pyrrhonian scepticism as untenable*

The first question to ask here is whether pyrrhonian scepticism is meant to be a move within inquiry or a move outside it. When I play football my physical movements constitute moves outside inquiry, whereas when I draw inferences and refrain from judging on the basis of appreciation of the evidence I am making moves within inquiry. Depending on whether pyrrhonian scepticism is taken to be a move within or without inquiry we have two very different pictures of pyrrhonism.

According to what we might also call the non-rationalistic or non-alethic understanding of pyrrhonism, silence is an attitude which is adopted for the sole sake of achieving tranquillity. Crucially, it is not adopted because it is somehow seen as the correct attitude to have with respect to the goal of believing the truth. It is a stance that is taken on the basis of non-alethic reasons.

There is a simple reason why pyrrhonism so understood can be discarded, namely

because it doesn't represent a competitive stance against the standpoint I am defending, namely the judgment that there are certainties. Since the pyrrhonian stance is adopted regardless of whether it is taken to be the alethically correct one to have, it doesn't count as a move within inquiry. To see that, suppose it is possible to refrain from judging any proposition one happens to be presented with, and that one refrains from judging on the ground that so doing will put her in a reasonably peaceful state of mind. Well, for this person it will always be an open question whether it is alethically correct to refrain judgment – this is, after all, precisely what her silence amounts to. One will always be in a position to tell to herself: I am not going to judge that p is true because I want to be left in peace, but is p true? The fact that this question remains open shows that the suspensive attitude of the pyrrhonian is not a move within the game of truth.

Yet there is a difference between the sense in which playing football is not in the business of the truth and the sense in which refraining from judging on prudential grounds is outside the game of inquiry. For, I can at the same time play football and make judgments, whereas I can't at the same time refrain from judging and judging. Thus, there is a sense in which, however, a tranquillity driven scepticism of this sort is really somehow incompatible with my stance. Yet, and this is crucial, the incompatibility here doesn't arise because there is a tension in the commitments of the respective standpoints. If one were to refrain from judging that p on the ground that so doing would be the most beneficial attitude to have, one would not ipso facto display commitments about what is true, about alethic grounds and about their quality. The sort of incompatibility we would have is somehow accidental when compared to the incompatibility between judging that p and judging that there are no grounds for p.

Another way of putting the point is that the clash between a silence about p motivated by prudential reasons and a silence motivated by alethic grounds is a clash that doesn't arise *within* the game of truth, but rather outside it. It is a disagreement as to whether the aim of truth should trump the aim of achieving tranquillity. This is a useful metaphorical way of putting the sense in which the two attitudes are not incompatible in the relevant sense. Yet, as I will argue in more length in Chapter IX, there is no real disagreement between the aim of truth and other aims in the case of judgment and cognition more generally, for truth is the constitutive aim of cognition in a sense that doesn't license any weighting it with other aims.

There is a general lesson to be extracted from this case and which I will repeat several times again in different occasions in what follows. The lesson is this: any stance

which is in practice incompatible with the stance of someone who does believe something with certainty does not represent a competitor stance if it is a stance that has no alethic support. To put it in different terms: if a stance is the result of some sort of deliberation which is not truth-oriented – like the practical deliberation which consists in deciding which one is the most suffering-free attitude to have – then that stance has no relevant bearing on the quest for truth. Similarly, and a fortiori, any stance which is the result of processes which are not truth-oriented and which are not transparent to the subject as such is not a stance which is relevant to the question whether certainty is possible or not. To illustrate the latter case, on which I will say something more below, consider this: suppose it is possible for a human being to stop, at some point of her life and due to a causal process of which she is unaware, to believing everything. She becomes a subject whose judgment with respect to any conceivable proposition whatsoever is forever absent. It is clear that that possibility doesn't represent any threat to the claim that certainty is possible. This works for any aetiology whatsoever, so long as the aetiology isn't cognized by the subject as being the (alethically pertinent) causal ground for judging or refraining to judge. Thus, to apply the point against a certain picture of a quietist philosophical move, if thanks to some sort of philosophical discourse one just stops believing everything without however taking the discourse as one's alethic ground for so doing (regardless of whether the philosophical discourse does in fact represent a good (alethic) ground or not), then the possibility of such a stance is no threat to the thesis that certainty is possible. Simply, the possibility of these suspensive stances, if ungrounded by alethic considerations, belongs to an entirely different business from the one which is characterised by the question: what is true?

So far I have argued that even if it were possible to refrain from judging on the basis of non-alethic grounds, the resulting standpoint would not be a competitor to my standpoint, as well as to any standpoint that is grounded on alethic considerations. But it is worth mentioning the fact that anyway it seems to be strictly speaking impossible to be silent on non-alethic grounds. If you are taking some consideration as a prudential ground for silence, then you are judging that you possess such grounds, or anyway you are committed to take yourself to possess prudential grounds. Hence you are failing to be entirely silent.

§7.8   *Alethically driven pyrrhonism as untenable*

In order to have a genuine competitor to the standpoint that judges that there are

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certainties we need somehow to make sense of silence as a move within inquiry, as a response to the aim of inquiry.

My case against the possibility of an alethically based pyrrhonism is based on two facts. First, it is impossible to *be* an inquisitive mind of the sort the pyrrhonian is describing without also having judgments, particularly judgments about grounds. This shows that there is no inquiring mind that can be completely silent. Second, even if it were by hypothesis possible to be entirely silent, it is not possible not to have alethic commitments. This means that the pyrrhonian standpoint, even if it manages to be silent on any occasion, is still *committed* to take some propositions as true, and so it fails to be a stable standpoint. There are various subtle ways in which one can try to save the pyrrhonian picture from these objections[202]. So we will gradually explore such moves and along the way we will further our understanding of the alethically committed dynamics of cognition.

Our question is now the following: how can one both be silent and take part to inquiry? The suspensive sceptic neither believes that it is possible to achieve the truth, nor does she believe that it is impossible. If she believed the latter, she would be a dogmatist sceptic. Whereas if she believed the former, she would anyway failing to be silent about every proposition. Yet, one might wonder whether it is intelligible to say that someone is actually engaged in the search for truth if she is not taking the discovery of truth to be a possible output. That would be a first objection to the tenability of an alethically based pyrrhonism.

According to Perin (2010), however,

"It is not a necessary condition on engagement in the search for truth that one believe that it is possible to discover the truth. All that is required is that one not deny, as the negative dogmatist does, that it is possible to do so". p. 19[203].

This point can be argued for by noticing that when we deliberate about what to believe we need not *explicitly* judge that it is possible to discover the truth. If we think of our

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[202] In what follows I will mainly focus on Perin's book *The demands of reason* whose aim is precisely to show that it is entirely possible and consistent to be a pyrrhonian sceptic who takes her silence to be a response to the demands of our truth-oriented inquiry. See Perin (2010), particularly Chapter 1. See also Brennan (1999) pp. 84-7 and 99-106, for a defence of the claim that the pyrrhonian sceptic is engaged in the search for truth. For a contrary opinion, See, Palmer (2000), and Striker (2001).

[203] There is a further consequence of this. Because of the fact that the sceptic is not a dogmatist, his suspension of judgments is not even a commitment to remain silent *forever*. Of course, it may happen that the sceptic will never have any ground to believe an option instead of its alternatives; however, this might not happen. If it turns out that there are conclusive grounds to judge a given *p* as true, then the sceptic will thereby stop to be one. Sextus is quite explicit on this point. PH. 1.25, 1.200, 1.201, and 3.70, as it has been remarked by Barnes (1990) p. 10, and Perin (2010) p. 21-22.

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inferential grounds for judging, in order to judge the conclusion of an argument we need not rely on an argument whose premises include the proposition that the truth is discoverable.

Yet, and this is one first point to be brought home, from the fact that it is not needed to explicitly judge that the truth is discoverable in order to come to judge anything upon alethic considerations, it doesn't follow that there is no commitment to judging that the truth is discoverable. This point can be noticed from a certain distance if we realise the simple fact that when we engage in a project we do so because we presuppose that it is possible to execute the project. The same goes for inquiry, the project of discovering what is true. When I inquire it is because I take it, however unconsciously and implicitly, that it is possible to discover the truth. If I were to explicitly judge that it is impossible to discover the truth I won't start inquiring (even if judging in this way would amount to a self-refutational step in inquiry). If we move closer to our mental life and try to engage in the method of intelligibility we realise that judging is committed to the possibility of discovering the truth. In order to appreciate this, we might try to put ourselves in a state such that we both judge that *p* is true and that it is impossible to discover the truth. This is not possible – it is precisely the sort of shortcoming that makes global scepticism untenable[204]. In fact, the same result might be more easily appreciated if one were to try simply to judge the proposition that it is impossible to discover the truth. As soon as one understands what one is judging and appreciate its implications, one will be stopping to so judge. For by judging that it is impossible to discover the truth I am judging that this very judgment might be false. So, even if a pyrrhonian sceptic need not *explicitly judge* that truth is discoverable, she is *committed* to it if she is engaged in the search for truth. But absent any further argument the presence of this commitment seems to be compatible with the thought that one can be silent whenever she considers a proposition. I will argue in a moment that this appearance is illusory.

The crucial problem for an alethically driven pyrrhonian scepticism emerges if we ask the following: *why* is it that the Pyrrhonian decides to remain silent when she is presented with a new proposition? It can't be on the basis of no reason or ground, for in

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204The only case that might elude this point is the one of mystery. In the case of a question which is recognized as being asking something that has no answer, I might *in some sense* be inquiring while I also take it that there is no truth to be discovered. Mysteries however are not insulated acts of cognition. They take place and are intelligible within a larger set of beliefs and commitments. Thus, when I raise the question that touches on a mystery, there are cases where I don't know already that I am dealing with a mystery (and in this case the commitment to the discoverability of the truth is in place) and there are cases in which I do know that I am facing a mystery (and in that case, even if I don't take it that the answer is discoverable, I am committed to there being discoverable truths, since I have discovered that I am facing a mystery).

that case her stance will be a thoughtless mental event, something that the cognitive agent can't ascribe to herself as her standpoint, as the standpoint she endorses. It can't be on the basis of non-alethic reasons – like the reason that being silent leads to tranquillity – for this won't amount as the endorsement of an attitude in the light of the truth. Thus, it must be on the basis of some reason or ground that are connected with the truth.

Perin is explicit on this point:

"It is clear that Sextus does not think that the Sceptic (or anyone else) can suspend judgement simply by deciding or intending to do so. For if the Sceptic could suspend judgement in this way, he would not need to seek or devise, as he does, arguments for and against the truth of the candidate for belief that is under consideration. These arguments are supposed to put the Sceptic in a position in which it appears to him that for the relevant value of p there is no reason to believe either p or its negation. Suspension of judgement is the Sceptic's response to finding himself in this position". p. 22-23.

However, silence – namely entertaining a proposition while wondering whether it is true or false – can't be an attitude that is based on *grounds*, in the technical sense in which I am using the expression 'ground' (viz., a ground is a proposition or an experience on the basis of which some further proposition is judged, and when something counts as a ground in this sense it is is taken by the subject as speaking in favour of the truth of the judged proposition). When we remain silent, we do not take things to be in a certain way – silence has no representational or thetic component. Thus, it is not the sort of thing that can stand in the ground relation with some ground. (Compare this discussion with Chapter V, §5.8).

Therefore, silence must be done on the basis of some *reason*. The reason, as we have seen, should have something to do with the truth – somehow, one should take silence as being the attitude to be had in order to be in a legitimate relationship with the truth, as it were.

One question is whether it is possible to endorse pyrrhonian silence on the basis of a reason, rather than a ground. The answer seems affirmative. I might have a reason to entertain a proposition and wonder about whether it is true. This is something I can do at will. However, there is something that is beyond my control. I can't control what is going to happen once I start considering p and wonder about its truth-value. For, if I end up confronting evidence for judging it, there is no practical reason that could prevent me from judging it. This is not a problem for a pyrrhonian. In fact, as noticed, she leaves it open the question whether there will be propositions that are justified enough so as to deserve our

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judgment. If they were judging otherwise they would fall in the dogmatist camp.

What this shows is that the pyrrhonian stance is not a *definitive* stance. This should not be a problem, for the unsettledness of our epistemic condition is precisely what the pyrrhonists should embody with their mental behaviour: so far, no proposition deserved our judgment, but we will see. Though the pyrrhonist can't judge it, somehow her systematic open-mindedness should display sensitivity to this discovery.

Another question about the proposal that there is a reason to be silent is whether this proposal has the resources to describe the pyrrhonian in such a way that his silence is *complete*. I think that the answer should be negative. Here is a way of presenting the problem. *Somehow*, the pyrrhonian is endorsing her stance because she thinks that it is the right one to have – the right one to have given the aim of judging the truth. This is part of what we need to capture in order to be capable of thinking of pyrrhonism as a move within inquiry and as a competitive stance against other moves in the game of truth. But the problem is that if the pyrrhonian silence is a response to reason, then it is not a completely silent attitude. The pyrrhonian remains silent because she judges that this is the alethically right attitude to take, and maybe in order to come to judge that this is the right one take, she also needs to make much more judgments. But then the price to be paid in order to be silent on some issues is to have one's mind stuck with many judgments and commitments.

One way of highlighting this point is to reflect on the way in which the pyrrhonian herself is led to silence. The pyrrhonian is presented with a suggestion to take some proposition as true. Then she reflects on the suggestion and offers an argument to the effect that it is impossible to conclusively establish whether the suggested proposition is really true. The most natural way of thinking of this process is by thinking of a process in which one comes to judge on the basis of some grounds that we can't be sure whether p is true. If that is how the process goes, then the alethically driven pyrrhonian is not a completely silent stance, for whenever a pyrrhonian is silent about an issue she is also making judgments to the effect that it is right to be silent, and eventually she is also making judgments about grounds and in this way ends up suspending judgment in the way described in Chapter IV, namely by having *judgments* about grounds. This is not a silent mind in the required sense. If this is so, then the pyrrhonian stance is not a competitor stance, and it is impossible for us to be completely silent.

There are various ways in which one can try to resist this picture. One way is to say that the pyrrhonian is not one who is judging things, not even judging things about

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grounds, but is just someone who is *presenting* grounds to reject a given suggestion to take some proposition as true. This goes nicely with the idea that the pyrrhonian stance is not really a cognitive stance but rather some sort of *practical* stance. This picture is very clearly expressed in Williams (2010)'s description of what he takes to be the core of the Pyrrhonian stance:

"A sceptic is a virtuoso dialectician. He can take any claim or argument, commonsensical or theoretical, and find a countervailing claim or argument of roughly equal persuasive force. Facing with such offsetting claims, he suspends judgment. Sextus *defines* the sceptic as one who possesses this ability. … Possessing the ability to orchestrate sceptical antitheses is the absolute bedrock of the Pyrrhonian stance- Sextus insists on this: "the chief constitutive principle" of scepticism is "every account's lying opposed to an equal account" (PH 1.12, my translation). The sceptics is not one who *argues*, thus believes, that every proposition he might be tempted to accept can be offset by a countervailing proposition: he is one who can produce a suitable counterweight. Suspension of judgment has *nothing* to do with what a sceptic *believes*: is wholly a matter of what he can *do*. The Pyrrhonian stance is *practical all the way down*". p. 295.

This description, attractive in itself as it might be, and even historically accurate as it might be, still fails to describe a stance which can be occupied by some subject. I cannot take myself to have an ability which consists in finding counterweight reasons that lead to equipollance unless I judge it to be so; unless, that is, I at least judge, on the occasion in which I find myself producing counterweight evidence, that I am actually reaching a state of equipollence, or at least a state which legitimates certain transitions in my doxastic practice. So, Pyrrhonian scepticism is maybe meant to be wholly practical, but it can't be practical all the way down.

One might reply along the following lines. Maybe it is true that I cannot take myself to have reached equipollence unless I take myself to have grounds, and also take myself to be legitimately believing certain truths. But it is enough that I produce a set of *assertions* which, once put together in an argument, do consist in a counterweight to the proposition under discussion. I don't need to *judge* the propositions I assert; nor do I need to judge that equipollence is reached; I only need to *actually* reach to equipollence, whether I judge it or not. This sort of externalist twist wont' do. If we just assert things without judging the asserted contents, then there is no reason for *me* to enter a silent attitude. Hence, the lack of reason makes my silence, if actual at all, a state which doesn't consist in a move in the game of truth.

Williams is aware of this objection to Pyrrhonian scepticism. He concedes the premise that to make judgments about grounds would amount to fail to be completely silent in the required sense, and he tries to answer the objection as follows:

"Pyrrhonian antitheses must be *psychologically effective*, rather than *epistemologically balanced*. Equipollence is not judged but *experienced*, the experience leading *directly* to suspension of judgment". p. 296

But what about that experience? Two main problems: 1) it makes sense to wonder whether the experience is correct or illusory; 2) even if we grant the correctness and reality of this supposed experience of equipollence, the way in which it *leads directly* to suspension of judgment can be of two sorts: a) alethic/epistemic, in which case pyrrhonian scepticism is no longer coherent, b) or a mere psychological compulsion, in which case pyrrhonian scepticism is just a non-rational itch which as such is no longer a move in the game of truth.

Another way of resisting the objection is offered by Perin. He suggests that the main difference between the dogmatic and the suspensive sceptic is the way in which they understand the cognitive attitude the presence of which *justifies* or *makes it correct* to react in their respective ways – namely, judgment that nothing can be justifiably judged, and suspension of judgment (silence, in my terminology) respectively. This is the requirement for a dogmatist:

(SJ) Rationality requires one to suspend judgement about whether p if one <u>believes</u> there is no reason to believe either p or its negation (p. 40),

whereas this is the requirement for the pyrrhonian:

(SJ*) Rationality requires one to suspend judgement about whether p if it <u>appears</u> to one that there is no reason to believe either p or its negation (p. 43).

The crucial difference is that the former takes the relevant ground for suspension of judgment to be the *belief* that there are no reasons to judge either p or its negation, whereas the pyrrhonian takes the relevant ground for suspension of judgment to be the *appearance* (which is not to be understood as a doxastic attitude) that there are no reasons for belief. However, crucially, in both cases suspension of judgment is taken to be an alethically

rational response to one's evidence.

Now, this is as it should be. For this is the only way in which we can properly make sense of pyrrhonian scepticism as being a move within inquiry. The problem is of course how to make sense of the mental state of appearing without understanding it as being some form of judgment[205]. The sort of appearances we are dealing with here involve potential grounds for judging, and it is unclear how one can understand one's discovery about the normative sufficiency of grounds for judging in a way that is non-doxastic.

To sum up, I have been pressing two objections to the idea that it is possible to coherently be an alethically driven pyrrhonian sceptic. The first objection grants for the sake of argument that it is possible to be one, yet it insists that one can't be a coherent and stable one: for, whenever one is silent on some proposition, one is committed to there being reasons for being one, and so one is committed to take some proposition as true even if, in a later moment, when one considers these very propositions, one will then have to remain silent about them. The second objection denies the very possibility of a complete silent, for it argues that in order for a pyrrhonian silence to be alethically driven one needs to have judgments about grounds, or anyways judgments which are used as grounds or reasons for then remaining silent.

The picture of the pyrrhonian stance that emerges from our discussion is that of a local form of suspensive scepticism whose core attitude is suspension of judgment, that is judgment abut grounds. The pyrrhonian is someone who finds out – and so judges – that with respect to some relevant class of propositions we can't conclusively go one way or the other. Hence, we should suspend judgment about these propositions. Yet, in so doing, the sceptic so understood will not be suspending judgment about plenty of other issues – notably, among others, issues about grounds for suspension of judgment. So understood, the Pyrrhonian stance doesn't conflict in any way with the standpoint according to which it is certain that there are certainties.

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[205]See Perin (2010), Chapter IV, when he concedes that the scope of the pyrrhonian scepticism is limited in that the suspensive sceptic doesn't have beliefs about how things are but she has beliefs about how things appear to be.

Chapter VIII

Fallibilism and Externalism as Untenable

In this Chapter I complete the work that I have started in the previous one. I will first argue that monistic forms of fallibilism and externalism are untenable. The arguments will have a significant consequence: that not only the sole tenable standpoint is to judge that there are certainties, but it also requires that one has certainty about the fundamental epistemological theory itself that one is endorsing. Thus, no epistemological theory is tenable unless it has the consequence that there are certainties and that the epistemological theory itself is, at least with respect to its defining thesis, known with certainty.

§8.1   *The reflexivity of the epistemological inquiry*

Since we want to discover the truth, we want to come to judge the true answer to these questions:

(1)   What is true? Which propositions are true?

(2)   How do we discover what is true? What are the conditions in which we are justified in judging that some proposition is true?

Our inquiry as a whole is an attempt to answer (1). Our *epistemological enquiry* is (at least in part) an attempt to answer (2). Since it is an enquiry, it aims at discovering truths, and then it is also a partial answer to (1). And since the desired output of the enquiry is true *judgment*, the enquiry has the following property:

> *Reflexivity of epistemological enquiry*:
> An epistemological theory provides standards for justified judgment, and the judgment in the theory is among the objects that should be evaluated according to the standards dictated by the theory[206].

In this chapter I will explore this feature of the epistemological enquiry and I will investigate the ways in which a judgment in an epistemological theory should be endorsed in order to be a satisfactory judgment. I shall call our judgments about epistemology

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206For an historically informed discussion of the centrality of this feature in post-Kantian German idealism, see Thomas-Fogiel (2010).

'epistemological judgments', though I will omit the qualification 'epistemological' when the context allows me to do so without ambiguity. By an epistemological theory I roughly mean what is often described as a 'theory of epistemic justification'.

I will proceed the discussion by considering *monist* proposals about the nature of justification, in particular a monist form of fallibilism and a monist form of externalism. Monism about epistemic justification is the view that there is a single kind of justification. Here I will consider monistic fallibilism, or fallibilism for short, namely the view that a judgment is justified just in case it is fallibly grounded, and monistic externalism, or externalism for short, namely the view that a judgment is justified just in case it is externalistically justified. Since these are monistic views, they are views to the effect that *at best* our justified judgments are fallibly justified or externalistically justified respectively.

What does it take for a theory of justification to be endorsed in an appropriate way? The first obvious minimal condition is the following:

> *Theoretical Reflexivity*:
> a judgment in an epistemological theory is satisfactory only if it possesses the status that the theory itself describes as the status of justification.

If an epistemological judgment doesn't satisfy that condition, then the theory itself is self-defeating because it entails that a judgment in the theory is not justified and hence that the theory is not to be judged true[207].

It is important to appreciate the following distinction: it is one thing to have a belief which complies with the standards for being a justified belief, and it is another thing to have a further justified belief about whether the belief in the theory (be that belief justified or not) complies the standards for being a justified belief. This condition of Theoretical

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[207] What about the proposal that the theory should not be justified according to the notion of justification it defines, but rather according to some other notion of justification which is endorsed as a genuine kind of justification by some meta-theory? The resulting view will be a form of pluralism (for there are at least two kinds of justification, the one of the first-order theory and the other of the second-order theory). One worry is that it is unclear what the rationale for this meta-theory would be. Since all judgments are alike in being judgments, it is unclear why a judgment with a particular content – the content of the first-order epistemological theory – would have to be epistemically fine in conditions that differ from those that must be satisfied by all other judgments. One further question is whether the second-order theory should be justified with the first-order kind of justification or with the second-order one. Another question is whether the overall theory that amounts to the conjunction of the two theories – that is the pluralist theory according to which there are both kinds of justification – should possess both kinds of justification or only one. If both, then theoretical reflexivity arguably holds for the first-order theory as well (because of the principle according to which a conjunction is justified only if each of its conjunct is justified according to the same kind of justification possessed by the conjunction), if only one, then it is unclear which one of them should be the one to be possessed. Each choice would seem ad hoc. Thus, no appeal to a meta-theory can easily falsify theoretical reflexivity. More on epistemic pluralism and its relation to the reflexive endorsement of the theory itself at the end of the chapter.

Reflexivity doesn't require any meta-belief. So, it is neutral on whether some conditions like JJ (the condition that justification requires being justified in believing that one is justified) is part of the conditions for justification.

There is a further less obvious condition for satisfactory epistemological believing:

Reflexive Stability:
a belief in an epistemological theory is satisfactory only if the theorist is justified in believing that the belief in the theory is justified.

Reflexive Stability can be seen as making a point about the conditions for having an epistemological theory that is stable when one reflects upon the belief in the theory itself. In order to make the theory stable at the reflexive level, one must have the resources to find that very theory as justified when one reflects about it. To see this point, suppose a theorist endorsing the epistemological theory A were asked: 'do you believe A?'. The answer would be: 'Yes I do'. 'Do you also believe that you are justified in believing A?'. Suppose that the answer to this impertinent question were: 'No, I believe A, but I am not justified in believing A'. This would be awkward. The reason is of course that when we believe a given proposition, we are also committed to take ourself to be justified in believing it. If we were to realize that we are not after all justified in believing it, we would take ourselves to be required to abandon that belief. So, the endorsement of a theory of epistemic justification is going to be stable and survive reflection only if one is in a position to find her own judgment in the theory to be justified.

In Chapter III I made a stronger claim, namely that it is not possible to comprehendingly hold at the same time *p* as being true and also that our so judging is not *justified* (either because there are no grounds at all for so judging or because the grounds are not good enough). If this is so, then the problem is not simply that when one moves at the reflexive level one would have to regard herself as required to abandon her belief in the theory if she were to take it as lacking justification. The problem is rather that as soon as the person moves at the reflexive level and takes her epistemological belief to lack justification, the person would not be in a position to hold her judgment in the theory, and if the subject is lucid enough she will also probably loose the corresponding dispositional belief in the theory.

Despite appearances to contrary, this requirement does *not* beg the question against externalist theories of justification. The requirement is not that justification requires

second-order justification (i.e. justification for believing that one has justification). The requirement has to do with the satisfactory endorsement, at the reflexive level, of a belief in an epistemological theory. In fact, as we will see in greater detail in a moment, the requirement can also be satisfied by an externalist theory, provided that we have an externalist justification for believing that we have an externalist justification for externalism. This is not impossible in principle. It is just enough to apply the externalist account consistently to epistemological beliefs themselves.

§8.2   *Fallibilism as untenable*

Fallibilism is here understood as the claim that the only sort of justification that can possibly be possessed by our judgments is a fallibilist kind of justification, that is a justification that is compatible with the falsity of p[208]. The question we are investigating here is what it takes to *be* a fallibilist. In order to answer this question we should try to put ourselves in the fallibilist's own perspective and see what should we think of it when we reflect about fallibilism itself and about the picture of our epistemic predicament that it delivers.

Easy things first. A fallibilist has no problem in satisfying Theoretical Reflexivity and Reflexive Stability. The belief in the fallibilist theory itself might well be fallibly justified, if the believer possesses fallible grounds for so believing that favours fallibilism over competing accounts of justification. Moreover, as a fallibilist I can also reflect on whether I am justified in believing that fallibilism is true, and if I take myself to have fallible grounds for so believing then I might take myself to be justified in believing in fallibilism[209].

208As Cohen (1988) puts it, "the acceptance of fallibilism in epistemology is virtually universal". Reed (2002) concurs: ""Fallibilism is endorsed by virtually all contemporary epistemologists" p. 143 It is unclear whether all theorists who endorse a fallibilist theory of justification or knowledge according to which justification/knowledge are fallible, also endorse the more specific view I discuss in this Chapter, namely that *at best* the sort of justification/knowledge that we can possess is fallible in kind. I think it is fair to assume that most fallibilist views of justification/knowledge, to the extent that they are monist views, they are also fallibilist in the most strict sense I discuss here. Maybe, they are willing to make room for some absolutely certain judgments, except that they will count these judgments as possessing a different positive epistemic status from the one of justification/knowledge. Anyway, fallibilists of the kind I have in mind in this Chapter are, I think, legions. Pragmatist philosophers are fallibilist in this sense. Quinians and epistemologists who work within a self-conscious naturalised epistemology are typically fallibilist in this sense. People who deny the existence of *a priori* justified beliefs are also typically fallibilist in this sense (denying the a priori, it is not clear what room remains available for certainty-conferring sources of justification). More generally, it arguably is a common thought in the current scientist culture the idea that the most we can hope for is fallible revisable justification for our beliefs.

209In order to take myself to be justified in believing in fallibilism I need not necessarily already have justification for believing that fallibilism is the right account. Whether this is needed or not depends on the details of the fallibilist accounts under scrutiny.

What is the problem then? One problem is that fallibilism is untenable in that it gives rise to commitments that can't be endorsed at the same time. In order to bring it into clear light, consider a particular proposition p judged by a fallibilist. As the fallibilist is very well aware of her commitments, she believes that p might be false. Since she believes that, she is knowingly committed to judge that p and that p might be false. But if the claims I have made in Chapter III are correct, then the fallibilist can't in fact so judge. It is simply impossible to comprehendingly judge that p and that p might be false in the same mental breath.

If the claim about uncotenability made in Chapter III is false and it is possible to comprehendingly judge that p and that p might be false, still it seems correct to say that there is a normative pressure to abandon p given the realisation that p might be false. The presence of the normative pressure might be further explained and sustained by the recognition that, even if it is by hypothesis possible to judge that p and that p might be false, it is in the nature of doubt that one can keep doubting whether p is really true so long as she doesn't possess conclusive grounds for p. When confronted with p, the fallibilist recognises that her grounds for so believing are fallible, hence she is in a position to raise a doubt as to whether p is really true. But when she raises the doubt, she is not judging that p is true. This means that the fallibilist standpoint is untenable by being unstable. The standpoint is such that it licenses judgment that p when one's fallible grounds for p are good enough. But then it is possible to raise a doubt about p's truth, and when one does so one will be no longer judging that p is true. This is a case in which a standpoint is untenable by being unstable given the nature of our inquiring mind.

So far we have seen a way in which fallibilism is untenable when we consider a particular proposition p that by the fallibilist own lights is fallibly justified. But the problem with fallibilism can be better appreciated if we reflect on what it takes to judge the fallibilist doctrine itself. A fallibilist is committed to judge that we only have fallible justification for fallibilism. This commits her to judge that fallibilism is true and that it might be false. If I am right in claiming that it is impossible to comprehendingly judge that p and that p might be false, then the fallibilist standpoint is untenable for it gives rise to commitments that can't be jointly endorsed at the same time. But even if I am wrong about this impossibility claim, the fallibilist standpoint is still untenable in that it can't be held in a stable manner. The fallibilist standpoint is tragical. By occupying it, we would have to see our own epistemic predicament as such that all our judgments, even those we are most confident in, might well be false. Yet, the fallibilist in so judging can't at the same time stably hold the

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very judgment that all that we judge to be true – fallibilism included – might in fact be false. For by the fallibilist own lights fallibilism might be false, and when one realises that, it is then possible to raise a doubt as to whether fallibilism is really true, and in so doing one is ipso facto abandoning, at least so long as the doubt survives, the perspective that sees every judged propositions as possibly false. But if a doubt about p can be stably resolved only if one has certainty about p, and since fallibilism denies the existence of such certainty, the fallibilist will never be in a position of stably hold her own position. In that respect, the possibility of a doubt about fallibilism itself is what *saves* the fallibilist from the tragical condition in which she takes herself to be: the fallibilist is seeing all her perspective on reality as potentially illusory (as if the Cartesian evil genius were a live possibility), but when one doubts that very perspective one opens up the possibility that all our cognitive perspective upon the world can't possibly be total illusion. The doubt reopens the possibility that at least *some* of our judgments capture with certainty the way things really are.

Suppose that a fallibilist wants to argue that a doubt as to whether p is not rational or justified in a case in which p is fallibly justified. (Consider that p might be the proposition of fallibilism). This reply fails to appreciate the problem for the fallibilist standpoint. For, we *can* also doubt whether this very fallibilist claim about the conditions for rational or justified doubt is true, and when we so doubt we can't use the fallibilist claim in order to remove the initial doubt about p. More generally, we can doubt about fallibilism itself, and we can do so precisely because by the fallibilist own lights fallibilism is merely fallibly justified, and so it might be false.

Notice that this capacity to doubt the fallibilist proposition itself, and in fact any proposition that the fallibilist wants to take as true upon the recognition that it is suitably fallibly justified, has the result that the fallibilist perspective undergoes some sort of cognitive collapse. A fallibilist starts considering some proposition p, then she doubts it, and in order to remove the doubt she will appeal to some further proposition, but since *by her own lights* that very proposition might be false, the fallibilist can't even rely on it. In fact, she can't even rely on the judgment that it might be false, for this might be false as well and so doubted, but even this latter thought might be doubted, and even the latter one, and even... As soon as the fallibilist becomes fully aware of what she is committed to, she is condemned to doubt. But this doubt is recognized by the very fallibilist as correct, and so she would have to doubt whether it is correct to doubt, and whether it is correct to doubt whether it is correct to doubt, and even... This is some sort of cognitive collapse, but it is

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that to which a fully reflexive fallibilist will have to be committed. In fact, I suggest that this collapse can be easily experienced if one actually tries to entertain fallibilism and to reason according to the fallibilist understanding of our epistemic predicament. When one does so, as soon as one understands that *every* proposition might be false and hence doubted, one will simply destroy one's own capacity for reflexive endorsement of the truth of a proposition. When we try to think according to fallibilism, we first understand that according to fallibilism everything might be false, and then we are immediately lead to think '*but then...*' and as soon as we try to draw some consequence from our understanding of the fallibilist standpoint, precisely because we understand that standpoint, we are prevented from drawing a consequence – for the conditional *might* be false, and so is doubted. By running into this thought experiment, one also sees, I submit, in what sense our mind is committed to certainty: for, unless a proposition is removed from the possibility of doubt, no reasoning could even get started[210].

Here we reach the bedrock, and that is precisely what we want from phenomenology: a description of the field – what we might call the transcendental field, or transcendental core – within which what is possible for us is fixed. The normative nature of cognition – in that case, it being such that a doubt is possible so long as one doesn't have conclusive grounds – can't be superseded by some theoretical consideration (like the fallibilist one to the effect that fallible grounds for *p* makes doubt about *p* irrational or unjustified), for that very theoretical consideration will be produced using the resources of the cognition which is trying to supersede. But it is in the very structure of our inquiring mind that it is legitimate to doubt whether *p* is true so long as *p* is not conclusively grounded – and this is the transcendental core, the court which defines the structure of inquiry, so even the structure of inquiry whose outputs end up being incompatible with the verdicts of this very structure. There can be no conclusion that the mind itself produces that can show that, despite the fact that our mind has a certain normative structure, that structure is misleading. For it is within the railways of that very structure that we reach our judgments.

Why is it that the untenability of fallibilism hasn't been so explicitly recognized

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210 Quine's epistemological holism (Duhem-Quine thesis) is the thesis according to which any belief is revisable. Since revisability requires fallibilism, as defined here – because to say that every belief is revisable commits to the claim that there is no absolutely certain belief – the argument presented here is an objection to the tenability of a Quinian epistemology, as defended in Quine (1951). See Wright (1986) for an objection to the effect that Quinian epistemological holism is lead to an infinite regress. The core of Wright's objection can be captured, in its minimal terms, by the objection I presented in this chapter. Wright's objection can be read as a *particular* application of my argument against the tenability of fallibilism in the case of the particular fallibilism endorsed by Quine's epistemological holism.

yet[211]? When we do epistemology and evaluate our beliefs, we have the impression that we can take some sort of God-like viewpoint from which we can appreciate what our epistemic condition would be like if a given epistemology were correct. When we imagine God thinking about the world according to the fallibilist lines, there seems to be no cognitive incoherence in endorsing the fallibilist perspective. This is what God could think of our fallible epistemic predicament: 'If certain conditions obtain – conditions which involve the presence of evidence to which the subject has some sort of access – then the believers would be justified. These justifications are fallible, meaning that they are compatible with the falsity of the proposition whose endorsement they justify. However, if the believed propositions are also true, then everything is fine, for their fallible justification happens to track the truth'. When we think of our situation in this manner we tend to forget that we cannot step outside of our epistemic perspective. By thinking along these lines, we are surreptitiously putting ourselves in the God-like perspective. And so what is thought in that perspective applies to that thought itself. And hence, what we must think is that if we are lucky enough then our justification tracks the truth. But since we recognize that we might be unlucky, then all we believe is seen as possibly false. And, crucially, all the last thoughts I have made falls within the scope of this doubt. Maybe, that is, the very fallibilist picture is false! If we entertain this thought without illusorily taking ourselves to be in the external God-like perspective, we see that the standpoint cannot be maintained in a stable fashion.

§8.3   *Externalism as untenable*

Having appreciated the shortcoming of the fallibilist epistemology, one might think that the problem depends on the fact that the fallibilist view we have been taken into consideration was an internalist one. In fact, it is natural to think of the fallibilism I have

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211There is some discussion in the literature that purports to put pressure on the coherence of the fallibilist position by noticing that it is some sort of Moore-paradoxical epistemology. Thus, it seems prima facie odd to assert the following: '*p*, but *p* might be false', 'I know that *p*, but *p* might be false', 'I am justified in believing that *p*, but *p* might be false'. However, the focus has been, as often occurs within discussions in the analytic tradition, on the practice of *asserting*, rather than *judging*, the fallibilist views and its consequences. Lewis (1996) p. 549 famously commented on the doctrine of fallibilism as follows. "If you claim that S knows that P, and yet you grant that S cannot eliminate a certain possibility in which not-P, it certainly seems as if you have granted that S does not after all know that P. To speak of fallible knowledge, of knowledge despite uneliminated possibility of error, just *sounds* contradictory." Lewis concludes that fallibilism is uncomfortable, though preferable to scepticism. The problem is that fallibilism is preferable if evaluated in abstracto, for as soon as one tries to *be* a fallibilist one realises that she can't consistently be one. As we repeatedly had the occasion to notice throughout the Dissertation, the focus on our linguistic practice as opposed to the phenomenology of cognition has led to a failure to appreciate what are the views that we can coherently endorse.

discussed above as endorsing some form of modest internalism according to which justification depends on what is first-personally available as grounds for judging to the subject, where the relevant grounds are thought of as being at best fallible, but never conclusive. One might then think that in order to make the standpoint a stable one we should add some externalist element to it (or abandon the internalist component and hold a pure externalist account). The externalist element is something the presence of which connects in the appropriate way (through an appropriate method of belief-formation) our belief to the relevant fact that it purports to truly represent. So, the hope goes, if we can have a perspective on ourselves according to which there are these externalist links then maybe we might hold an epistemology that can be reflexively endorsed in a satisfactory fashion, that is, without being untenable one way or another.

Externalism is here understood as the thesis according to which the best justification that we can hope to possess for our judgments is externalist in kind. An externalist justification is one according to which, for any justified belief that *p,* it is at least necessary, if not sufficient, that some external conditions obtains. Crucially, the sort of externalism that I have in mind, is one that even though *can* put some internalist element in the conditions for justification, it *cannot* however put the requirements for absolute certainty among them. Moreover, the view must be such that it doesn't make room for absolute certainty, particularly room for absolute certainty about epistemology itself, otherwise it won't represent a competitor to my standpoint. Thus, to illustrate, in the case of perceptual justification, it might require, though it need not to, that there be some experience that *p* as a necessary condition for justifiably judging that *p* (this condition might be construed in such a fashion as to be of an internalist kind).

In order to see why externalism so understood can't be reflexively endorsed in a tenable manner we should first have an understanding of the way in which the externalist sees herself and the world. We should make a step into the externalist perspective and reveals what can be described as a blind spot – a blind spot that is analogous to the one that we inherit if we think according to fallibilist lines. In order to do this, let me offer a description of what I take to be a fairly recognizable prototypical externalist picture[212].

First step. If our perceptual-system is reliable[213], externalism will allow us to acquire

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212This description is modelled on various externalist works, but the one who recently offered this sort of account in fullest details and with the explicit intent to address the sort of reflexive questions which interest me here is Sosa (2011). Since the objection I have against externalism depends on the structure of the externalist account, and not on its details, I think that the omissions of details will not affect my point.

213I have chosen the property of reliability as an example of externalist property. You can substitute it with your favourite externalist property, or add to reliability whatever you think is necessary (even fallible internalist properties) in order to have a plausible externalist (or hybrid) account. This won't affect my

in a justified way most of the beliefs we commonsensically form about the environment and ourselves on the basis of perceptual appearances. Perceptual justification doesn't require that one have a *prior* justification for believing that one's perceptual system is reliable or, more generally, for excluding far fetched sceptical scenarios. The only requirement is that one doesn't take it that there are defeaters in the environment. One might also require that there is some internalist ground for judging. But, and this is crucial, the ground need not be conclusive. The ground might simply be, in the case of perception, the experience that *p* is the case (e.g., the experience that there is a tree in front of me), or, in the case of testimony, the experience of reading some text, or something along these lines.

Second step. By so proceeding, *if* not only our *perceptual* system but also, and more generally, our *belief*-forming processes (those, for example, which allow us to draw inferences) are reliable, then externalism will allow us to form[214] a justified picture of the world which includes, among other things, a belief in the reliability of our belief-forming processes. The belief is justified inductively, by relying on the individual pieces of justified beliefs about our perceived environment. What is crucial to notice here for our purposes is that the externalist picture at this stage has already made room for the possibility of having justified beliefs in the obtaining of the conditions which are necessary and sufficient for justification.

Third step. When we come to epistemological reflection, *if* the perceptual-system and the belief-forming processes are reliable, then on the basis of their justified outputs the externalist will be in a position to believe with externalist justification the externalist account itself. At this step, *if* all the previous conditions are in fact satisfied, then it might well be that the belief in externalism is externalistically justified. If this is so, then we have satisfied Objective Reflexivity.

Fourth step. The externalist is then in a position to describe the sort of situation I have just described at the previous steps and, indeed, at this very step (and any subsequent step, if any): she is in a position to tell to herself that her beliefs about the environment are by-and-large justified and that they are so justified because they are arrived at through a reliable process of belief-formation; then, relying on the sort of evidence that is provided in epistemological theorizing, she is also is in a position to tell to herself that externalism is

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point.

214 Of course, this is the description of a *rational reconstruction* of the building of our belief-repertoire. In reality, there is no such a succession of events. For example, the belief in the reliability of our senses and the belief in the existence of the external world are, to use a Wittgensteinian terminology, the sort of hinges which are always in place, however implicitly and unconsciously, whenever we rely, as we typically and unreflectively do, on our senses for acquiring beliefs about the environment.

the true account of justification. If the externalist is challenged to show that the evidence she has for externalism is good enough for believing in externalism – that is, if she is challenged to show whether she is also justified in believing that her belief in externalism is justified – then, again, the externalist can tell to herself the same story: *if* my belief-forming processes are reliable, and *if* no unpropitious condition obtain, then I am justified in acquiring beliefs about the environment through my perceptual system, am I also justified by inductive reasoning to believe in the reliability of my belief-forming processes, and I am justified in believing in externalism, and *if* I follow reliable belief-forming processes in forming the further meta-beliefs, I am also justified in taking myself to be justified in believing in externalism.

So, according to the externalist picture, *if everything goes well,* then our endorsement of externalism satisfies the principle of Objective Reflexivity and also the principle of Reflexive Stability. However, as some internalsits[215] have pointed out, we feel that this is not good enough – we want more.

To approach the problem, it is useful to start by pointing out that we desire to have more than what externalism is capable of giving us. According to externalism, *if everything goes well* (that is, if our belief-forming processes are reliable, and if whatever other externalist property is instantiated when we believe) then our beliefs are justified. But *if something goes wrong,* then we are not justified. Now, how could we came to be justified in believing that everything goes well? We will come to justifiably believe that everything goes well by relying on particular outputs of our more basic belief-forming processes, and *if* these processes are reliable, that is, *if* everything goes well, then we will get a justification for believing that everything goes well. But the sort of externalist justification that will be obtained in that manner does not remove our epistemic anxiety, *if* we have any: for it is a justification which relies on what must be proven[216]. And the same applies for this very epistemic story I just told you about justification when understood along externalist lines: if externalism is true, then, *if* everything goes well, we will eventually form a justified belief

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215The objection I am going to press is very similar in spirit to the one Barry Stroud has repeatedly pressed in his critical discussion of externalism. See the papers contained in Stroud (2000). However, my objection is explicitly linked to the issue of the reflexivity of the epistemological inquiry and to the issue of certainty. What Stroud describes as a problem of lack of 'understanding' is what I think is best described as a problem of lack of certainty. I think that what explains the possibility of raising the objection I am raising and the one Stroud was raising is simply the possibility – a possibility secured by the structure of our cognition – of looking for certainty, rather than any lesser epistemic property. And so I think Stroud should have made his points in terms of certainty rather than understanding, though doing so was and still is less easier to accept in the epistemological community.

216It doesn't rely on what must be proven in the sense of *using* as a premise the claim that everything goes well in order to come to believe that everything goes well. Rather, the premises can be used as such in inference because one takes it that they are justified, in the sense that they have been formed in a reliable manner.

in externalism. And here is the crucial blind spot when you move at the reflexive level: the very belief in externalism is hostage to the obtainment of conditions which are beyond our access. Of course, if the notion of access is understood along externalist lines, then the obtainment of these conditions can be accessed, for it is part of the very externalist story that *if* the belief-forming processes are reliable and we follow the relevant procedure then we may come to have an externalistically justified belief about whether the relevant justification-conferring conditions are present. But the sort of access that we obviously lack – whose absence we are signalling when we keep asking whether the propitious justification-conferring conditions really obtained or not – is an access of the internalist sort. It is part of the externalist story that we might not be internalistically justified in believing that all propitious conditions obtained. That our reflexive perspective is unsatisfactory is something we understand if we realize that we are capable of understanding the claims that I have just made and that it is desirable to have a more sure-fire – that is, as I will argue, certainty-conferring – access to the conditions for justification. If we are capable of asking whether the external conditions *really* obtained, it is because we understand what it means to have more than externalist justification. So long as we don't merely understand that we *can* ask for more, but we also *want* more, the externalist perspective might be found unsatisfactory.

Suppose that an externalist understands the previous remarks, understands that it is possible to have more, and also wants to have more. Still, she might reason somehow to the conclusion that she ought not to desire more than that. For one thing, she might think, we can't have more. And anyway, this desire might be unjustified in other ways. Here I just want you to notice the following point: again, if the externalist is really feeling the dissatisfaction, then no reasoning which is thought of as being merely externalistically justified can remove the feeling of dissatisfaction. For, the dissatisfaction is about externalist justification itself, and it is not clear how one can succeed to convince oneself that externalism is fine by providing an argument which one takes to be conferring mere externalist justification for its conclusion.

But let us move beyond this problem and the issue of desire. There is another more serious set of problems with externalism. The crucial commitment of externalism, given our purposes is the following: that for any externalistically justified belief that *p*, the subject needs not have an *access* (understood in internalist terms) to the external conditions whose obtainment is necessary for having justification. A fully aware externalist is then knowingly committed to judge that any belief which she takes to be justified might in fact not be a

justified one. That happens if we are unlucky and the relevant external conditions don't obtain. The externalist presupposes, without needing internalist conclusive grounds for so doing, that the relevant conditions for externalist justification obtain. By presupposing it, it eventually gets externalist justification for believing that they obtained. This circular reasoning is fine according to externalist lights, yet there is a clear sense in which even if one grants that the reasoning is fine, as far as we can tell, it might be the case that the presupposed conditions don't and didn't obtain. This is something that the externalist should be willing to accept, for it is part of the spirit of externalism. This means that for any proposition *p* that the externalist judges to be true, the externalist is committed to judge that *p* might not be justified. But the problem is that, by judging that *p,* the externalist is also committed to *p*'s being justified. Hence the externalist is committed to judge that *p* is justified and that *p* might not be justified. But if the arguments provided in the Chapter on *Judgment* are correct, it is not possible to both judge that *p* and that *p* might be false – or, anyway, even if this claim about impossibility is false, still it is true that externalism is unstable because by judging that *p* might not be justified she is in a position to doubt whether it is justified, and by doubting whether it is justified one will be committed to refrain from judging that *p*.

There is another more explicit way in which externalism might be shown to be untenable. That consists in showing that externalism is committed to fallibilism. Here is why. The externalist is committed to take it that the relevant externalist conditions might not obtain. But then, from the externalist's own perspective, it might be that *p* is false. After all, the evidence upon which the externalist formed his conception of the world is such as to be compatible, given the evidence to which the externalist takes herself to have an access to, with the falsity of the relevant propositions. The externalist condition was precisely supposed to bridge the gap between our fallible evidence and the truth, but if the externalist is committed to take it that the bridge might not be there, then she is back to the fallibilist predicament.

Consider perceptual justification, which is arguably the justification enjoyed by the basic beliefs which are at the foundation of the rational reconstruction of the way in which we come to have a justified picture of the world according to externalism. If one could have absolute certainty that our perceptual beliefs (or of any other beliefs on the basis of which the externalist comes to form her own externalist perspective) are true, then one would not need to appeal to externalist justification in order to make them justified or in order to build a picture of the world on their basis. Of course, if there were absolute

certainty for some propositions, one could *also* claim that externalism is a necessary condition for having justification, for one might want our certain beliefs to be formed in some appropriate way in order to be justified. But this is not the sort of externalism we are considering here. Here we are dealing with externalism understood as the claim that the best justification that we can get is an externalist one. The externalist we are considering might claim that all is needed for being justified is the obtainment of some external conditions. But it need not be so extreme, it can also ask that some introspectively available grounds be present, though these grounds have of course to be fallible. Since we have seen that the externalism is committed to judge that the external link might be absent, the externalist is committed to judge that a given *p* that she takes to be externalistically justified might in fact be false. For, if there might not be any external link, then all that speak in favour of *p* might just be the first-personally available grounds, but these grounds are taken as being fallible, hence one is committed to take it that *p* might be true. But then, if externalism is committed to fallibilism, externalism inherits all the problems of fallibilism, and it turns out that it is untenable as well.

In order to see how the problems with fallibilism arises in the case of externalism, it might be useful to dramatise a little bit. Let's consider what a believer in externalism would believe about his own adherence to externalism. 'I believe in externalism because I have good grounds to believe in it, of course. And my reasons are good because they have been formed through reliable processes and have themselves relied on further beliefs and experiences which were reliably formed or properly connected with the facts they purported to represent'. Then, if pressed, the externalist might need to realize the following: 'If I am right, however, I have no guarantee that externalism is right. For I have no guarantee that the processes I relied on in order to form all the beliefs I have – namely those beliefs on which I have relied in order to come to believe in externalism – are themselves reliable. I mean, I started by assuming that the relevant external conditions obtained. After all, I didn't check whether they were obtaining, for I didn't need to do so – that is required by demanding forms of internalism, not by externalism, that is precisely its advantage. But I realise that since all the other things I believe depend on the initial assumption that the external conditions were really obtaining, I must concede that they might have not, and so that as a consequence the resulting externalist picture might itself be unjustified. So, if I am right, then I cannot be sure that externalism is true'. This is one blind spot.

But, like in the case of fallibilism, the situation is even more dramatic and it

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consists in some sort of collapse of the whole epistemic perspective, for I might then also realize the following: 'Well, if externalism is really true, then I cannot even say that I might not be certain that it is true?! For, having realized that the externalist picture is believed on a basis that makes the picture uncertain, if I keep relying on that picture, I cannot even claim with certainty what I am claiming now, for as soon as I realize that it is uncertain I am no longer in a position to stably keep my judgment (doubt incurs). Maybe I can claim it nonetheless *without certainty*. But no! Because this very last claim is uncertain. And even this one. And...' This is some sort of cognitive collapse, the same we encountered with fallibilism.

This, I hope, is clear when the perspective is explored in a way which is resolutely first-personal. But we do have an irresistible tendency to behave as if we could go beyond that perspective and see ourselves from the outside. For, I might now tell to myself the following. 'Maybe I cannot be sure that externalism is right. But who cares, for *if* it is right, and *if* I am not in unpropitious conditions, then most of my beliefs are justified, and likely true, and so I also have reasons to believe in externalism. So, even if I cannot assure myself of the goodness of my epistemic position, I could still be in a fine epistemic position'. This thought is almost irresistible. But, once you consider that very thought, how would you evaluate it? Well, one may continue to reason according to this alienated standpoint and say: 'Obviously, if everything goes fine, than my previous thought is fine as well...'. But this is, again, a thought which I am having about myself and which I cannot have with certainty, because it is in the very nature of the perspective that I am embracing that I can't be certain of it. So, I cannot even be certain of being uncertain of it. The problem is that one can endorse such a perspective so long as one keeps oneself sufficiently alienated from the commitments of that perspective. This gives one the reassuring appearance of being holding a consistent and indeed promising standpoint ('imagine, if everything goes fine, then our commonsensical picture of the world is vindicated...'). But the appearance is illusory.

§8.4   *Absolute certainty about epistemological truths*

To sum up, the arguments I have advanced so far against the tenability of fallibilism and externalism can be seen as motivating the two following conditions:

Infallibility:

a belief in an epistemological theory is satisfactory only if the believer has conclusive grounds for that theory

Reflexivity:
a belief in an epistemological theory is satisfactory only if the believer has a certainty-conferring access[217] to there being conclusive grounds for that theory

As the names suggest, these are the conditions for absolute certainty we considered in Chapter I, and these also capture the commitments of judgment, as argued in Chapter III. Thus the condition is the following:

Absolute certainty:
a belief in an epistemological theory is satisfactory only if the believer has absolute certainty for it

The reason why this requirement is correct is easy to detect, now that we have made all this journey into the normative profile of our inquiring mind. For any judgment that p, either the subject's overall standpoint allows her to judge that p is certain or not. If not, it might be either because one takes the grounds for p to be merely fallible (lack of infallibility), or because one takes it that she is not in a position to be certain that the grounds for p are conclusive (lack of reflexivity). In the first case (lack of infallibility), one would be committed to judge that p and that p might be false. But this is either impossible or, if possible, it makes room for a doubt as to whether p is really true, and the doubt is incompatible with the judgment that p, thereby making the judgment reflexively unstable. In the second case (lack of reflexivity), one would be committed to judge that p and that the grounds for p might be fallible. If one is committed to judge that the grounds for p might be fallible, then one is committed to judge that p might be false. Hence one is committed to judge that p and that p might be false, and this commitment has the problems aforementioned. Thus, one needs to have conclusive grounds and also being certain to possess such conclusive grounds. This is tantamount to needing absolute certainty.

This has a further important consequence. The sole tenable standpoint is not simply the standpoint that it is certain that there are absolute certainties, but rather the standpoint that is also certain of its own epistemological theory. This is a crucial point.

217See Chapters I and III for an explanation and discussion of the condition of Reflexivity.

Defending a theory of certainty doesn't entail by itself that the theory itself can be justified with certainty. One should also make an effort to provide a characterization of the source of internalist infallible justification that is such that the theorist can appeal to *that* source in order to come to judge the very epistemological theory[218].

What is then the true epistemological theory the belief in which I am arguing is in need of being itself absolutely certain? The theory is the one that says that a belief is justified only if it is absolutely certain. How can I be certain of it? I haven't provided a story explicitly directed at answering this question yet. But this is the structure that the answer should take. It should be shown that we can know the truths about the normative profile of cognition with certainty. That is, it should be shown that a phenomenological investigation into the normative commitments of our most fundamental mental acts (that is, judgment and questioning) can lead to absolute certainty. Once this is done it is shown that it is the very structure of our inquiring mind that imposes the requirement to possess absolute certainty as the standard for judgment, for this is the only tenable standpoint that our mind can take. This is an extraordinarily difficult task for it requires an epistemology that shows how we an acquire certain *modal* knowledge about epistemology and how we can derive from that modal knowledge truths that have a normative bearing on how to judge. The step from modal phenomenological knowledge to normativity is discussed and defended in Chapter XI. The missing piece of this complex epistemological story is a defence of the possibility of acquiring certain modal knowledge about phenomenology[219]. This is the question whether Husserl's eidetic phenomenology is possible and can deliver certain results.

§8.5   *From untenability to falsity?*

I have been arguing that the only tenable standpoint is the one that countenances the existence of certainties. More specifically, I have also argued that some of these certainties must be certainties about the epistemological theory itself, namely certainties about the conditions in which one is certain (or epistemically justified). But this seems to leave

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218It is unclear whether current epistemological theories that characterise an internalist and infallibilist kind of justification have the resources to explain *how* one can have the internalist infallibilism itself justified in an internalist and infallibilist manner. The problem is that the desideratum that one possesses certainty about the epistemological theory itself hasn't been explicitly recognized. As a result, little or no explicit effort has been made in order to show that it is possible to be certain about one's own epistemological convictions.

219The initial plan for the Dissertation was to include a Chapter on the epistemology of phenomenology, in which I would have explained how to know with certainty modal truths about phenomenology. Unfortunately, I haven't had enough time to complete the chapter. See Zanetti (ms3) for more on this.

entirely open the question whether there really are certainties. From the fact that we are inescapably committed to the existence of certainties (some of which being certainties about epistemology itself), it doesn't seem to follow that there actually *are* certainties. Can we move from the fact that we can't but judge that there are certainties to the fact that there actually are certainties? Or should we rather find an independent source for judging that there are certainties?

We surely can find such independent source. The certainties we have (think of the sum and the cogito) are grounded on a direct confrontation with the very fact they represent, and not on some complicated philosophical argument that bridges the apparent gap from the impossibility to think otherwise to the truth of what we can't think otherwise. Also, I think it is possible to discover with certainty through eidetic variation that a doubt is possible as to whether p is true so long as p is not certain. Yet, exploring this gap is extremely important. It touches the very hearth of the transcendental problem – that is, the problem of understanding how knowledge of the truth is possible at all.

I will say more on this gap in Chapter XII, but here I will briefly make the most important point that concerns the issue of the unavoidable commitment to there being certainties that we have discussed in this and the previous Chapter[220]. There is a difference between judging that from the untenability of global scepticism it doesn't follow that it is false, and judging that even if we can't but be committed to the existence of certainties, our commitment might be wrong. The two things should be distinguished, because we *must* judge that global scepticism can't be true even if it doesn't follow from its being untenable. The recognition that the falsity of global scepticism is not entailed by its untenability should not lead us to think that even if it is untenable *it might be true*, for if we were to so judge, we will *ipso facto* be committed to judge that there might not be any certainty. But this standpoint is untenable in many ways, as already argued above.

We should first appreciate *why* is it that we think that from the untenability of global scepticism it does not follow that global scepticism is false. The reason hinges on a very profound idea that structures the way in which we think about the mind, that which confronts the mind, truth and knowledge. That we can't but be committed to the truth of some propositions seems to be perfectly compatible with the possibility that this proposition is false. Since truth is objective, our judgments, however unavoidable, might be wrong. Our unavoidable commitments to the truth of some proposition might simply be

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220The point made here applies *mutatis mutandis* to the unavoidable commitment that there are justified judgments (in at least *some* sense of justification), a commitment which we have discussed in connection with global scepticism – that is, scepticism understood as the denial that there is any justified belief in any sense of justification.

some sort of psychological compulsion. If the compulsion is originated by factors that have nothing to do with the truth, then it is entirely possible that the alethic commitment is false, even if unavoidable. Since so far all I have done was to argue that there are constitutive commitments of cognition and I have done so by exploring the phenomenology of cognition, no evidence has been presented about the *truth* of these commitments. Thus, we need an independent source of justification, if any. But, and this is the crucial point, even if it were ex hypothesis impossible to find this independent source, we could not endorse a standpoint according to which the constitutive commitments of our cognition might be false or are false. This is untenable. So, even if from the claim that we can't but be committed to judge that *p* it doesn't follow that *p* is true, still this doesn't mean that we *can* tenably judge that *p* might be false – for in so doing we are committing ourselves to the truth of *p*.

Chapter IX

Truth is the constitutive aim of cognition

In this chapter I will argue that truth is the constitutive aim of cognition. Through a discussion of existing accounts of the aim of judgment, I will defend a minimalist account according to which for judgment to aim at truth is for it to represent its content as true.

I will then argue that questioning is also aimed at truth in the minimal sense that by raising a question one is raising a question as to whether some proposition is true and in this way posits a true answer as its form of satisfaction.

I will then rely on these constitutivist claims about judgment and questioning in order to discuss and partially vindicate some other phenomena that are taken to be distinctive of cognition, namely the property of exclusivity – only alethic considerations count as ground for judging –, the property of transparency – the question whether I should judge that *p* is transparent to the question whether *p* is true.

The thesis defended in this chapter represents the premise of an argument which I will pursue in the next chapter. There I will argue that truth is valuable for us in a very specific sense which is captured by so called constitutivist accounts of normativity. Constitutivists try to ground the authority of norms on facts about what is constitutive of a given suitably inescapable practice. In the next chapter I will argue that cognition is inescapable in a sense that grounds the claim that truth is unavoidably valuable for us.

I begin the discussion by introducing three senses in which we can value something. These distinctions will be very important in order to develop and evaluate the constitutivist strategy I pursue in the next two chapters on constitutivism.

§9.1   *Personal valuing, sub-personal valuing, and transcendental valuing*

In order to properly appreciate the sense in which truth and certainty are valuable we should distinguish between at least three broad ways in which we can value things. These distinctions will also be useful in order to make some order in the debate on the constitutive aim of judgment, a debate that we are going to engage with in the next sections.

Personal valuing. One way I have for valuing something is by *consciously* aim at it or by *consciously* take it to be valuable. This conscious aiming at something can take different

forms. First, and obviously, I might value something by *judging* that it is valuable. A second way in which I can value something is by consciously *desiring* it. Thus, I might desire to be rich, and by so desiring I am valuing – precisely in the sense that I am desiring it – richness. A third way of valuing something is by *intending* to bring it about that I possess it. Thus, I might intend to become rich, and by so intending I am valuing richness.

This doesn't mean that by judging something to be valuable, by desiring something or by intending to possess something I am valuing something for its own sake. I might judge that richness is merely instrumentally valuable; I might desire richness for the sake of possessing something else – say, happiness; and I might intend to be rich for the sake of helping people that need a financial help. Yet, in these cases, even if I am not valuing something for its own sake, valuing it for the sake of something else still is a way of valuing it.

These are not three ways of valuing something in the same sense of valuing; they are rather three different ways in which something can be valued[221]. Of course, these ways interact. Judging something to be valuable is likely to be a commitment of intending to bring it about that I possess something. Anyway, for our purposes, what matters here is that we recognize that these forms of valuing are *conscious ones*. It is a possibility that we have to value things in these conscious ways.

Given this possibility, and given our capacity for reflective distancing[222], we have a normative problem that can be individuated by the following questions: what should I personally value? In the case of judgment, the question is: what should I judge as valuable? What is really valuable? In the case of desire: what should I desire? What is really desirable? In the case of intention: what should I intend to do? What should I do?

Sub-personal valuing. Another possibility we have of valuing things is by valuing them sub-personally. Here we can divide sub-personal valuing in two kinds, a form of sub-personal valuing that is wholly unconscious, and another form which is partially conscious, though it it not explicitly cognized by the subject.

Unconscious sub-personal valuing occurs when we are completely unaware of the fact that our behaviour have some aim. Thus, most of my behaviour can be conceptualized in such a fashion that it makes sense to say that I value survival, even if I have never

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221Maybe there are other ways. For instance, caring about something might be a way of valuing something that isn't reducible to the other three ways or to a combination of them. Nothing substantial will hinge on that.

222See Chapter II for a characterization of reflective distancing. To recall, reflective distancing occurs when I put into question the goodness of a candidate ground/reason for judging/acting. Thus, to illustrate, reflective distancing occurs when I step back from my desires and ask whether I am entitled to act on them.

consciously judged that survival is valuable, say. Also, if we want we might say that our organism having functions might be conceptualised as having values, just like we can say that our organism values pumping blood in the right way in the sense that it is the function of my hearth to pump blood in the right way. So long as we keep the distinction between this sense of valuing and the previous one, we might unproblematically think of a sub-personal valuing activity.

But there is also a kind of conscious yet sub-personal way of thinking of a valuing activity. Thus, I might be the sort of person who is curious about architecture, so that when I walk around in the city my attention is spontaneously directed towards features that have some interest in this regard. In this sense, I value knowledge about architecture, or I value aesthetic acquaintance with architecture. Yet, this still counts as a sub-personal form of valuing, because there is no conscious endorsement of the relevant value in the form of judgment, conscious desire, or intention.

The possibility of personal valuing and reflective distancing gives rise to normative questions about what one should personally value. Can there be similar questions in the case of sub-personal valuing? Yes, though they are not quite the same. In the case of personal valuing the questions have a *practical* or *deliberative* import: they are questions whose answers are pertinent in order to decide what to *do*. In the case of sub-personal valuing it is prima facie more appropriate to think of normative questions about what one should sub-personally value as being questions having a mere *evaluative* import. The question 'what should I sub-personally value?' has no immediate deliberative import if it is understood as the question 'what would be a good way for my system to function?'. The question might take a deliberative import if an answer about what counts as *good, well-*functioning for my system somehow provides me with reasons for taking some course of action that can shape my system in the desired direction. Thus if I judge that my system would be better off if it were less emphatic, say, and if by doing such-and-such I can change my system in the desired direction, then the evaluative question about what it would be good to sub-personally value gains a deliberative import. But this doesn't falsify the fact that there are two very different kinds of questions here. One question is: what should *I personally* value? And the other question is: what would be better or good for my sub-personal system to do? The first has a practical import, the latter has primarily an evaluative import.

Transcendental valuing. Finally, there is another way of valuing something, which deserves to be called transcendental for reasons that will become clear as we move forward

in the study of this phenomenon. To a first approximation, a value is transcendental if and only if it is *constitutive* of a given dialectically inescapable activity, where an activity is dialectically inescapable if in order to evaluate this activity one should engage in that very activity. In the next Chapter I will argue that truth is transcendentally valuable because it is constitutive of cognition and cognition is dialectically inescapable. I will now briefly contrast transcendental valuing with the previous forms of valuing, but I will have much more to say about it in what follows. Here I will be dogmatic, the arguments will come later.

An example of transcendental valuing is the fact that cognitive agency aims at truth. We might personally value truth or not – thus, I might judge that truth is valuable, but I might even judge otherwise, I might suspend judgment on the issue, or be open-minded about it; I might desire to know the truth about a given issue, or I might intend to find it out about a certain issue, but I might also desire and intend otherwise. Regardless of what I personally value, I will transcendentally value truth, because so long as I am thinking I am asking questions that want true answers and I am judging what I take to be the case in such a way that my thinking is responsive to alethic considerations only.

The same considerations apply to sub-personal valuing. My whole organism might be such that it doesn't promote discovery of the truth and responsiveness to evidence (for, say, in some circumstances, if I know the truth, I might suffer too much; or because, more generally, other things are more valuable in general than truth and get systematically promoted at the expense of the truth whenever conflicts arise). Yet, even if this was true, I would still be transcendentally valuing the truth, because if I judge I judge what I take to be true, and if I ask questions I ask them because I want to know the true answer.

As noticed, though transcendental valuing of the truth might occur even if truth is neither personally nor sub-personally valued, it can also be personally and sub-personally valued. One question we will be raising is whether we should personally value what we transcendentally value, and whether it would be good that we sub-personally value what we transcendentally value.

Is there any normative question that can be applied to transcendental valuing? What about: what should I transcendentally value? Or maybe: what would be good to transcendentally value? Or what about this: is it really valuable what I transcendentally value? It would be the aim of the next Chapter to explore what sort of normative considerations can be deduced, if any, from the fact that truth is transcendentally valuable. To anticipate, we will see that there are no intelligible *practical* or *deliberative* questions about

how we should cognize, whereas there other non-practical questions (that is, evaluative and existential questions) that are intelligible and to a significant extent independent on what we transcendentally value. But first, let me argue for the claim that truth is the constitutive aim of cognition.

§9.2   *Judgment aims at truth*

There is a growing literature in contemporary debate on the idea that judgment has some constitutive aim, the main candidate for that aim being truth[223]. The debate addresses several questions.

First, an uncontested thesis is that to say that truth is the constitutive aim of judgment is not to say that some mental act counts as the act of judgment only if it is true. It is to say that a mental act counts as the act of judgment only if it *aims at truth*.

Second, what does it take for something (e.g. truth) to be the aim of judgment? We will see different ways of understanding the 'aiming-at' relation. Some understand it as a form of personal valuing, others as a form of sub-personal valuing, others as a mixed phenomenon that includes both personal and sub-personal valuing. Others take the 'aiming' talk as metaphorical and understand the claim that truth is the aim of judgment as the claim that it is constitutive of judgment (or of our concept of judgment) that a judgment is correct if and only if the content judged is true. I will argue that none of these accounts is capturing the most basic and fundamental sense in which truth is the aim of judgment.

Third, what is the aim of judgment? How many aims are there? Is there a hierarchy among them, or are they all equally fundamental? Many think that truth is the aim of judgment, some think that other values like knowledge or justification are the fundamental aims of judgment. Other endorse a pluralist stance arguing that there are several equally fundamental aims or norms[224]. In what follows I will argue that once the aiming-at relation is properly understood, it becomes clear that truth is the fundamental aim of judgment.

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[223]Most works speak about the aim of *belief,* rather than about the aim of *judgment,* but here I will henceforth speak of judgment for the sake of conformity with my previous discussions in this Dissertation. I will assume that we are talking about the same phenomenon, and will notice where the difference between belief and judgment might be responsible for difference in opinions.

[224]People who claim that truth is the fundamental aim of belief include: Williams (1973), Railton (1994, 1997), Velleman (2000), Wedgwood (2002), Boghossian (2003), Shah (2003), Burge (2003), Millar (2004), Gibbard (2005), Shah and Velleman (2005), Steglich-Petersen (2006, 2009), Vahid (2006), Whiting (2010, 2012), and Littlejohn (2012). People who claim that knowledge is the fundamental aim of belief include Peacocke (1999), Williamson (2000), Adler (2002), Engel (2004), Bird (2007), Sutton (2007), Huemer (2007), McHugh (2011), and Littlejohn (2013). Weimer (2014) endorses pluralism about norms for belief and deny that neither truth nor knowledge is more fundamental than the other.

Despite the just noticed issues of controversy, some points are agreed upon by virtually all participants in the debate. It is agreed that truth (or the other candidate primary aim) is the *constitutive* aim of judgment. The constitutivity is then understood either about our concept of judgment or about judgment itself[225]. Either way, the constitutivist claims that a judgment (or our concept of a judgment) is such that its aiming at true (or knowledge) is that in virtue of which it is the thing that it is. I will also offer a constitutivist interpretation of the claim that truth is the aim of judgment, and I will argue that truth is the constitutive aim of judgment itself, regardless of whether our concept of judgment is such that for something to fall under it it should aim at truth.

There are several reasons why reflection on the aim of judgment is taken to be important. To take truth as the constitutive aim of judgment promises to offer the resources to *explain* various important phenomena that are central to our cognitive life.

1) *Exclusivity*: only alethic considerations can count as grounds in doxastic deliberation.

2) *Transparency*: the question as to whether to judge that *p* is transparent to the question as to whether *p* is true.

3) *Impossibility of believing at will*.

4) *The authority of epistemic norms*: there are epistemic norms about correct/incorrect, justified/unjustified judging.

I don't think that all these phenomena are genuine – particularly, I deny transparency, and reject the claim that the authority of all epistemic norms are explained on the ground that truth is the constitutive aim of judgment (though I remain open minded as to whether *some* epistemic norms derive their authority on the aim of judgment. The minimalist view I will offer deny the need for an *explanation* of these phenomena, but rather make them structural features of cognition. I will extend minimalism to them and will argue that they all are basic facts about the phenomenology of cognition that can't be explained by appealing to any further more basic fact about cognition. In this respect minimalism is significantly different from other existing accounts which all purport to offer explanations of these features.

There is another important question which is not explicitly considered in the present debate. Namely, the epistemological question concerning the *way* in which we know the right answers to the previous questions. There is no explicit discussion of the following

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225Conceptualists: Velleman (2000), Boghossian (2003), Shah (2003), Shah and Velleman (2005), Engel (2013). Essentialists: Wedgwood (2002), Baldwin (2007). It is not entirely clear to me whether Railton (1994), (1997) is a conceptualist or an essentialist, for he makes remarks that suggest both interpretations.

questions: how do we know that truth is the aim of judgment?; how do we know that truth is normative for judgment?; how do we know claims about the *constitutivity* of the aim and of the norm? Though I won't have the occasion to explicitly answer these questions here, it is the overall aim of the Dissertation to argue that the answer comes from a phenomenological investigation of the relevant phenomena, and so the answer must be provided by an epistemology of *phenomenological* knowledge – particularly, an epistemology of *modal* knowledge about phenomenology (see Chapter II, §2.12).

§9.3   *The minimalist view*

What does aiming at truth means then? The fundamental sense in which truth is the aim of judgment is that judging is judging how things are, it is judging that such-and-such is the case, or is the truth. This view is a kind of *minimalism* about truth as the aim of judgment in the following sense: there is no further thing that is needed in order to explain why judgment aims at truth in that sense. It is rather the structure of the phenomenon of judging itself that posits truth as its aim, as it were. The positing is not to be understood as some further personal or sub-personal mental state that makes it the case that judgment aims at truth. Rather, judgment itself posits truth as its aim or value in the sense that to judge that *p* is to take *p*, in the particular way in which judgment does that, as true.

Here I will offer several clarifications and further elucidations, mostly by answering to the most prominent objections to the view and by presenting the flaws of competing accounts. Like most minimalist or deflationary philosophical views, this view is better appreciated by contrasting it with other views which are not minimalist.

The view is about judgment itself and not about our concept of judgment. The view tries to capture what the nature of judgment is, where the nature here is exhausted by the way judging *appears* – namely by its phenomenology. It might be that it is also a *conceptual* truth about judgment that judging just is judging that *p* is true. But this is a further claim I am not primarily interested in here.

One way of expressing the truth that minimalism is meant to capture is to say that to judge that *p* is to judge that *p* is true, in the sense that judging is to present its content as being true. But of course, the point here is not that it is the same thing to have a judgment whose content is *p* and a judgment whose content is *p is true*[226]. It is phenomenologically

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226We should therefore clearly distinguish the claim of minimalism and the phenomenon that is sometime referred to in the literature as *transparency* (See Wright (1992), for instance). Transparency might be understood as a linguistic and conceptual point to the effect that it is true to say and think that to judge that *p* is to judge that *p* is true. I don't want to object to this claim about language and thought. The only

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different to have these two judgments. The minimalist view is meant to apply to both of them, since they both are judgments. In the intended sense, to judge that *p is true* just is to judge that *p is true* is true, namely to present the content that *p is true* as true.

When I say that to judge that *p* is to judge that *p* is true I am not saying that two things that are *given* as different are in fact the same. It is not like saying that the morning star and the evening start are one and the same thing. Rather, to say that to judge that *p* is to judge that *p* is true is a way of articulating the very phenomenon of judgment, the way judging is experienced when we judge. It is a way of articulating what is going on when one judges that *p* is the case.

The sort of internal articulation of the structure of judgment that I am providing here is a quite peculiar one. This is because intentionality is a mysterious phenomenon. The articulation doesn't provide the sort of understanding that can be achieved by using scientific or natural categories. The point is not about some temporal or spatial property of judgment; it is not about its causal power; nor is not about its place in a wider network of relations that hold between different relata.

Relatedly, there is no third-personal understanding of the aim of judgment that can have the conceptual resources for articulating the fact that judging that *p* is judging that *p* is true. If we were to identify something as being the physical substratum of judgment, the sorts of concepts we would use to describe that substratum would not give us the resources to think of judgment as being aimed at truth, in the sense in which I am claiming that judgement aims at truth by presenting its content as true.

More generally, to say that judging that *p is* judging that *p* is true (in the sense of being the sort of act that presents or takes its content as true) is not to place a relationship between two things, judgment on the one hand, and truth (or aiming-at-truth) on the other. Judging *is* taking things to be in a certain way. There is no distinction between the act of judging and the component *presenting-things-as-being-true*. Thus, the minimalist claim is not *ascribing a property to judgment* – and thus, saying that truth is the aim of judgment is not saying that judgment has some property, namely that of being aimed at truth. The minimalist claim is meant to be useful in so far as it makes perspicuous the phenomenon of judgment by allowing us to see it more clearly.

Since the claim is meant to be an articulation of what judgment is, I will argue that it is misguided to ask the following question that, as we will see, seems to be in the mind of

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point I wish to make is that minimalism is a view about *the phenomenon of judgment*, and as such it aims to articulate the very phenomenology of judgment and the sense in which the phenomenology itself is such that judgment represents things as being in a certain way.

many theorists about the aim of judgment: what is it that makes judgment the sort of thing that aims at truth? Many theorists make a distinction between judgment itself, and something that must be added to judgment in order to make it the sort of thing that aims at truth. That something can be a further mental state like an intention or a second-order representation, or it might be the application of some concept in one's reasoning or the fact that there is some norm with respect to which judgment is accountable. This is the wrong approach, or so I will argue.

§9.4   *Common-element objection*

The minimalist view hasn't even been explicitly noticed as a viable option in the literature on the aim of judgment. The reason why this is so is that all participants to the debate have been mislead by what might be taken as an objection to the viability of a minimalist approach of the sort I favour. The objection is often presented not so much as an objection to some view, but rather as a set of platitudinous remarks whose role is to introduce a discussion on the aim of judgment.

The common-element objection[227], as we might call it, has the following structure. First, it is pointed out a fact about our way of speaking about propositional attitudes. We speak about them as if they had some element in common. Second, from this fact it is then inferred a point about our concept of judgment and/or a point about the metaphysics of propositional attitudes. The point inferred is that propositional attitudes (or our concept of them) have an element in common (or ascribe to them a common element). Finally, it is argued that there must be some further fact about judgment that accounts for the difference between judgment and other propositional attitudes. In what follows I will discuss in some details two slightly different presentations of this objection.

I will first analyse Velleman's presentation of the objection, then I will present Railton's version of it.

Velleman. Let's start with the linguistic fact. It is natural to think that judgment aims at truth, for when we judge we judge something to be true. This appears to be a quite platitudinous and potentially revealing sense in which judgment might be said to aim at truth. Yet, it is noticed, this can't be right. Here is how Velleman (2000) comments on this apparently innocuous thought.

227This objection seems to be accepted by everyone in the debate. See for instance Velleman (2000), Vahid (2006), Steglich-Petersen (2006), Humberstone (1992), Railton (1997).

"every instance of believing is an instance of believing something to be true, and this relation to the truth is sometimes confused with truth-directedness [viz., the idea that truth is the aim of judgment]. But in bearing this particular relation to the truth, belief is just like any other propositional attitude, since wishing entails wishing something to be true, hoping entails hoping something to be true, desiring entails desiring something to be true, and so on. Hence the fact that believing entails believing-true doesn't set belief apart from other attitudes, as truth-directedness is supposed to do". p. 247.

In this passage one can isolate many misleading ways of approaching the issue of the aim of judgment. If one starts non-prejudicially to wonder about the idea that when judging we want to judge the truth, a very natural starting point is to recognize that when we judge we do simply that: we judge something to be true. To judge is to take things to be in a certain way. If one simply pays attention to the phenomena, without bothering too much about the way in which one tries to capture them linguistically, then it seems pretty obvious that judging is aimed at the truth in a sense which doesn't justify, if one were to move at the theoretical level, the talk of a *relation* between judgment and the truth. Judging simply is to judge how things are. The idea of relation doesn't have a natural application here. It is natural, however, to think in terms of a *relation*, whatever that might turn out to be, between judgment and the truth in the sense that there is a relation between what we judge to be the case and what is actually the case – what is the truth. But this is something like a relation of correspondence (or lack thereof) between mind and world. It is a completely different phenomenon from the one we are trying to elucidate when we speak of truth as the aim of judgment. So, there is a first idea that is initially implausible – absent any positive argument in its favour – in the passage from Velleman. We will see that thinking in terms of a relation between two things is using a kind of imagery that orients our reflection towards the wrong venues.

The second point to be noticed is Velleman's ambiguous focus. It is not clear whether his claim here merely concerns the way in which we speak about propositional attitudes, or whether it also concerns some truth about these propositional attitudes themselves, a truth that might be evinced through phenomenological investigation rather than being simply accepted on linguistic grounds alone. He speaks of the relation of *entailment* between belief and believing something to be true, and he sees the same entailment relationship in other propositional attitudes, since wishing entails, as he puts it, wishing something to be true, and so on. Now, if the claim is just meant to notice a linguistic fact, I think that we all might agree with Velleman. Yet, if this were the sole point

it wouldn't be very interesting. Surely he means it to be also a conceptual point that goes beyond linguistic surface and maybe even a metaphysical point, namely a point about the nature of judgment itself and the other propositional attitudes. The problem is, however, that it is unclear how one can justify the claim as a conceptual one or even as a metaphysical one. Surely, it can't be justified on linguistic grounds *alone* – I might say that I raise my hands, that I raise the standards, that I raise money, that I raise the volume, and that I raise my children, but this by itself doesn't show that there is a common element in all these actions, beside the fact that we use a single analogical expressions for them. Unfortunately, Velleman doesn't give us anything beside the linguistic consideration as an argument for establishing something about the nature (or the concept) of belief. How can we move beyond linguistic considerations in order to reach conceptual and metaphysical conclusions to the effect that there is some common *to-be-true* element between belief and other attitudes?

The natural and obvious way of proceeding is to wonder whether the 'to-be-true' feature that is common to all ways of speaking about propositional attitudes tracks some particular feature *in the very experience* that involves these attitudes. So, the question is whether judging something to be true is a phenomenon that shares something – the *to-be-true* feature – with desiring something to be true, and with any other propositional attitudes, for that matter. For my part, I don't see any such common feature. When I judge that *p* I surely judge *p* to be true but the phenomenon of judging something to be true is different from the phenomenon of desiring something to be true. In one case, *p* is taken as being really the case, whereas in the case of desire, one is taking it to be a desirable state of affairs in a way that presupposes that *p* is not already the case. So, even if it might be natural for us to *say* that judging is judging something to be true and that desiring is desiring something to be true, the phenomena of judging and desiring themselves do not share any recognizable *common* to-be-true component.

Let us be clear on what I am arguing here. If one keeps one's reflection at the level of linguistic expression, as Velleman does, then one is invited to think that, *first*, there is a thing that all propositional attitudes have in common, and *second*, that this thing is what is captured by the fact that with all propositional attitudes it is possible to intelligibly say the following:
believing is believing something to be true
wishing is wishing something to be true
hoping is hoping something to be true

desiring is desiring something to be true

…

So, the linguistic pattern suggests that there is something that all these attitudes have in common, namely the *to-be-true* component. But if one focus on the *phenomenon* that these expressions are meant to capture, then it is unclear whether one finds anything that can be recognized as being a common-element that captures the sense in which it is true that both in desiring and believing one is desiring and believing something to be true[228].

This point about phenomenology suggests that there is no metaphysical ground (in this case, phenomenological ground, since we are wondering about the nature of judgment, namely the *conscious* act of taking a proposition to be true in the way in which judgment does) for taking the linguistic to-be-true component as indicative of a metaphysical conclusion. The same point is also true, I feel, about concept. What I understand when I think that judging is judging something to be true is significantly different from what I understand when I think that desiring is desiring something to be true. It is not the case that the *to-be-true* component is thought of in the same way in the two thoughts. I am just thinking about two different things, and not about *two ways* in which the same thing – namely the *to-be-true* component – can occur. Analogously, when I think the thought that I am raising my children and the thought that I am raising the volume I am not thinking two thoughts that are composed by the same concept – the concept of raising. I am just thinking about two very different things.

Notice that Velleman's point about the presence of this common to-be-true component in all propositional attitudes was used in order to argue that since the attitudes differ despite their having this common component, there must be some *further* element that distinguishes them. But if we reject the existence of this common to-be-true component, then we have no pressure to judge that there must be some further component that distinguishes the propositional attitudes. Let us however concede for the sake of argument this point to Velleman, and let's see how he moves forward in the development of his view, for this will prove to be very instructive.

This is how Velleman marks the difference between judgment and other propositional attitudes, like desire. He says:

228One might be worried by my argument because it seems to locate the ambiguity in the listed expressions in the expression 'truth' itself. Yet, we don't want to say that 'truth' is ambiguous. But we need not commit ourselves to the claim that 'truth' is ambiguous in order to vindicate the claim that these expressions are saying different things. The ambiguity is in fact naturally located in the expression 'to be'. When we say that judging is judging something *to be* true, we are saying that it is *already*, or *really* true. It is true in *being*, as it were. But when we say that desiring is desiring something *to be* true, here we are not saying that *p* is true *in being*, already, but rather that we would like the world to be such that *p* is the case. Thus, in rejecting the common-element objection we are not committed to take 'true' and its cognates as ambiguous.

"Believing a proposition to be true entails regarding it as something that it is true, as truth already *in being*; whereas desiring a proposition to be true entails regarding it as something to be made true, as a truth-*to-be*". p. 248-9

Interestingly, Velleman doesn't take that remark as casting doubts on his presumption that when we speak of judging and hoping as judging and hoping something to be true we are speaking about some common element between them. He might have taken the obvious discovery that judgment differs from desire in the way just quoted as evidence for refraining from taking the common way of speaking about all propositional attitudes as evidence that there is such common element. Instead of taking this natural road, he says that judging and desire have *further* different entailments. In the case of judgment, judging something to be true *entails* regarding it as something that it is true, whereas the same entailment doesn't exist in the case of desire.

In the case of belief, according to Velleman, there is a *regarding-as-true* component which is absent in the case of desire. Yet, after having made that remark, he immediately notices that this component doesn't suffice for distinguishing belief from other attitudes.

"Whatever regarding-as-true turns out to be, it will still be involved in more than believing, since it will be involved, for example, in supposing or assuming, and in propositional imagining as well. These attitudes are cognitive, like belief, rather than conative, like desire. To imagine that p is to regard p as describing how things are, not as prescribing how they should be. Imagining is therefore a way of regarding a proposition as true – or, to introduce a term, a way of accepting a proposition. The question remains how belief differs from imagining and the other cognitive attitudes". p. 250[229].

From this discussion Velleman concludes that the difference between these attitudes must be in the *aim* one has while having them. Using his technical vocabulary, the difference between these attitudes depends on the aim with which they accept a proposition, or regard it as true.

"Assuming, for example, involves assuming a proposition for the sake of argument, or for similar purposes, but it doesn't involve believing that proposition. … I suggest that this attitude is like a

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229Notice that this notion of acceptance is technical – it amounts to take a proposition as true in a way that is supposed to be common to imagining, supposing, and judging. Velleman makes it clear that his notion of acceptance is different, though connected with, the one discussed by Bratman (1992). See Vahvid (2006) for critical discussion of Velleman's notion of acceptance.

belief because it is an acceptance, and that it is unlike a belief because it is acceptance for the sake of argument, whereas belief is acceptance for the sake of something else". p. 251.

Before coming to the details of his positive suggestion, let's evaluate his reason for thinking that there is something as a regarding-as-true component which is shared by judgment and by the other alethically committed attitudes[230].

Velleman is now struck by the recognition of another pattern in the way in which we speak of some *cognitive* (as opposed to *conative*) attitudes:

judging that *p* is to regard *p* as true

assuming that *p* is to regard *p* as true

supposing that *p* is to regard *p* as true

imagining that *p* is to regard *p* as true

…

Admittedly, it is not the case that in desiring that *p* is the case we regard *p* as being the case. So, we seem to have found a difference, yet a difference which doesn't suffice to capture the specificity of judgment, for judging shares a regarding-as-true component with other cognitive attitudes.

Here the argument is exactly analogous to the one we saw about the to-be-true component. A linguistic pattern is noticed, and from this it is inferred that judgment has something in common with other attitudes, either at the level of concepts, or of phenomenology, or at both levels.

However, speaking of this common *taking*, or this common *regarding-as-true*, or *acceptance*, seems to be just a useful linguistic shortcut. We should not be led to think that there really is this common component just because superficial linguistic expression suggests that there is such component. Noticing the linguistic point doesn't by itself tells us anything about the phenomena themselves. Surely, there is more similarity between judging and assuming, say, than between judging and desiring. But if we look at the phenomena themselves I don't think we see anything substantial like a regarding-as-true as true component which is shared by assumptions, judgments, and acts of imagination. To regard a proposition as true in the case of a judgment is to take it as really true, whereas to regard a proposition as true in the case of assumption is merely to pretend that the proposition is true – it is to proceed as though it were true, that is, as though one were

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230I have relied on something like this regarding-as-true component in Chapter III, when I remarked that there is a category of attitudes which consist in taking a proposition to be true, though I also insisted that they take their contents as true in ways that are more or less committal, as I put it in that occasion. In this Chapter the minimalist account of the aim of judgment makes clear the difference between judgment and other attitudes like supposing and assuming.

effectively judging it to be true. It is not as if the phenomenology of judgment and imagining, say, is identical in *one* component (or set thereof), and then there is some *further* component that distinguishes them. It is very hard to think of things in this way because mental attitudes do not look like the sort of things that can easily be treated in sum-parts terms. It is not that the sum 'judgment' include, as part, the feature *to-regard-a-proposition-as-true*, and that somewhere else, in the sum 'judgment' there is the component: 'for the sake of truth'. These are things that we can distinguish linguistically and conceptually for the sake of clarity. But to give a phenomenological weight to these expressions on linguistic grounds alone is methodologically unsound, and simply unjustified given the phenomenology itself.

The same point seems to hold at the conceptual level. When I think that in judging I regard a proposition as true I am thinking something very different from what I am thinking when I think that by assuming a proposition I regard it as true. It doesn't seem to me that there is a *single* concept involved here – the concept of regarding something as true – which picks out a *single* property. Velleman might have made his point speaking of a common *taking*-as-true component. 'Take' is an expression that can be used in order to express many different concepts, and this makes clear that the linguistic commonality shouldn't be taken as indicating any conceptual common component. At least, further argument is needed here to prove the point.

To a first approximation, my view is that every attitude that consists in regarding a proposition as true exhibits a particular way of regarding its proposition as true. This way of presenting things might be taken as suggesting that there is then a common minimal element: the regarding-something-as-true component, or what Velleman calls acceptance. But this minimal element is not something that can be isolated from the particular way in which it gets instantiated, as it were. It is like noticing that all faces have their own particularities (my face is different from yours), and then trying to isolate the common element among them, namely the face itself, regardless of its particular manifestation. But to think of something like :-) is already to offer a *particular* shape. The same occurs with judgment, supposing, assuming, imagining. There surely is some usefulness in noticing that *unlike desires* they all *somehow* amount to the act taking some proposition to be true. Yet, we need not bring home the utility of this remark by saying that there is this common element – regarding-as-true or acceptance – that is shared by all of them[231].

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231 Velleman explains the difference between judgment and other cognitive attitudes by appealing to the different *goals* for the sake of which these attitudes are had. One might think that a minimalist view like mine has no resources to explain the difference and the similarity between these attitudes. To discard the commitment to the picture 'acceptance + aim of the acceptance' is not however to renounce offering a

So, I think that Velleman is wrong in thinking that there are these *to-be-true* and *regarding-as-true* components that are shared by all propositional attitudes. These are just linguistic artefacts. Since he is wrong in thinking that there are such components, he looses the ground for arguing that we should explain the distinctive way in which judgment is truth-directed by introducing some *further* element in our mind, namely some sort of aiming. Rather, we can notice, as the minimalist does, that the phenomenology of our propositional attitudes is different, and that to judge just is to present a content as true, and it is to do in a way that doesn't have any recognizable phenomenological element in common with other propositional attitudes.

One of my argument for resisting the common-element objection is that there is no such common-element to be found in experience. Yet one might insist that it might be found at the conceptual level. As I already remarked, however, even if we stick to what we seem to be thinking when we think thoughts expressed by using the to-be-true or regarding-as-true component, still it seems that we are thinking different thoughts. When I think that judging is judging something to be true (or regarding it to be true) I am thinking about judgment in a very different way from the way in which I am thinking about imagination when I think that imagining is imagining something to be true (or to represent something as true)[232]. Anyway, if one doesn't like arguments relying on introspection of thought (though notice that Velleman should rely on his own experience of understanding of the relevant expression in the same way in which I did), there is a simpler reply to the suggestion that Velleman's remarks might still be correct about our *concepts* of belief and propositional attitudes. The reply is that our concepts might be wrong – they might be such as to embed false presuppositions about the nature of the phenomena they refer to. If our concepts of judgment and desire are such that they presuppose that there is some common-element between them, then let us just check whether the presupposition is true.

characterization of the different alethic attitudes that explain how they differ despite their common element. Beside attention to phenomenology itself, significant insight can be gained by showing the different webs of commitments that characterise the different attitudes. I implicitly began to offer such characterisation in Chapter III, where I investigated the normative profile of judgment and at times contrasted it with other attitudes like assumption and supposition. There I remarked that judging that *p* is committed to there being grounds for judging that *p* is true. Assuming that *p* is true, however, does not commit me to judge that there are grounds for judging that *p* is true. This is just an illustration of how work on commitments through an investigation by the intelligibility method sheds light on the differences among these cognitive attitudes.

232 I might have put the point in a less baroque way by saying that in the two thoughts I am *ascribing* two different *properties* to judgment and imagination respectively. Yet, I do not even think that when we say that judging is judging something to be true (or to regard something as true) we are really ascribing a property to judgment – unless of course we are speaking in a deflationary fashion such that an act of predication suffices to ascribe a property. Metaphysically speaking, I don't think there is any such *robustly* conceived property that is possessed by judgment such that this property can be captured by saying that judging is judging something to be true (or is to regard its content as true). The same applies *mutatis mutandis* to imagination.

It doesn't seem to be so. One might resist this reply by saying that all there is to our mind is just what we think of it and what our concepts entail about it. This form of anti-realism has several serious problems, chief among them the fact that it is just impossible to believe it consistently (for discussion on this see Chapter VI).

Railton. Railton (1997)[233] also considers an objection to my view which is a version of the common-element objection. Railton's starting point for an analysis of belief as it relates to the aim of truth is Moore paradox. He starts by noticing the oddness of

(1) *h* is true, but I don't believe it.

(2) I recognize that the evidence for *h* has become conclusive, so I don't believe that *h* in the least.

Then he asks:

"What makes (1) – and perhaps by extension (2) as well – so odd? Various explanations have been proposed. One might start by noting that belief is a propositional attitude partly characterized by its representation of its object as true. "Belief is believing true," the saying goes. But this is too quick. For even the propositional attitude of "pretending that *h*" amounts to "pretending that *h* is true" – such is the 'believe' in 'make-believe.' And there is nothing paradoxical about:

(3) *h* is true (or: I recognize that the evidence that *h* is true has become conclusive) but I'm pretending otherwise.

So we must go further". p. 296

Before seeing how he proposes to go further, let's evaluate his argument. Like Velleman's, Railton's argument starts by offering a putative specific quality of judgment that would put it apart from other propositional attitudes; then he notices that this putative specific quality is also present in other propositional attitudes; yet, judgment differs from other propositional attitudes in that it gives rise to Moore's paradox, whereas some other attitudes don't. This suggests that there should be a further feature to be identified that would distinguish judgment from other attitudes.

The structure of Velleman's and Railton's arguments is the same. They differ in some interesting details though. Railton seems to conceive of the element which is in common between judgment and other attitudes in a way that differs from Velleman's. Velleman speaks of judging/pretending that *p* as *entailing* judging/pretending *p* to be true

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[233]He puts forward a similar argument in Railton (1994). I focus on Railton (1997) since here the argument is more developed.

(to-be-true component) and as *entailing* regarding *p* as true (acceptance or regarding-as-true component)[234]. Railton doesn't put the point in terms of entailment. He says that "belief is a propositional attitude partly characterized by its representation of its object as true". He then puts his point as a point about the metaphysics of belief itself, rather than our ways of speaking (and thinking) about belief.

The question is of course whether he is right in claiming that both judgment and pretension are partly characterised by a representation of their objects as true. Interestingly, he doesn't offer any argument for this claim. So, presumably, even if he doesn't make the point by anchoring it to the way we speak about propositional attitudes, he would appeal to similar linguistic considerations in order to back up his argument. Here the same objection that I applied to Velleman's argument applies as well: what is the phenomenological ground for thinking that judgment represents its object as true *in the same way* in which pretending does? There is no such ground: pretending represents its object as true in a way that is cognizant of the fact that its object is not *really* true, whereas judgment represents its object as true in a fully committal fashion, as it were.

Let us take stock. I have argued that the common-element objection is unsound. Phenomenology doesn't vindicate the claim that there is a common-element like acceptance in common between judgment and other attitudes. The argument moreover relies on a methodologically dubious inference from linguistic practice to conclusions about our concepts of judgment and the metaphysics of judgment. This removes the ground for thinking that we must posit some further mental state in order to explain why judgment aims at truth.

§9.5   *Aiming as a second-order representation*

The common-element argument has had a huge role in shaping philosophical reflection on the idea that truth is the constitutive aim of judgment. By thinking that judgment and other attitudes share the fact of regarding their contents as true, people have been led to posit a *further* mental ingredient whose role is to make judgment the sort of thing that constitutively aims at truth.

According to the view under discussion in this paragraph, what makes judging aiming at the truth in a way that distinguishes it from other attitudes is the fact that there is some further second-order representation to the effect that the first-order judgment is

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234A minor unimportant difference here is that Railton focuses on the regarding-as-true component, omitting discussion of the to-be-true component.

aiming at the truth. I will focus on Rail ton's version of this view.

After having concluded that both judgment and pretension are partly characterised by a representation of their objects as true, he goes on to say what distinguishes judgment from pretension.

"We might say this: a belief that *h* "aims at" the truth of *h*. A belief that *h* necessarily "misses its target" when *h* is false, whereas a pretence that *h* does not. Beliefs are evaluable as true or false, and are false whenever their propositional objects are. To have mastered the distinction between belief and pretence is in part to understand this". p. 296

This is surely right. It is true to say that a judgments are evaluable as true and false, whereas other propositional attitudes are not. Yet, this point alone doesn't explain in which sense judgment differs from other attitudes. What we are trying to do here is to offer a phenomenological characterization of the phenomenon of judgment and of related phenomena. The phenomenological characterization must be such as to allow us to individuate what distinguishes judgment from other states. But *mere subjugation* to a norm, or mere *capacity to be evaluated* by a standard of correctness is not by itself a feature that should be evinced in the phenomenology itself. My present judgment that *p* might be evaluated as correct and incorrect according to some prudential standard according to which having a certain mental state is correct only if having it as the consequence of making me happy. But the fact that we *can* evaluate our mental performances in this fashion need not be something to which our mental performances themselves are sensitive in such a way that the sensitivity is detectable in the experience. If the truth is the standard of correctness of judgment in the same sense, then this doesn't make any difference to the phenomenology and so doesn't distinguish judgment form other mental attitudes in the required way[235].

Railton says that by mastering the distinction between judgment and other attitudes we are understanding that judgments, but not other attitudes, are evaluated as correct if and only if they are true. Surely, this feature about how we evaluate judgment seems to be central in our concept of judgment[236]. But unless this bit of understanding is somehow reflected in our experience of judgment and doxastic deliberation more broadly, the point does not suffice to distinguish judgment from other attitudes in their nature. It might be a

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[235]This objection should be reminiscent of the challenges to weak constitutivism that I have discussed in Chapter VI. Many of the arguments offered in this Chapter are particular applications of the general challenges that I discussed in Chapter VI.

[236]But see discussion on transparency below.

point about concept, but as such it doesn't suffice to conclude anything about the metaphysics of judgment.

Railton has something more to say that goes towards the desired direction. Though he is not very explicit about this issue, he seems to think that aiming at the truth involves some cognitive effort of the agent, even a very minimal and quasi-automatic effort, some sort of second-order thought or representation to the effect that in judging one is holding one's judgment as accountable to the truth only. Here are the relevant passages in which he expresses this idea:

"In order for a propositional attitude to be an attitude of *belief*, it cannot represent itself as wholly unaccountable to truth or evidence". p. 297

"It is part of the *price of admission* to belief as a propositional attitude that one not represent one's attitude as unaccountable to truth. Someone unwilling to pay this price – who, for example, insists that he will represent himself as accepting propositions just as it suits his fancy and without any commitment to their truth – would not succeed in *believing* these propositions at all." p. 297

"as an agent you must possess beliefs; as a believer you must represent certain of your propositional attitudes as accountable to truth and as disciplined by truth-orientated norms (at least, in the limit); therefore, as an agent you must so represent at least some of your attitudes, irrespective of what other goals this might or might not serve."

"A self-representation of certain of one's attitudes as "aiming at" truth is *partially constitutive* of belief, which in turn is *partially constitutive* of agency. Let us, then, call this sort of argument a *constitutive argument"*. p. 298-9

The first quotation might be read as suggesting that for something to *be* a judgment, instead of something else, it (the judgment itself) must represent itself as accountable to truth or evidence only[237]. Taken literally, I don't think it makes much sense, at least it doesn't make much sense on phenomenological grounds: judgments are representational mental acts, but they do not always (also) represent something about themselves. In the second and third passage he locates the relevant representational component at the

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[237] The condition for believing that he actually presents in the first and second passage is negative: one should *not* represent one's own mental attitude as unaccountable to truth-relevant considerations. Yet, from what he says in the third and fourth passage, it is constitutive of belief not only, negatively, the absence of some representation, but also, positively, the presence of some second order representation. This is why I read the passage as suggesting, however implicitly, the need for the relevant second-order representation.

personal level: it is the *believer* who somehow represents her attitudes as being accountable to the truth. Since he is a constitutivist, we should give a very strong reading of this claim: namely that if no such representation is present, one can't even have a judgment. This is plainly false. Beside the fact that it is unclear what this personal representation is supposed to be, it is surely not the case that when I form judgments I also have a further recognizable representation to the effect that I am forming a mental state accountable to the truth. If the further mental state is not meant to be phenomenologically salient, then I don't see why we should believe in its existence, and, more fundamentally, if the further second-order representation is not phenomenologically salient, then it can't be constitutive of the *phenomenon* of judgment.

Putting phenomenology aside, the presence of these second-order representations is suspicious for other reasons. It is just unclear what sort of mental acts they are. Surely, they can't be judgments. If they were, judging would be impossible, for any judgment *to be a judgment* will require the presence of a further judgment whose content is *somehow* the representation of the first-order judgment as being accountable on the truth, and this latter judgment will require a further judgment, and so on. Yet, if it is not a judgment, then what is it? There are no candidates that easily come to mind – if there were such candidates, then why Railton didn't mention them?

Since the candidate second-order representations have to represent the mental state as accountable for the truth, it seems that it has to represent the mental state in such a way that it is true that it is accountable for the truth. Suppose that instead of so representing the mental state it merely amounts to the supposition (or assumption, or imagination, or …) that it is accountable for the truth. In this case, one would not be seriously taking one's state as a judgment, for I might suppose that *p* while taking it to be false. So, if it can't be a judgment because of the vicious regress problem, it must at least be some sort of protojudgment or quasi-perceptual state. Anyway, we are owed an account here, and absent any further clarification, the view is not credible. (Also, notice that the sole argument for the view is the common-element argument; once the argument is defused, we should not even feel the pressure to look for a further mental state. The peculiarity of judgment might be located in the phenomenology of judgment itself, like the minimalist view does, without feeling the theoretical pressure to appeal to some further ingredient, like a second-order mental state).

The problem seems to be even more general. Let us grant for the sake of argument that this second-order order representation might be properly representing as true that

judgment aims at truth, without needing to be itself a judgment. Yet, in order to do its work, this second-order representation must represent its object as true. But then it is like judgment, by Rail ton's own lights, by sharing with it this common element – the representing-as-true component. So, by Rail ton's own lights, we need to postulate a *further* mental state which has the role of distinguishing the first-order from the second-order representation. There must be some third-order representation whose role is to represent the second-order representation not as a judgment (that is, not as something that aims at the truth in the relevant sense), but as a quasi-judgment, or something of the sort. Beside the fact that all this seems implausible on phenomenological grounds alone, it seems that we would be led to another even more contorted vicious regress that would make judging impossible.

§9.6   *Aiming as personally valuing*

We have seen how Railton is led to traffic with second-order representations because he was led astray by the common-element objection. We are now going to see how Velleman[238] tries to distinguish judgment from other mental attitudes once he has convinced himself that he can't simply capture the sense in which truth is the aim of judgment by appealing to the fact that judgment represents its object as true. We have seen that for Velleman there is one component which is shared by judgment and other alethically committed mental states like assuming and supposing. It is the component he calls acceptance. Now, Velleman's view is that what distinguishes judgment from other acceptance-involving attitudes is the sake for which one is accepting a proposition as true.

"Assuming, for example, involves assuming a proposition for the sake of argument, or for similar purposes, but it doesn't involve believing that proposition. … I suggest that this attitude is like a belief because it is an acceptance, and that it is unlike a belief because it is acceptance for the sake of argument, whereas belief is acceptance for the sake of something else". p. 251.

What is the sake for which we accept propositions as true when we make judgments?

"What purposes or aims could acceptance have? Well, imagining involves regarding a proposition *as* true irrespective of whether it *is* true – regarding it as true, that is, without trying to get its truth-value right. Perhaps, then, believing involves regarding a proposition as true with the aim of so

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238Here I am discussing the view defended in Velleman (2000). But he has then changed his view and
    followed Shah's normativist account. We will see it later on.

regarding it only if it really is. Thus, to believe a proposition is to accept it with the aim of thereby accepting a truth". p. 251.

What does it mean to *aim* in Velleman's picture?

"An acceptance has the aim of being the acceptance of a truth when it is regulated, either by the subject's intentions or by some other mechanisms in ways designed to ensure that it is true".

To accept a proposition as true with the aim of accepting it only if it is really true is the mark of judgment. This *aiming* is ensured either by personal valuing (one's intentions) or by sub-personal valuing (some mechanism), where the two might be thought of as end points of a spectrum of possibilities in which aiming might be realised. This is a form of mixed account about the aim of judgment which endorses a teleological account at both the personal and sub-personal level[239].

Now, for our purposes we might put on a side the sub-personal form of aiming, since I am going to discuss it in a next paragraph, and we might also put on a side the idea of a mixed account, and focus instead on the idea that aiming at truth is ensured by some form of personal valuing[240]. Is it plausible to believe that it is constitutive of judgment the fact of being accompanied by some intention of the agent? The account under discussion

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239A similar mixed account is also defended in Millar (2004, pp. 56ff).

240One might think that to object at a purely sub-personal teleological view and to a purely personal teleological view will leave untouched the tenability of a mixed account. However, this is not so, as it can be evinced if consider each of the four main forms that a mixed account can take.

First, suppose it is necessary for something to be a judgment that is accompanied by the relevant sub-personal mechanism, though it is contingent whether there *also* is the intention. This makes conscious intention redundant, and so we are not given a *phenomenological* account that individuates a mark that differs the *experience* of judging from the experience of accepting a proposition as true for the sake of something else.

Second, suppose, on the contrary, that it is simply necessary for something to be a judgment that it is *either* accompanied by a conscious intention of by a sub-personal mechanism. In this case, we still don't have a suitable phenomenological account of the difference between various forms of acceptance. For, the conscious intention will then not be what necessarily distinguishes judgment from other mental states *in experience*, since an acceptance could be the sort of acceptance that amounts to a judgment even if there is no conscious intention that makes it having the phenomenology of a judgment.

Third, suppose it is necessary for something to be a judgment that it is accompanied by both a conscious intention *and* a suitable sub-personal mechanism. This is the only view that promises to be a constitutivist view of the nature of judgment, for it can capture its distinctiveness at the level of phenomenology. This is why I discuss in the main text only the personal component, since to refuse its plausibility is sufficient to refuse the plausibility of any mixed account. The main objection to this view (though see more in the main text) is that it is phenomenologically implausible, for there doesn't seem to be always an intention that accompanies the relevant judgment. Notice that this is in fact accepted by theorists favouring a mixed account, since the initial motivation for a mixed view is *precisely* the recognition that there might be plenty of cases where one forms judgment without the relevant intentions.

Finally, if one says that conscious intention is necessary for having a judgment, whereas sub-personal mechanisms are not necessary, then, again, we have the view that I discuss in the main text, and the problems that I discuss there.

here sometimes goes under the name of the *teleological* account of the aim of judgment[241]. This account understands the idea that truth is the aim of judgment in terms of some *goal* that the agent has by having the relevant intention to achieve that goal.

A first observation to be made concerns the relationship between acceptance and the relevant intention. If accepting a proposition as true can't be what distinguishes judgment from other alethically committed attitudes, then it is unclear why an acceptance can become a judgment just by adding a background intention to the effect that the acceptance is done for the sake of getting the truth. One picture can be the following. It is possible to have states of acceptances whose nature qua judgments (rather than, say, suppositions) is undecided until the relevant intention is in place. This view is implausible, for we don't seem to have free floating acceptances that are indiscriminate between judgments and other attitudes. Either I judge that *p*, or I suppose that *p*, or..., but it is not the case that I accept that *p* and wait to form the relevant intention in order to decide whether to judge that *p* or juste to suppose it[242].

Another picture can be the following. There never are free floating undecided states of acceptance that wait the relevant intention that will turn them into fully determined mental states. There just are judgments and suppositions, so the fundamental mental states must be thought of as complex states consisting in combinations of acceptances plus the relevant intention. This view is implausible in many ways. I can't see in my case the relevant intention whenever I judge (or suppose, for that matter). We all know what it means to have intentions. The sort of intention that I have when I decide to go to the super market is just not the sort of mental state that I have whenever I form judgments[243].

Finally, there is another picture of the interplay between acceptance and intentions. The first picture has it that there might be free floating states of acceptances. The second picture denies that and says that whenever there is an acceptance there is the relevant intention. Yet both picture agrees that for something to *be* a judgment there must be the relevant intention that turns the acceptance into a judging form of acceptance. A third

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[241] There are many authors who endose such teleological account of the aim of belief. See Steglich-Pertersen (2006), Vahid (2006), Velleman 2000, Hieronimy (2006). Whiting (2012). See Owen (2003), Shah (2003) and Kelly (2003) for objections to the teleological account on the ground that aims can be weighted, whereas truth can't. See Steglich-Petersen (2008) for an answer to this objection. See McHugh (2012) for a reply to Steglich-Pertersen (2008).

[242] Notice that here the notion of acceptance that we are using is technical and refers to the putative regarding-as-true common element that Velleman would have individuate thank to linguistic analysis. Velleman himself recognizes that his notion is technical and differs from Bratman's notion. Thus, there might be states of acceptances of the sort Bratman describes. But these states will also feature a *further* regarding-as-true component (that is, acceptances in Velleman's sense) that will turn the regarding-as-true-component in an Bratmanian intention.

[243] See Coté-Bouchard (2016) for further critical discussion of the idea that some intention or desire systematically accompanies our beliefs.

picture would deny this and would say that there are judgments independently of the relevant intentions, though it would also insist that the intention is necessary in order to make judgment (or its acceptance-component) aiming at truth. Beside the phenomenological problems already mentioned, this view will have the consequence of abandoning the claim that aiming at truth is constitutive of judgment. For a judgment by itself would not be the sort of thing that aims at truth. Simply, it is the sort of thing that is systematically accompanied by an intention that makes it aiming at truth. But this is to abandon constitutivism about truth as the aim of judgment.

Another way of raising a problem to the teleological view will be to phrase the phenomenological considerations as raising a problem about self-knowledge. If there is nothing distinctive to the phenomenology of judgment *itself* that distinguishes it from other forms of acceptances, then how do we know when we are judging rather than assuming, say? We can't appeal to the simple fact that consciousness is self-consciousness, for even if by judging one was also conscious of being judging, judging by itself is like supposition in that it is an acceptance of some content as true, and thus they would have to be the same phenomena. We must then think that self-knowledge is here achieved by knowing whether one has the relevant intention. So, I know whether I am judging if I know that I am intending to accept a proposition as true for the particular sake that distinguishes the acceptance of a judgment from the acceptance of a supposition. But this doesn't have any phenomenological plausibility. When I judge I need not know whether I intend to get the truth. This is true regardless of the model of self-knowledge we want to embrace. Neither do I have to *observe* the presence of the relevant intention, nor do I have to *make up my mind* so as to have the relevant intention[244].

Maybe one further reason – beside the adherence to the common-element objection – why people are tempted to think that some intention must be present in the background is that people fail to distinguish clearly the phenomenon of doxastic deliberation from the phenomenon of judgment itself. When inquiring about an issue there seems to be some phenomenological plausibility in the thought that in inquiring I am intending to discover the truth about it. And so one takes that plausibility as involving the very output of the process, namely judgment itself. But this is not correct. Judgment is judgment that things are in a certain way, and this minimally is all there fundamentally is to its being aimed at truth. Beside this, there might sometimes be the explicit intention to form a judgment about a certain issue, and so an intention to make a cognitive effort to

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244See Moran (2001) for some discussion of the distinction between conceiving of self-knowledge as an observation of one's mind and conceiving of self-knowledge as making up one's mind.

discover the truth about some issue. But these are two different phenomena. Intention to get the truth might accompanies inquiry or deliberation, not the nature of the output of inquiry or deliberation, namely judgment.

Beside the points just noticed, there is a further puzzling feature in Velleman's account, namely the fact that he seems to be more concerned with our concept of judgment rather than with judgment itself. Here is what he says, commenting on the discovery that our concept of judgment is such that judgment is correct only if true, and incorrect if false.

"Our conceiving of belief as truth-directed doesn't necessarily settle the issue, however. Perhaps we could discover that the attitudes we call beliefs are actually regulated in ways designed to promote something other than their being true. Would we conclude that these attitudes weren't really beliefs, after all? Or would we revise our conception of belief, to reflect its newly discovered aim?" p. 278[245].

This passage clearly shows that Velleman is not a constitutivist about the aim of judgment itself, for the existence of the aim is not part of the very nature of judgment, but part of our concept of it. But if this is so, one has failed to provide a phenomenological characterization that elucidates in which sense judgment *itself* aims at truth.

Ironically, Velleman points to the right evidence that would establish a fundamental sense in which truth is the constitutive aim of judgment itself – namely the fact that truth-relevant considerations are the only considerations that shape our doxastic deliberations (this is exclusivity, a constitutive feature of cognition, yet a distinct feature from the fact that to judge that *p* is to regard *p* as true). Commenting on the possibility that the attitudes we conceive of as judgment might not be truth-regulated, he says:

"I think that introspection argues against this possibility. When we discern a gap between a belief and the truth, the belief immediately becomes unsettled and begins to change. If it persists, we form another belief to close the gap, while reclassifying the recalcitrant cognition as an illusion or a bias. I cannot imagine evidence that would show this reclassification to be a mistake". p. 278.

But precisely because it is impossible to think of such evidence, we should not make the

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245A similar cautionary remark is made by Railton (1994), and this seems to me to suggest that he is more concerned with the concept of belief rather than with belief itself. "All this [referring to his discussion of truth as the constitutive standard of correctness of belief] should be taken with a grain of salt. I have been speaking of a folk notion, belief". p. 76. He suggests that his consideration about belief might be proven wrong by scientific psychology.

aim of judgment parasitic on our concepts. The truth-directedness of judgment should be built in the nature of judgment itself, but this can be done only if it is built in the phenomenological nature of judgment itself, for anything that goes beyond the phenomenology might be conceptualised as contingently related to the phenomenology itself[246].

Let us take stock and compare the teleological account with the minimalist one. Minimalism about the aim of judgment differs from the teleological account because it says that it is the nature of judgment itself that ensures that it is aimed at truth. According to the teleological account, as well as according to the account that appeals to second-order representations favoured by Railton, either it is some further mental state that explains why judgment aims at truth, or the explanation why judgment aims at truth is delivered by saying that judgment is a complex states composed of a state of acceptance plus the relevant intention. Minimalism avoids any burden to appeal to some further mental state, and explains the relevant sense in which judgment aims at truth by noticing that to judge that p is to judge that p is true in the particularly committal way in which judgment regards its content to be true[247].

In order to further the understanding of the distinction between minimalism and the teleological account, consider this comparison. Suppose I throw a ball in a field and the ball falls one meter on the left from a little bin whose existence I was completely unaware of. Suppose that I then realise that there was a bin there. Can I understand myself as

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246The point here is even more general. The fact that judgment *constitutively* aims at truth can't be made parasitic on sub-personal mechanisms. It is conceivable that the underlying mechanisms change while the phenomenon of judgment remains the same. Yet, it is unconceivable that the phenomenon of judgment changes – for instance in that we can start judging on the basis of recognized non-alethic grounds – while it remains the phenomenon of *judgment,* rather the phenomenon of some different thing. This means that it can't be in the *essence* of judgments themselves the fact that they come with some sub-personal mechanism.

This further shows that an accompanying intention or second-order representation can't be what makes it the case that truth is the constitutive aim of judgment. For it is conceivable that I judge something without further representing it as being accountable to the truth only, or without further intending to judge that p if and only if p is true. Intention and second-order representations seem paradigmatically to be the sort of things that might or might not be present while we judge. But since it is unconceivable that a judgment be not accountable to truth-relevant considerations only, then it follows that the fact that truth is the aim of judgment can't be parasitic on the presence of features that we might conceive as absent in our experience of judgment.

247The sense in which judgment is directed at the truth according to the minimalist account does not appeal to the idea of direction of fit. I stand with Frost (2014)'s critical discussion of the opposition between two directions of fit. See Humberstone (1992) for an account of the phenomenon of direction of fit according to which it amounts to the same phenomenon that Velleman is describing when he speaks of truth as the aim of belief. "The present point, says Humberstone in order to sum up his account, is simply that unless one takes there to be a criterion of success in the case of an attitude towards the proposition that p, and, further, takes that criterion to be truth, then whatever else it may be, the attitude in question is not that of belief. So unless the attitude-holder has what we might call a controlling background intention that his or her attitudinising is successful only if its propositional content is true, then the attitude taken is not that of belief".

having *failed* to dunk? No, at least not in any sense which is comparable to the sense in which one is failing if one is judging what is false. Having noticed this point one might then wonder: what should I add to the mere throwing of a ball in order to put the throw under the relevant norm norm? In the case of a throw, the answer is quite obvious: I must *intend,* have *the aim*, of getting the ball into the bin. So, here the intention is something that must be added to the physical movement of throwing in order to make it susceptible of being judged incorrect or a failure in case I don't dunk. I think that people who think in terms of the aim of judgment in teleological terms have something like this model in mind when they feel themselves so comfortable in speaking of aiming at the truth. But this looks like one of those cases where a conceptual world which has its home in a context is brought out of context in order to understand another phenomenon that is not entirely hospitable to it. In the case of judgment there is no distinction between the mere physical movement (throwing/judging) and the further *aim* that transforms the physical movement in the suitable intentional action that then deserves to be judged incorrect if it is false, and correct only if it is true. The judgment is *already* imbued of the relevant sort of intentionality by itself. In the case of throwing a ball we might think that even before explicitly aiming at dunking in the bin, I was already aiming at something, or intending to do something – something like throwing the ball in the field, or whatever have you. But in the case of judgment not only there is no distinction between mere physical movement and intentional action construed by adding an aim to the physical movement; there is not even a distinction between judging as an intentional action *with some aim* and judging as an another intentional action *with some other aim*. It is not the case that there are judgments that have a certain aim, and judgments that have other aims. Judgment is what it is and it is *already intentional in the relevant way* – namely the particular way in which judging *is* judging things to be thus-and-so –; there is no need to add some aiming in order to turn it into some thing that then deserves to be judged as correct if and only if it is true and incorrect otherwise.

§9.7   *Aiming as sub-personally valuing*

A way of detecting an element which is not common to judgment and other attitudes is to go to look for it sub-personally, namely at the level of the mechanisms that putatively ensure the production of judgments and doxastic deliberation more generally[248]. Here is

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[248]Works that pursue this strategy are Bird (2007) and McHugh (2012b) Yamada (2010). It is not entirely clear to me whether they always have in mind truth as the aim of *judgment* itself, rather than truth as the

Bird (2007)'s proposal about the idea that truth and knowledge are the aims of judgment.

"Cognitive faculties have essential functions, as do bodily organs and the like. The function of the liver is to filter toxic impurities out the blood. Likewise the function of the faculty of belief is to produce truth/knowledge (depending which you think the aim is). A little more precisely, the function of the faculty is to supply true contents (or knowledge) for the purposes of reasoning. Thus when engaged in practical deliberation whose outcome is an action, the function of belief is to supply inputs to that process, and furthermore its function is to supply true/known inputs, so that the output, the action, will be successful. This is analogous to the function of the blood, which is to supply oxygen to the muscles and other organs, so that they may carry out their functions properly. On this view it is the function of the faculty that provides its constitutive aim (this function/aim makes it the faculty that it is)". p. 94.

The idea of function can here be understood in merely causal terms or in teleological ones. Neither form of understanding has the resources however to articulate what we understand when we realise that to judge that *p* is to regard *p* as true. Causal relations put things one after the other or in counterfactual relation or in some sort of relation of production. But there is no temporal relation involved in the fact that judging that *p* is to present *p* as true. Nor is there any relation of production or counterfactual relation between judging and (the aim of) truth. The same goes for teleological conceptual resources. There is no need for the concept of purpose in the articulation of the insight that to judge that *p* is to present *p* as true. In judging that *p* I haven't a purpose to get things right. Simply, judgment itself is the form that posits how things are. The *process* that eventually culminates with a judgment might be meaningfully said to be purposive. While inquiring, I might do so with the intention of getting the truth about some issue. But judgment itself, the eventual output of the process, doesn't feature any purposive element. (A minimalist will then have to say that speaking of truth as the 'aim' of judgment should be taken as metaphorical, or maybe is a way of speaking that we should abandon and relocate at the level of inquiry, not at level of its outputs).

Independently of the previous objection, there is another simple consideration that can be used to put on a side the sub-personal view. It is not the sort of view that we are licensed to use in order to theorise about cognition when we proceed as phenomenologists. When doing phenomenology, we are trying to characterise the phenomena themselves. Nothing follows about the phenomena if one mentions features that are not given in

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aim of the *activity* of inquiry more generally.

experience.

One might try to construct an objection to phenomenological method on the ground that it cannot avail itself of considerations about causation and functions that are otherwise independently motivated. But there is a methodological priority of phenomenology over any other investigation. In the present context, the priority is established as follows. Even if one wanted to offer a naturalist account of the fact that judgment aims at truth, one would first need a characterization of the fact to be treated in naturalistic terms – namely a characterization of judgment itself. Phenomenology provides this characterization, and the characterization provided is such that there is a basic sense in which the very phenomenon of judgment is internally articulated in such a manner that it represents its content as true. This point about the phenomenology is independent on any further thesis about the function of the mechanism that is supposed to ensure the process of formation of judgments.

§9.8   *Aiming as metaphorical: normativism.*

Normativists hold that speaking of truth as the aim of judgment is to be taken as a metaphor[249]. The thesis they hold is that truth is rather the norm for judgment. The norm is typically taken as a norm of correctness according to which to judge that *p* is correct if and only if *p* is true. Correctness can then be understood in different ways, as a deontic property, as an evaluative one, as an ideal, or as a sui generis kind of normative property that can't be reduced to more familiar ones[250].

Normativism takes two forms, regardless of the particular content of the norm and the normative vocabulary that is taken to be needed in order to articulate it. Conceptualists[251] take it that it is a constitutive feature of our *concept* of judgment that judgment is the sort of thing that it is partly in virtue of it being such that it is correct if and only if its content is true. Essentialists[252] takes it that it is part of the nature of *judgment itself* that is it is the sort of thing that it is in virtue of the fact that it is correct if and only if it is true. Both versions of the view face difficulties that can be solved only if constitutivism is grounded in the phenomenology of judgment.

249Lynch (2004), p. 499; Wedgwood, (2002), p. 267.
250Deontic interpretations: Wedgwood (2002), Boghossian (2003), Shah (2003), Gibbard (2003); evaluative interpretations: Sosa (2007), Lynch (2009): 79–82, Fassio (2011), Jarvis (2012), McHugh (2012); ideal interpretation: Engel (2013); sui generis interpretation Rosen (2001), McHugh (2014). Ferrari (ms) holds a pluralist view according to which truth is normative for belief in a plurality of ways.
251Boghossian (2003); Engel (2004); Shah (2003), Shah & Velleman (2005)
252Wedgwood (2002), (2007).

Conceptualism. According to a conceptualism modelled on Shah (2003) and Shah & Velleman (2005), all it takes for one's judgment to be aimed at truth is for it to be *conceptualised* as a judgment by the subject in deliberation. Crucially, by so conceptualising one's mental performance one is conceiving of one's attitude as being subject to the truth norm of correctness. This is what is meant to explain doxastic transparency – the fact that to wonder whether to judge that *p* is transparent to a wonder as to whether *p* is true –, and exclusivity – the fact that only alethic considerations count as grounds for settling the question what to believe.

A first difficulty for the view is that when we deliberate we do not seem to bring into the deliberative process the concept of *judgment* (or the concept of *belief*). It is rarely the case that I begin a deliberation by asking: what should I believe? Rather, I directly start paying attention at the issue itself.

"Does my mental life end after my physical physical death? Well, if I am reducible to a physical substratum, then all we seem to know about physics seems to entail that I would have to die as well. Yet, if I am not reducible to a physical substratum, then maybe physical death by itself doesn't entail mental death. But it all depends on whether my mental life is still dependent on it despite its not being reducible to physical stuff. If I am so dependent then I might die when my body dies, even if I am not identical with it. Anyway, if I don't die, then what happens to me? …"

This thinking process never involves the concept of belief, nor the concept of truth, for that matter. Yet, it has all the features of doxastic deliberation. If these concepts are not involved when we deliberate, how is it that they are supposed to explain the fact that judging aims at truth?

Shah (2003) claims that one needs not have explicitly before one's mind the question 'what should I believe' in order to have one's stream of thoughts *framed* by the question 'what should I believe?'. But he doesn't explain what does it take to have one's own question so implicitly framed. In the absence of any positive reason to think that the concept of judgment is somehow involved in deliberation without being explicitly present in the contents of the judgments and questions of the deliberation we lack a reason that we would need in order to make the conceptualist view worth of belief. But Let us suppose here for the sake of the argument that there is some plausible explanation. I will come back to this conceptualist view and the problem about deliberation which is not explicitly framed by the question 'what should I believe?' in §9.10 where I discuss how it tries to explain transparency and exclusivity. I think that the view is objectionable for another

simple reason.

Let us grant to the conceptualist that it is a matter of conceptual necessity that we understand judging as aiming at the truth in such a way that a judgment is correct if and only if it is true[253]. Let us also concede that it is in virtue of the deployment of that concept in deliberation that our judgments turn out to be responsive to alethic considerations only and more generally to be aimed at truth. This means that were we not to have this concept of judgment we would not find judgment as accountable to the truth and truth-relevant considerations only. If we didn't have *that* concept we would be capable of using, for instance, practical considerations as ground for judging a given proposition to be true, something that it is impossible for us now. But for one thing concepts seem to be paradigmatically the sorts of things that can be possessed or not, and there doesn't seem to be any obvious necessity to possess the concept of judgment that we actually possess according to the conceptualist version of normativism, namely the concept of a mental state whose standard of correctness is the truth. Moreover, one might have different opinions about judgement and as a result ending up having a different concept of it. But this seems to clash with the fact that we might easily conceive how we can keep having judgments even if we change our concept of judgment. To say the very least, a conceptualist owes us an explanation of why we can't but have *this* concept of judgment. Or, alternatively, he owes us an explanation of why it would be impossible to have judgments that respect transparency and exclusivity were we to have a different concept of judgment.

To make things vivid, take a person – a philosopher – who becomes strongly persuaded that whether a judgment is correct can be evaluated only by measuring the way in which a judgment satisfies non-epistemic aims, like moral ones[254]. This is not incredible. She is a philosopher who thinks that action is of a single kind, say, and that mental action just is one way in which we can act. On this ground, she thinks that when deciding what to do one should weight all possible aims, and eventually she thinks that moral considerations are the most authoritative ones. We might dogmatically suppose that this person has a

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253 I am myself sceptical about this claim of conceptual necessity, but I won't claim for it here. See Street (2009) for another sceptical voice and for criticisms to Shah's account of the concept of belief.

254 See Street (2009) where she discusses the mental life of an agent who takes prudential considerations as reasons for believing. Though I concede that it can be conceived in the sense that there is no obvious *conceptual* error in the description of the scenario (this is part of my scepticism about the claim of conceptual necessity voiced by conceptualist versions of normativism), I deny that it is conceivable in the stronger sense of being a scenario that we can try to experience, the reason being that I take it that it is a necessary structure of our experience that only alethic considerations count as grounds for judging (if we would be capable of experiencing judgments formed on the basis of non-alethic grounds, it would not be a necessary feature of experience that judgments can be grounded on alethic considerations only). More on this below.

wrong conception of judgment (for exclusivity holds, and only alethic considerations count as grounds for judging) and we might suppose that as a result she ends up having the wrong *concept* of judgment. Yet, this person keeps judging all the same.

Now, the conceptualist might want to reply that this person simply has a wrong *conception* of judgment, while still having the right *concept* of judgment and while unwittingly and unwillingly applying that concept to her doxastic deliberation. But this line needs argument. It is not absurd to think that by starting to firmly think that judgment is not responsive to alethic considerations only one comes to apply other concepts in one's doxastic deliberation. Yet, the end point of a deliberation, and each intermediate step will still be instances of judging that aim at truth as judging does, namely by regarding its content as true.

The conceptualist might perhaps concede the point and say that even though it is a necessary feature of our concept of judgment that it is subject to the truth norm of correctness, it is not necessary to have that concept. As a result, she will maybe grant that were we to have different concepts, the way in which our *current* cognition is structured would change as well. Perhaps, in a mind occupied by different mental concepts, mental states will display different necessities: it would no longer be the case that only alethic considerations count in doxastic deliberations. If the conceptualist view is open to that possibility, then it fails to capture the basic sense in which judgment aims at truth, namely by being an act that represent its content as being truth in the particular committal way in which judgment does that.

Essentialism. According to essentialists, to say that judgment aims at truth is to say that it is constitutive of judgment itself (regardless of what our concept of judgment entails) to evaluate it as correct only if it is true. The problem with essentialism is that, unless it is grounded on a phenomenological account of the idea that truth is the aim of judgment, it fails to answer the following question: what does ground the fact that this norm of correctness applies to judgment?

One answer might be that the application of this norm is a fundamental fact, not to be explained by appeal to anything else. Another approach might be to try somehow to naturalise this norm. A non-naturalist realist might ground the truth of the norm in some irreducible domain of normative properties. All this debate and effort is however beside the point. Phenomenology itself provides all the resources we want in order to understand the normativity involved in judging and, particularly, in order to understand why the truth norm of correctness holds. The relevant facts are, I think, the following. The fact that to

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judge is to regard its content as true. Second, the fact that sometimes we recognize that what we judged to be the case was not in fact the case. This provides us with the recognition that sometimes we fail to get things right. This failure gets to be conceptualised as an *error* because judging is judging that *p* is true in the particular way in which judging commits to the truth of the content judged. There is no further external aim to judgment itself that should be invoked in order to explain this feature. Nor is the norm something that goes beyond and explains the way in which judging aims at truth. Judging by itself aims at truth in the way in which it does; to speak of a norm of correctness is to speak of a *consequence* of this fact, and not of what this fact *amounts* to. It is not a way of *capturing* this fact, nor is it a way of *explaining* this fact, but it is rather a consequence of it.

We can take another approach in order to appreciate that the normativist accounts are derivative accounts of a much more basic phenomenon. Normativists want to explain the idea that judgment aims at truth by saying that judgment is under the jurisdiction of a norm of correctness. But how does this norm gets *manifested* in the phenomenology itself of judgment? In the phenomenology we do not see norms. Yet we see things that explain the sense in which it is right to speak of norms applying to our mental states and the sense in which it is legitimate for *us* to judge that our mental states should conform to norms. The things we see that explain the relevant sense in which there are norms for our judgment are the basic feature that a fundamental theory of the aim of judgment is meant to capture. Hence, there is something *more basic* than norms in the nature of judgment and it is natural to ground the correctness of the truth-norm on these features, otherwise it would be incredible why the norm would be constitutive of judgment.

§9.9   *A general problem for non-minimalist views of the aim of judgment*

A minimalist view denies the necessity of an explanation for the fact that truth is the aim of judgment. The fact is a basic one about judgment in that it is in the very nature of judgment to be a representation of its object as true in the particular way in which judgment does that. This 'particular way' is not to be captured by postulating some further mental state that would distinguish the way in which judgment represents its object as true from the way in which other propositional attitudes do. It is judgment itself that has the form of presenting its content as true in its own particular way.

All other views take it that there is a need for an explanation. The explanation is needed because they accept the common-element objection to minimalism. Interestingly,

they then use their preferred explanation as a ground for explaining further phenomena, namely exclusivity, transparency, the impossibility of judging at will, and the authority of epistemic norms.

The general problem with such explanatory aspirations is that they lack the resources to end the chain of explanations. The point can be illustrated by considering each of the proposals in turn.

Teleological accounts like the one endorsed by Velleman appeals to intentions. Judgment aims at truth *because* it is formed with the additional intention to do so for the sake of getting the truth. Even if one assumes for the sake of argument that this would have the form of an explanation of the sense in which truth is the aim of judgment, the question is whether this can be the *end* of the explanation. One natural question is why judgment should be accompanied with that particular intention instead of some other intention. Why is it that by judging one should intend to get the truth – instead of intending to get something else? Here one would like to appeal to the nature of judgment itself in order to answer – one would like to say that it is because judgment represents in the way it does its content as true. But this explanation can't be used, since the appeal to intention is precisely designed to explain the sense in which judging aims at truth. But then, if one can't appeal to the nature of judgment itself, how one could explain the fact that judgment is accompanied by the relevant intention to get the truth, instead of some other intention? This remains mysterious.

One might try to say that the fundamental fact that can't be explained any further is that judgment comes with its relevant intention. But this doesn't have the form of a fundamental fact that can't sustain an intelligible question for explanation. Notice that by 'intention' teleologists mean the standard form of intention that paradigmatically occur in practical contexts. But then it is legitimate to ask why that particular intention, and not some other intention, is the only one that come along with judgment. This is left as a mystery by the teleological account.

One way out is to say that the relevant explanation occurs sub-personally. Somehow, our sub-personal mechanism of belief-formation is such that judgments are always and only accompanied by its relevant intention. Even if we conceded the possibility that it is the case, this account would still be a failure. For what we want to capture is the sense in which the phenomenon of judging itself is in some relevant sense aiming at truth. But phenomenologically speaking, the connection between intention and judgment, even if it would be ensured by some sub-personal mechanism, still is a contingent connection: as

the account is construed, intending to get the truth and judging are just two different mental phenomena, and it would then have to be entirely possible to conceive of them as occurring in isolation one from the other. But it doesn't seem to be conceivable to judge without being aiming at the truth.

Another way out will be to say that the relevant intention that comes along with judgment is not an intention like the other typical intentions. We call it intention because it is relevantly similar to other intentions, yet it is a sui generis mental state. This would have to be argued for by the proponent of the teleological account. But even if one were capable of making this claim coherent, it would still be possible to ask: why is it that judgment is accompanied by this however special intention? The account still puts together two mental states, and it seems at least intelligible to ask why they are so combined. The problem is that one can't appeal to the nature of either mental state in order to explain their connection, for the feature of judgment that would explain why it is accompanied by the relevant intention is guaranteed precisely by the presence of that intention.

Railton's proposal appeals to second-order representations. Judgment aims at truth *because* it is accompanied by some second-order representation to the effect that judgment is accountable to the truth only. Can this be the end of the explanation? One is invited to ask: but why is it that judgment is accompanied by this second-order representation? Assuming that we can make sense of the existence of these second-order representations, they do seem to be the sort of things that might be present even in other contexts. Why is it that a second-order representation of the kind Railton describes shouldn't accompany also other mental states? It is natural to think that the same representation can accompany acts of assuming a proposition to be true, where the second-order representation would have a different content from the one that accompanies judgment. After all, it is precisely because judgment and assumption have the same regarding-as-true component that we need to look for some further mental state. But then, the question becomes why judgment is accompanied by a second-order representation to the effect that judgement is accountable to the truth only? Why not another mental content? Again, Railton cannot appeal to the nature of judgment itself, because what would explain why judgment is so represented is a feature which is not present in judgment itself but is rather ensured by the presence of its relevant second-order representations. It is then not clear how this account can explain the phenomenon of the aim of judgment.

Exactly the same problem arises for normativist accounts. Conceptualists have to explain why we should apply a given concept with given correctness-conditions of

application and not some other concept. What is it that justifies us in applying the concept of judgment that presupposes the truth-norm of judgment to judgment itself? Maybe our concept is wrong. What is wrong in thinking that our concept of judgment might presuppose a falsity about the normativity of judgment? The answer can't appeal to the nature of judgment itself, because it is part of the conceptualist view that it is the application of the relevant concept that makes it the case that judgment aims at truth in the sense of being subject to the relevant truth norm. There is then a request for an explanation that it is not clear how the conceptualist can discharge.

Metaphysical accounts need to explain why the norm applies. Since they can't appeal to the application of concepts, they must appeal to the nature of judgment itself. But even if we were to assume, for the sake of argument, that these views capture the sense in which truth is the aim of judgment, they would still have further things to explain. And the problem is that it is unclear what are the resources to which they can appeal in order to perform the required explanations. Why is it that judgment must respect the truth-norm? It can't be the nature of judgment itself, for by hypothesis all that distinguishes it from other alethically committed mental attitudes like assumption and supposition is precisely the fact that it is subject to a norm. The price to resist the request for an explanation is to be some sort of realist about the normativity of truth – it just is a fact that a judgment is correct if and only if its content is true. In this respect, a minimalist view doesn't have to buy into any form of realism about norms, for it is making a point about the very structure of judgment. Whether one can ground normativity on this descriptive feature of judgment is then a further question (to be addressed in the next Chapter).

In this respect, the minimalist view has a significant advantage. The fact that judgment aims at truth can't be explained any further, it is a fundamental basic fact about cognition. There is no explanatory burden for minimalism[255]. Another advantage of the view, as we will see, is that it can take as basic other facts that theorists of the aim of judgment were supposed to be explaining.

§9.10 *Exclusivity*

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[255]Well, of course there are questions for an explanation that minimalism doesn't answer. Being a merely descriptive view of the phenomenological essence of judgment, it doesn't answer the questions 'why judgment is as it is and not otherwise?', or 'why is there judgment and not something else?'... but these questions are also open for the other non-minimalist views. The difference is that other views must answer questions that the minimalist doesn't have to answer.

People become interested in the idea that truth is the constitutive aim of judgment for several reasons. One of them is the fact that this seems to explain a noteworthy feature of judgment that goes under the name of exclusivity, namely the fact that only evidential considerations seem to matter when we deliberate about what to judge. I can't appeal to pragmatic considerations in order to decide what to judge. I can only appeal to considerations that speak in favour of the truth of p in order to decide to judge that p. What does minimalism have to say about exclusivity?

The other views promised to offer an *explanation* of exclusivity. Minimalism doesn't offer any explanation and denies the need for an explanation. To think of exclusivity as a phenomenon that needs to be explained is to think of it as somehow derivative and supervenient on other more basic phenomena. Minimalism denies that and take exclusivity to be a fundamental basic feature of our cognitive phenomenology.

Simply, to judge that p is to represent p as true. And simply, to judge that p on the basis of some ground is to judge that p on the basis of considerations that are taken as speaking in favour of the truth of p. To put in another way: the act of taking something as a ground for judging that p just is the act of taking something as speaking in favour of the truth of p. In order to introduce the minimalist view about exclusivity it is useful to first consider and show the problems of a conceptualist view. A conceptualist view is different from minimalism in two significant ways: first, it wants to offer an explanation of why exclusivity holds; second, the explanation doesn't appeal to phenomenology itself, but makes exclusivity a feature that depends on our conceptual scheme. Let us see how the view is developed and motivated.

Shah's conceptualism about exclusivity. There are two phenomena that are often invoked to in the literature on the nature of cognition: transparency and exclusivity. To a first approximation, transparency consists in the fact that to ask question as to whether one should believe that p somehow boils down to a question as to whether p is true[256], whereas exclusivity consists in the fact that only alethic considerations count as basis for forming judgments[257]. I think that the central and real phenomenon is exclusivity, not transparency, so I will start with a critical discussion of a recent influential defence of transparency due to Shah (2003). Then I will move to a defence and explanation of exclusivity which is independent from transparency. Shah's paper might be read as identifying two features as

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[256]For discussion and endorsement of transparency see See Setiya (2008), Shah and Velleman (2005), Shah (2006), Moran (2001), Evans (1982), Adler (2002).

[257]Exclusivity is accepted almost by everyone. See Bennett (1990), Owens (2000), (2003), Kelly (2002), (2003); Shah (2003), (2006), Shah and Velleman (2005), Steglich-Petersen (2006a), (2006b), (2008), (2009), Hieronymi (2008). For critical voices, see McHugh (forthcoming) and Sharadin (2015). I will comment on Sharadin's paper in what follows.

being the core of the phenomenon of transparency:

1) To answer the question whether p is true is to settle the question whether to believe that p.

   Here some passages where he describes the phenomenon : when we ask ourselves *whether to believe that* p*,* we "must … immediately recognize that this question is settled by, and only by, answering the question *whether p is true*". p. 447.
   "Within the perspective of first-personal doxastic deliberation, that is, deliberation about what to believe, one cannot separate the two questions. What I mean by claiming that the two questions cannot be separated is that one cannot settle on an answer to the question whether to believe that p without taking oneself to have answered the question whether p is true". p. 447

2) There is no inferential step between discovering the truth of p and determining whether to believe that p

   "Truth is not an optional end for first-personal doxastic deliberation, providing an instrumental or extrinsic reason that an agent may take or leave at will. Otherwise there would be an inferential step between discovering the truth with respect to p and determining whether to believe that p, involving a bridge premise that it is good (in whichever sense of good one likes, moral, prudential, aesthetic, all- things-considered, etc.) to believe the truth with respect to p. But there is no such gap between the two questions within the first-personal deliberative perspective; the question whether to believe that p seems to collapse into the question whether p is true". p. 447

Feature (1) is false, and feature (2) is true but receives a wrong interpretation by Shah. Let's start with feature (1). There are two ways in which one can *ask* to oneself the question whether to believe that p. One might ask it in such a manner that one wants to know whether it is good or desirable to be in the state of belief that p. This question doesn't ask for grounds that speaks in favour of the *truth* of p. Another spirit in which the question might be asked is indeed the one that Shah has in mind when he says that by asking that question one must immediately recognize that the question is settled by and only by

answering the question whether p is true. I might ask the question whether to believe that p in such a manner that what I want to know is whether p is true. But, crucially, it seems that we have *both* possibilities. It is *intelligible* to *ask* both questions. Our conceptual resources make room for the intelligibility of both questions.

With respect to point (2), the idea is that there is no inferential step that need to be performed between judging that p is true and determining whether to believe that p. The relevant inferential step that is not present is one in which one wonders whether it is good (in whatever sense) to judge that p, given that p is true. So presented, we are not in the presence of any relevant feature. Of course there is no step between discovering that p is true and determining whether to judge that p, for by discovering p to be true one is already judging that p. In that sense, there is no inferential step. If the point is however that it is not intelligible to wonder whether it is good or the thing-to-be-done (regardless of the fact that I am already doing it) to judge that p, then, as remarked above, this seems entirely possible. It is a possibility that we have to wonder whether it is a good state to be in one of judgment with respect to a given proposition. There are plenty of dimensions of evaluation with respect to which I can ask this question. So, we must look elsewhere.

This discussion highlights a very important point, which is connected with the problems highlighted above in the conceptualist framework defended by Shah and Velleman, among others. We have the possibility of deploying in thought concepts of judgment, truth, deliberation, goodness and related concepts that are such that it is intelligible to ask for non-alethic reasons for judging. This possibility has therefore to be explained at the level of *thought*. Somehow, whatever the details turn out to be, our *conceptual resources* allow for the intelligibility of such questions.

Notice that Shah's strategy in his paper is to argue in favour of exclusivity on the basis of transparency. After having argued that transparency is a genuine phenomenon that occurs whenever we deliberate[258], he then offers a conceptualist explanation of it.

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[258] On Shah's understanding of doxastic deliberation: "Deliberation of any kind is framed by a question, whether it is what to do, what to believe, what to pretend, or whatever. This does not mean that an agent has to have the question at the forefront of his mind, explicitly posing the question to himself, as it were; but unless his thinking manifests some recognition that this is the question that he is striving to answer, his stream of thought would lack the direction or purpose required for it to be an instance of deliberation about what to do or believe rather than, for example, a stretch of directionless cogitation. The phenomenon of transparency that needs explaining occurs within the context of deliberation that is structured by the question *whether to believe that p*. Transparency does not occur in non-deliberative contexts of belief- formation, nor does it occur (at least in a sense that isn't trivial) in deliberation whose sole question is *whether p is true*. So if we are to account for transparency, what we need to explain is why deliberation that is framed by the particular question of *whether to believe that p* is answered solely by considerations relevant to answering the question *whether p is true*. We don't also need to explain instances of nondeliberative belief-formation or deliberation that is framed by some other question, because there is no phenomenon of transparency that occurs in those cases.". p. 466

Transparency holds because when we deliberate we deploy our concept of judgment, and our concept is such as to count as judgment only those performances that are exclusively responsive to alethic considerations. Thus, deploying our concepts in deliberation is what explains both transparency and exclusivity:

"My proposed avenue of explanation thus comes into view when we recognize that transparency occurs only in the context of *asking* oneself what to *believe*. ... What I suggest is that by framing his deliberation as answering to the question whether to believe that p, a disposition to be moved by considerations that he regards as relevant to the truth of p and a disposition blocking considerations that he regards as irrelevant to the truth of p are activated. That is, part of possessing the concept of belief involves being disposed in this way when one applies the concept to frame one's reasoning". p. 467

"My point has been to emphasize the relevance of the trivial point that in order to deliberate about what to believe, one needs to possess the concept of belief, and my proposal is that it is the dispositions constitutive of possessing the concept of belief, and of seeking to answer a question framed with that concept, that are responsible for the fact that only truth-regarding considerations move an agent in such deliberation." P. 468

This explanation, however, can't be right, if our conceptual resources make room for the intelligibility of questions about the desirability of having some judgments regardless of their truth. If transparency doesn't hold, then we can't appeal to transparency in order to explain why exclusivity holds.

One might try to rescue transparency by saying that when one is asking the question with the "right" concepts transparency turns out being true. This is of course correct – there is a manner of asking the question 'what should I believe?' that makes it transparent to the question whether p is true –, yet if the point is a mere conceptual one, and not one which tracks the nature of our own mental states, then the view is explanatory wanting. Shah wants to explain why transparency holds by arguing that when we deliberate we deploy our concepts in such a manner that transparency holds. But, if we can deploy our concepts differently, that is, in a manner the make it intelligible to ask for non-alethic reasons for judging, then there is an explanatory question that is left unanswered by the conceptualist. Why is it that even though at the level of thought it is intelligible to ask for both alethic and non-alethic reasons for judging (and also to evaluate our judgments according to alethic and non-alethic standards), at the mental or phenomenological level it is impossible to *rely* on non-alethic reasons for judging? He might respond: as it turns out,

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whenever we deliberate, we happen to deploy exactly those concepts that make it impossible to rely on non-alethic considerations as reasons for judging. But what we are asking for now is an explanation of why we deploy exactly those concepts, and not other concepts. Why is it that we don't deploy concepts that would make it possible to rely on non-alethic considerations as grounds for judging? The natural answer, the one which makes exclusivity a structural feature of cognition itself that doesn't depend upon our conceptualisation, is to say that it is right to apply concepts that exclude non-alethic considerations in doxastic deliberation *because* doxastic deliberation is *by itself* constrained by alethic considerations only. But Shah and conceptualists in general can't avail themselves of this answer. Unless one grounds the correctness of application of the concepts that turn exclusivity true in the very phenomenology of cognition, it will be mysterious *why* these concepts end up being those that shape and structure our cognition, and so why our cognition is not shaped by the other conceptual resources that make room for non-alethic reasons for judgment. A conceptualist has no obvious resources to explain that[259].

The consequence of this is that the conceptualist hasn't escaped what she wanted to escape, namely the fact that truth is for judgment what any other aim is for action, namely something that can be *contingently* attached to it. The way of moving away form this initial thought was to be constitutivist. But the source of the constitutivism must be placed rightly in order to avoid the contingent connection between the aim of truth and judgment. If one builds the constitution at the level of concept, concepts being the paradigmatic things that can be lost, changed, abandoned in the light of considerations that make us reject the presuppositions embedded in the concept and so on, then the account fails to provide the right sort of necessary connection. The necessity can be of the right sort only if it arises from the nature of judgment itself, and not from our concept application.

Having argued against transparency, and against the attempt to ground exclusivity on transparency along with conceptualist explanatory lines, let me now move to my own minimalist understanding of exclusivity. We will then come back to a conceptualist objection to minimalism.

Exclusivity. According to a minimalist understanding of exclusivity, there are two

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259There is another explanatory problem for conceptualist. They argue that we deploy our concept of judgment in our doxastic deliberation. Yet, they are very explicit (see previous footnote) in saying that when we deliberate we do not explicitly entertain thoughts which feature the concept of judgment. In fact, we very rarely do so. When we deliberate, we pay attention to the issue itself. Thus, it is quite ad hoc for a conceptualist to claim that even when we do not entertain a thought featuring the concept of belief we do nonetheless bring to bear that concept in our deliberation. A minimalist doesn't need to make any such ad hoc move, for it builds in the nature of phenomenology itself the fact that exclusivity holds. See Zalabardo (2010) for other critical discussion on this point.

very different mental acts. One is the act of taking something as a *reason* for an action. The other act is that of taking something as a *ground* for judging. The former might take as reasons for actions considerations of various kinds, that is, prudential, moral, aesthetic, and so on, yet it can't take alethic considerations into account as reasons for action. The latter can't take as grounds considerations that don't speak in favour of the truth of the *p* to be judged. The minimalist bit is the claim that this is so because the act of taking something as a ground for judging *is* the act of forming the judgment that *p* on the basis of a consideration that is taken as speaking in its favour. It is in the very nature of the act of taking something as a ground for judging that one takes the consideration that is taken as ground as a consideration that speaks in favour of the truth of the *p* to be judged.

This however does *not* mean that I have to consciously judge that my grounds are alethically pertinent in order to rely on them in doxastic deliberation. Thus, this fact is compatible with relying on grounds for judging that however *as a matter of fact* are not alethically relevant. This point is obvious: I might appeal to grounds that in fact have nothing to do with the judged proposition; or I might appeal to doxastic grounds that would have something to do if only they were true (or justified), but they are not. Yet, by relying on them I am taking them as relevant for the truth of *p* – for this is what taking them as grounds for judgment amounts to.

In order to appreciate in which sense this is a form of minimalism we need to appreciate why there is something wrong in the idea that *the fact that only alethic considerations can be taken as grounds for judging* has to be explained. There are several reasons why people feel the need of an explanation here.

First, consider the very way in which the *fact* to be explained is framed. It is framed in such as was as to suggest that there is on the one hand a thing called 'ground' (or 'reason' …) and the other hand some sort of performance, namely the act of taking *that thing* as a ground or as a reason for judging. If one starts to think in this way it is very natural to then wonder *why* only alethic considerations can be taken as grounds in the case of judging.

In order to explain why it is so natural we should add a further bit to the picture. Once we have started thinking in terms of two things, (grounds on the one hand, and the act of taking them on the other) we might also find very natural to think that the two things do not always come together in all circumstances, and thus this leads us to wonder why they necessarily come together in the circumstance of a deliberation about what to judge.

Thus, consider the ground itself first. The thought that *p* might be taken as a

ground for judging, but it also might be taken as a ground for performing other things. The thought that p might be taking as a reason for acting, and actions can be many things. Thus, one is led to think, exclusivity cannot come from the nature of the ground, for the same thing can be taken as a ground for doing various different things.

But now consider the very act of taking something as a ground for judging. Here, again, one might notice that the very act takes different grounds in different circumstances, depending on *what* it is taking its ground *for*. Thus, I can take a proposition that has nothing to do with the truth of p as a reason for supposing that p. I might take the fact that I like to imagine scenarios as a reason to suppose that I am immortal, and it might be the case that I am really immortal. But then, if it is so, it seems that the very act of taking something as a ground for doing something else can't be what explains exclusivity, since the very same act can be present elsewhere.

The natural run of thought, then, is to explain exclusivity – the fact that in the case of judgment the act of taking as a ground picks up only grounds that are relevant for the truth of the judged content – by referring to some peculiarity of the thing *for which* the act of taking grounds for is performed. Thus, it must be something about the nature of judgment itself that explains why only alethic considerations can be taken as grounds for judging. This something might be, for instance, the fact that judgment aims at truth (and this fact can then be explained, as we have seen, in various ways, or one can resist the temptation to offer an explanation, as the minimalist does).

This sounds just the right way of conceiving of the issue. But it is not. The mistake is in thinking that *there is something*, the act of taking a ground for doing something, that is *shared* by all performances that can be done on the basis of some consideration that speaks in their favour[260]. The mistake is to think that the act of taking something as a *reason* for *acting* is of the same kind as the act of taking something as a ground for judging. This equation is natural because there seems to be some initial superficial structural similarity in taking something as a reason for judging and in taking something as a reason for acting. In both cases there is something to be taken as ground (and, notice, the very same thing, like a proposition taken to be true, might be taken as ground in both deliberations), and there is a taking as a ground, and there is something for which something is taken as a ground. But, if one looks at the phenomena themselves, there is no genuine similarity.

Let us focus on a very simple case. I see a bottle in front of me and judge that there

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260This error is also responsible for the way in which teleologist thinks of the aim of belief. To think that judgment is the sort of thing that is done *for the sake* of getting things right (or for the sake of knowing, or what have you), is to think of judgment as a performance which is relevantly like any other sort of action that can be done on the basis of instrumental reasons.

is a bottle there. Here the judgment is continuously sustained by the experience of the bottle. It is like a direct confrontation with the fact that I am judging to occur. The experience is my ground for judging. Now take my decision to drink the bottle because I am thirsty. Here the fact that I am thirsty is my reason for grabbing the bottle. There simply is no relevant similarity between my taking the experience as a ground for judging that there is a bottle and my taking my thirst as a reason for drinking. If you look at the phenomena themselves this is just plainly obvious. In the case of judgment, the experience supports the act of judgment because the experience is the confrontation with the very fact judged to occur (or so it seems to the subject). In the case of action, the desire to drink doesn't make true anything, but is rather what prompts the subject to drink, eventually. It is only a bit of philosophical reflection conducted in abstraction from experience itself that leads one think that they are the same thing.

But if they are not the same thing, then there is no need for explaining exclusivity. It just is a datum. It is not that there is a single act which takes place in action and judgment (namely the act of doing something for a reason), despite the fact that in one case only alethic considerations count whereas in the other case other considerations count. Rather, there are two *different acts*: one is taking something as a *ground* for judging, the other is taking something as a *reason* for acting (I will use the talk of 'grounds' for judgment only, and the talk of 'reasons' for actions only).

Once we have discharged the need for an explanation of the difference by noticing that there are two different phenomena, is there still a need for an explanation? One might think: fine, the act of taking something as a ground for judging *is unique*, it has no counterpart in the case of action; but, why is it that *that act* takes only alethic considerations as grounds for judging? Here again we are misguided by philosophical analogies into thinking that some explanation is needed.

One misleading analogy. Suppose that we have been persuaded that the reason-act and the ground-act are just two very different sorts of things. One might be puzzled by noticing the following. The reason-act can take considerations of different kinds as its reason: thus prudential reason, moral reasons, aesthetic reasons, and maybe others. *Why* does the ground-act just take *alethic* grounds? But this question turns things the wrong way. It sorts out reasons and grounds by using the wrong categories. To see this, let us ask why should we sort things out in this way (using categories like alethic, aesthetic, prudential, moral, …). You can sort them out in different ways, by grouping instances of reasons and grounds along with different categories. How do you choose one grouping rather than the

other? Moreover, is there anything that the *alethic* category can be *contrasted with*? The alethic qualification doesn't even seem as a classification of the sort of grounds appealed to – notice that there can't be any alethic reason for acting! Rather, speaking of alethic ground is just a way of speaking of a sort of thing that is *used as a ground for judging*. It is not that there is the using as a ground for judging on the one hand, and a vast category of grounds on the other, a sub-class of which, the supposed category of alethic grounds, is picked out by the ground-act. Rather, if we want to speak in this way, *it is the very fact of being taken as a ground by the ground-act that 'makes' a ground an alethic ground*.

This mistake is also what explains why people think that it is possible to form judgment on the basis of grounds that are judged to be fallible. Think of a case of *conclusive* (or all-things-considered) reasons for action. There are various ways in which one can deliberate in action. One fairly simple case is instrumental deliberation, in which one takes for granted a given aim or desire and reason about what to do in order to achieve or satisfy it. In the case, there is a particular form of *gap* that is simply not present in the case of judgment. Once I have recognized that I have to do X in order to satisfy desire *d*, if I have authorised my desire, for whatever reason, then I understand that I ought to do X. Yet, there is a gap here: I might fail to do X, for whatever reason. In the case of truth, there is no such gap. Once I have recognized that the evidence is conclusive I *also* have *thereby* judged that *p* is true – it is not possible to judge at the same time that the evidence is conclusive without judging that *p* is the case[261]. (Epistemic akrasia when conclusive grounds are involved is not possible).

Consider now a case in which one has not conclusive reasons for action, but only prima facie reasons. Here, one might very easily act because of her pro tanto reasons for action, even if the person is perfectly aware of the fact that her reasons are just pro tanto; however, one can't judge that *p* on the basis of less then conclusive grounds *while comprehendingly judging that the grounds are not conclusive*, and hence that *p* might be false. This disanalogy hinges on the difference between the *acts* of appealing to *grounds*, on the one hand, and *reasons*, on the other. They simply are two different things. And the act of appealing to some consideration in order to judge, is such that it can't be comprehendingly

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261 Perplexity: but it is possible to judge that *p* without judging that there are conclusive grounds for *p*. True, this happens most of the time, for we almost never form judgment about grounds using complicated concept like 'ground' and 'conclusive', and also most of the time we simply judge without deliberating too much. But this is not a problem. For one thing judging that *p* commits one to judge that there are conclusive grounds for *p*. Second, my point is simply that if one is deliberating about *p* and at some point ends up concluding that the grounds are conclusive, and *if* one understands what he is judging, then he is ipso facto judging that *p* is true. But in fact, it almost never happen that one reaches a point in which one judges that the grounds are conclusive. Simply, one investigate an issue, and at some point the evidence leads her to conclude that *p*. As we saw in Chapter II, §2.2, it is a very specific act of reflective distancing that leads one's mind to recognize things *as* grounds.

performed if the subject judges that the ground is not conclusive.

This has a further important consequence. The act of taking something as a ground for something else is not an act that occurs in isolation from judgment. In fact it is part of the very act of judging – when I take something as a ground for something else I am thereby judging *on that ground* that *p*. This means that taking something as a ground is always taking something as a conclusive grounds, as being something that makes it certain that *p*.

This point might be counterintuitive, let me explain it. We often say that we take several things as evidence in favour of some claim. True, when we do so we are assessing evidence. We judge: this makes it probable that *p*; this speaks against *p*; this suggests that *q*, which in turn entails that *f*, which suggests with some probability, assuming that everything went as it typically does, that *p*; and so on and so forth. When we assess evidence in this way relative to a given *p,* we are not performing the act of taking something as a ground for *p*. We are simply *judging* that something favours the truth of *p*, in the many ways in which we can ordinarily conceptualise this favouring. But it is a further step to then judge that *p on the basis of* some ground. When we do so we are performing a very specific act. When performing it we do not *conceptualise the ground as conclusive*. But we commit ourselves to conclusiveness of ground in the sense that we can't keep judging that *p* if we judge that it might be false, and the ground-act goes along with the act of judgment – they are one and the same thing.

Let me argue for the claim that the act of judging and the act of taking something as the ground for judging are the same thing. First point to be noticed in order to appreciate the difference is the just noticed fact that taking something as a ground for judging is *not* like judging that something is evidence for some proposition. Now, if there is such thing as a judgment isolated from the act of taking something as its ground, and if there is something like the act of taking something as a ground for judging isolated from judging, then it must be possible to do the experience of them in isolation one from the other. I personally can't put myself in a position of having this experience. Can you? Consider judgment first. To judge that *p* on no ground is impossible. It is completely arbitrary to judge that *p* if I have no ground for so judging. I might find myself with an inclination to judge something, but as soon as I pay attention to the issue, unless I rely on some ground as the basis for taking *p* to be true I won't be judging that *p*. Now consider the act of taking something as a ground for judging. This is just the act of judging something on the basis of a ground. It is impossible to experience it in isolation.

Shah and others like him might be led to adopt a conceptualist view because they think that if one makes exclusivity a metaphysical feature of cognition, then it would be impossible to be irrational[262]. However, my view doesn't abolish our irrational nature. My point is not that *all our judgments* are formed on the basis of *good* alethic grounds, nor my point is that all our dispositional beliefs are formed and maintained on the basis of alethic grounds. My point is simply that when a judgment is formed is formed on the basis of grounds, it is formed on basis of grounds that are taken as speaking in favour of the truth of *p*, for taking something as a ground for judging just is to treat something as speaking in favour of the truth of *p*. Yet, all this is compatible with the possibility of wishful thinking. All sorts of *causal* truth-irrelevant factors might lead to the formation of judgments. The grounds of our judgment might be very bad, and have many truth-unrelated causal stories. The only point that my account would deny is the possibility of free floating judgments which aren't formed and sustained by some ground which are anchored, as it were, to judgment, by the fact that they are taken as the ground for the judgment. This is impossible, I suggest.

To conclude this long discussion, it is useful to consider an objection to minimalism that comes from the conceptualist camp – an objection which maybe explains why people want to explain exclusivity on the basis of our concept of judgment.

"Up to this point, my proposal amounts to little more than re-describing the phenomenon of transparency in a way that brings out the point that transparency is expressive of a *conceptual* truth about belief. However, this is an important point that can easily be missed. An agent's grasp of this constitutive truth about belief shows up phenomenologically in the way that the truth of *p* appears to him as solely relevant to settling *whether to believe that p*. If this constitutive truth about belief were merely a metaphysical truth, then it would be possible for an agent to fail to appreciate it, and it would be possible for the truth about belief to fail to influence his deliberation. But transparency is the consciously felt authority of truth for belief in any deliberation that aims to settle belief, so transparency can't be the conscious face of a merely metaphysical truth about belief. Transparency thus must express a conceptual truth about belief; a truth that an agent grasps merely in virtue of treating his deliberation as answering to the question of *whether to believe that p*". p. 468-9

This view turns things upside down. It makes phenomenology dependent on our representational resources (on our concept of judgment), instead of explaining why we have the representational resources that we have by appealing to an independently structured phenomenology. But beside the many problems that such a view should face,

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[262]"We need an account that explains why one can't conceive of one's activity as inquiry unless one is disposed to treat evidential considerations, and only evidential considerations, as reasons for belief, but without building this disposition into the metaphysics of belief" p. 465.

the motivation for adopting it that we can extract from this passage is not a good one. He says that if exclusivity were a metaphysical truth then it would be possible for an agent to fail to appreciate it, and as a result it would be possible for our deliberation to proceed in a way that isn't responsive to alethic considerations only. The premise is true, but the conclusion simply doesn't follow from it. It is true that if exclusivity is a metaphysical truth then it is possible for an agent to fail to appreciate it. This is nothing more than saying that it is possible for us to fail (as we surely did in the past, and as I did some years ago before I started to think about the present issue) to take notice of the fact that exclusivity holds. But from this it doesn't follow that it would then be possible to cognize in a way that fails to respect exclusivity. If exclusivity is a truth about the phenomenology, then it is the claim that we can't fail to reason otherwise, regardless of whether we notice it or not.

An objection to exclusivity. According to Sharadin, there are cases in which exclusivity doesn't hold, and so we can rely on non-alethic reasons as grounds for judging. Here is his case:

"My counterexample works like this. Suppose that a teacher, Dan, is deliberating about whether to believe that his student, Able, will improve in the com- ing year. Suppose further that the following is true and that Dan knows it:
Self-Fulfilling-Prophecy [SFP]: If Dan believes that Able will improve, then Able will be significantly more likely to improve."

Sharadin adds to the case the assumption that Dan knows that SFP is not an evidential consideration. Plus we add two conditions: that the evidential grounds for believing that the student will improve is equally weight, and also that Dan has a strong desire that Able improves. Generalising his case, the sort of consideration we are considering here has the following form:

SFP: If S believes that p, then p is likely to be true

Now, I don't find myself in a position to see how could I form a judgment on the basis of the recognition that so forming it will make it probable that it will turn out to be true. This will hardly be perceived as a sound objection. After all, critics of exclusivity might insist that they find the case possible, and maybe that they have actually have the experience of being in one of these cases. And they might even deny my phenomenological reports.

Surely, more methodological work is to be done in order to prepare protocols for checking through phenomenological investigation phenomenological claims. In the absence of such an established protocol, here are two reasons for resisting these cases.

First, there are two ways in which one can use SFP as a reason for believing: a case in which one consciously and comprehendingly takes SFP not to speak in favour of p; another case in which one is not so conscious that SFP doesn't have anything to say in favour of p. In the latter case, we simply fail to have an interesting objection to my claim that reflexive cognition respects exclusivity. I don't deny that we form judgments and belief in all irrational, sub-personal ways. These ways might involve non-evidential reasons. If the former is the case, however, then it is really difficult to see how one could rely on SFP in order to judge that p. Again, however, here one might simply insist that one very easily see how to rely on SFP to judge that p, even when one is fully aware of the fact that SFP doesn't speak in favour of the truth of p. What puzzles me is that even if we grant that somehow the mind can end up judging p upon having considered SFP and having understood that it is good to judge p given one's desires (e.g., to see one's student to improve), still I don't see how one could keep judging that p if one asks himself whether p is true.

Second, and perhaps more convincingly, even if one grants that in very particular extraordinary cases (like those involving SFP) it is possible to form a judgment on the basis of SFP, this phenomenon is different in kind from the phenomenon of appealing to ground in order to judge that p. Simply, appealing to a consideration that speaks in favour of the truth of p is different from appealing to a consideration that doesn't speak in favour of p but in favour of some other aim a with respect to which the judgment that p is instrumental. The distinction is not ad hoc or question-begging, but phenomenologically grounded. If you look at what it takes to judge, you will see that *there is* this phenomenon that consists in taking some consideration as ground and by so doing as speaking in favour of p, and, if the case of SFP is genuine, one will eventually see that *there is* this other phenomenon which consists in forming a judgment on the basis of the recognition that so doing will be beneficial for achieving some aim – like having one's students capacities and knowledge improved. The two phenomena are distinct, and this allows us to concentrate on judgment on the basis of grounds, rather than judgment on the basis of reasons, when dealing with the quest for truth. Even if we grant that forming judgment on the basis of SFP is possible, these judgments will not survive an inquiry whose overall aim is to discover the truth and only the truth. This is because the judgment won't survive reflection,

one it is noticed that there is no evidence that favours it over incompatible propositions. Moreover, as Sharandin construes his case, one must strongly desire to achieve some aim in order to judge on the basis of SFP (in the case here discussed the desire is to see one's students to improve). And as soon as this desire disappears, like when one is only inquiring into the truth, then one's judgement won't survive reflection.

The phenomenological claim that there is a significant difference between reasons and grounds can also be used in order to make plausible the idea that the case people like Sharandin are finding intuitively possible are not cases in which one forms *judgment* or *beliefs* on the basis of SFP, but rather some other cognitive state, like supposition or confidence[263]. He considers this objection, but claim that its prospects are very poor, given the difficulty of making it in a non-question begging way, that is, without assuming from the outset that only alethic considerations can be that on the basis of which judgments are formed.

§9.11 *Questioning aims at truth[264]*

I have explained in what sense judging aims at truth. But in fact also questioning aims at truth. Since judging and questioning are the fundamental ingredients of cognition, cognition aims at truth[265].

263Here matters are very complicated. In italian, there is a straightforward way of describing the sort of mental state that one can form on the basis of SFP aided by the desire to achieve some aim. The italian expression is 'essere fiduciosi'. It is a state whose best translation in English is probably being *confident*. It is a sort of *hope* which is also accompanied by some belief that one's hope will probably be satisfied. However this mental state is not like a state of judging that *p*. It is one thing to judge that a student will improve, and it is another thing to be confident that the student will improve. Also, the fact that all these putative counterexamples to exclusivity involves putative judgments about the *future* should make us suspicious about their effectiveness. When we deal with the future, there is a sense in which it is not already the case whether *p* or not *p*. This sense might be responsible of some people's impression that there are genuine counterexamples to exclusivity here. This point would need much more elaboration, but I must leave it as it is here.

264The ideas presented in this paragraph are developed in more detail in a paper in which I argue that questioning is a sui generis form of desire which can't be captured by existing accounts of the nature of desire. See Zanetti (ms5).

265Given the distinction I draw between *transcendental* valuing and *personal* valuing – a distinction which is typically overlooked – it is not easy to see whether there are other views in the literature that are in full agreement with mine. People tend to focus either on the aim of judgment/belief, or on the aim of inquiry. It is not always clear to me how authors working on these issues understand the relationship between the aim of judgment/belief and the aim of inquiry. For the idea that truth is the non-instrumental aim of inquiry, see, for instance, Alston (2005), David (2005), Goldman (1986; 1999), Foley (1987), Hempel (1965), Kvanvig (2003; forthcoming, 2009), Lynch (2004), Sosa (2003). For criticism of this view, see Brady (2009). The idea that inquiry aims at truth is largely taken for granted – though see below § for a Pragmatist take on the issue that might seem to deny this claim. Davidson (2005) and Rorty (1998), (2000) seem to deny that truth is the aim of inquiry. For discussion of Davidson and Rorty's denial of truth as the aim of inquiry, see Hookway (2007), Bilgrami (2000), Lynch (2005). For what is worth, I firmly distinguish between transcendental and personal valuing, and regard the question of the aim of cognition as concerning the transcendental level, whereas the question of the aim of inquiry responds to the question arising at the personal level. Thus, what I have been arguing for in this Chapter

What does it mean to say that questioning aims at truth? Questioning comes in two forms: either in an open question or in a closed question, in the sense defined in Chapter V. In the case of closed questioning the point is clear. To wonder whether p is to wonder whether p is true. When I doubt about p I am asking myself: is p really true?

In the case of open questioning it might be less obvious, because it is hard to put 'true' and its cognates in the formulation of an open question in the same way as we do when we formulate a judgment or a closed question. But very little phenomenological reflection reveals the same point. Suppose you ask your favourite open question: 'What does it all mean, if anything at all?'. Well in so asking you are asking the truth about this issue – the truth about the meaning, if any, of existence.

Another way of pointing your attention to the fact that in raising a question you are aiming at truth is by mentioning the fact that a question wants an answer. And an answer is a judgment, which is aimed at truth in the basic sense defined by minimalism. I don't mean to suggest that the truth-directedness of questioning is parasitic in any way on the truth-directedness of judgment. It is just an invitation to look closely at the relevant feature of the experience of questioning: when you raise a question, you are waiting for an answer, and this is wanting an answer, and wanting an answer is wanting to know the truth about the issue that the question is raising.

Suppose we wanted to raise the common-element objection against minimalism when applied to the case of questioning. The defender of the objection might perhaps point out the fact that we can say that a question about p is a question about whether p is true, and that a perplexity about p is a perplexity about whether p is true, and that a request about p is a request about whether p is true, that a supposition about p is a supposition about whether p is true, that an opinion about p is an opinion about whether p is true, and so on. The arguer might then notice that there is a common element in all these cases – call it the whether-it-is-true component. Thus, one might then claim that we should posit some further element in order to explain the particular way in which question is directed or aims at the truth. Maybe this further element can be the intention to get the true answer, and not just any answer that might be otherwise valuable (say, because pleasurable). Or maybe one might say that one needs some second-order representation that represents the question as making a request that can be satisfied only by true answers. But there is no need to look for this further element. The senses in which an opinion about p is an opinion

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should be seen as partially independent to the issue of the aim of inquiry. Yet, I think that no proper answer to the latter question can be offered if one looses track of the way in which truth is the constitutive aim of cognition.

about whether *p* is true and a question about *p* is a question about whether *p* is true are two completely different sense. Question aims at true in the particular way in which question does, namely by being a question.

There doesn't seem to be any further mental state beside the very state of questioning that might contribute to the particular way in which questioning is aimed at truth. The sort of intention I have when I decide to work a little bit before going to sleep needs not to be present when I raise a question while I reflect on philosophical issues, for instance, or when I suddenly wonder where I left my keys before leaving my apartment. Yet, these further intentions to know the truth might be present. I might decide to solve a sudoku. Thus I might ask all sorts of questions about the sudoku in order to solve it, that is, with the intention of solving it. But this sort of accompanying intention is not present all the time. Just asking a question is in itself the request of an answer, as it were; one needs not also to intend to have an answer, in order to want an answer through the act of asking a question.

Interestingly, if there is a non-metaphorical place for the expression of intending to find out the truth, aiming at the truth, desiring to know the truth, this place is precisely that of questioning. When I raise a question there is a sense in which I am really desiring to know the truth. Focusing on questioning gives us a paradigmatic understanding of what it means to desire something. When I ask what is the weather like I want to know the truth about the weather. It is a desire that I have. But notice, and this is crucial, that the point here is not that there must be on the one hand the question – what is the weather like? - and *on the other hand*, the desire – the desire to know what is the weather like. The very moment of questioning is *a form of desire*. In this sense it is a paradigmatic phenomenon for understanding what it means to desire something: because *asking a question just is desiring an answer*.

One objection goes as follows. It is not true that the aim is to have *true* answers. The aim is to remove the question, and the question is removed by providing an answer to it, and the answer in order to be an answer need not be a *true* answer, but only an answer that the subject takes as the true one. Thus, the aim is not really having *true* judgments, but rather having *judgments*.

This objection can be extracted from Charles Peirce's work. In 'Fixation of Belief' (1877) he argues that enquiry is the struggle to move from the irritating[266] state of doubt to

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[266]"Doubt is uneasy and dissatisfied state from which we struggle to free ourselves and pass into the state of belief; while the latter is a calm and satisfactory state which we do not aim to avoid, or to change to a belief in anything else. On the contrary, we cling tenaciously, not merely to believing, but to believing just what we do believe". See also the work of Cardinal Mercier, who agrees in saying the doubt is painful.

the state of belief[267]. If this is so, then the aim is to avoid suffering, and to achieve the aim we should move from doubt to belief. If this line was to be used to put pressure on the idea that truth is the constitutive aim of cognition, one will have to try to argue from the fact that doubt is irritating and that mere belief suffices to avoid the irritation, to the conclusion that having true answers is not really the aim of judgment[268].

To see our predicament as consisting in the mere struggle to remove suffering by coming to belief is to take a detached perspective upon ourselves. Yet, not only it is an illusion to think that we can take this detached perspective (for in being in that perspective one is not detached from its aiming to get the truth about our predicament – that perspective is nothing but a move in the game of cognition), but it also leads to a failure to appreciate what is the internal intelligibility of our struggle for the truth. As Peirce puts it,

"The most that can be maintained is, that we seek for a belief that we shall *think* to be true. But we think each one of our beliefs to be true, and, indeed, it is mere tautology to say so".

The points, as I would rather prefer to phrase it, is that to judge is to present one's content

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There are two fundamental senses in which doubt is painful. The most basic sense is that when one doubts one's mind haven't already taken a commitment. Another sense is that some doubts arise with respect to propositions that are central to one's own understanding of oneself and the world. If I start to doubt some proposition I previously firmly believed and on which an important part of my own self-understanding depends it is natural that the doubt will be painful. To give a very simple example, if I start doubting the existence of God, and I am a committed believer, my consciousness will be shaken and I will suffer. The first sense in which doubt is painful is equally natural and known by many. The first sense of doubt is more similar to the one Peirce describes as an *irritation* – we might also be irritated about issues which are not of vital importance for our life, and this occurs when there is some proposition whose truth-value is unsettled. But the latter sense, involving issues that are of vital importance for the subject, goes beyond the mere irritation, and can be source of profound suffering. If you want to see this point clearly, think of someone who, like Camus, finds herself in an existential situation according to which "There is only one really serious philosophical question, and that is suicide" - exept that the question is not merely philosophical, but painfully lived as one's own fundamental question. To speak of 'irritation' is clearly to miss the phenomenon. See Camus (1955), p. 3.

267 See Levi (2012) for a discussion of Peirce's view of inquiry. It is notoriously controversial to capture in exact terms Peirce's view on the aim of inquiry. In part this difficulty depends on the fact that it is hard to have clear grasp of Peirce's view truth itself. For some useful discussion, see Hookway (2000), (2007), Wiggins (2004), Misak (2007)

268 Here is the full passage where one might try to extract the intention to present such an argument:
"The irritation of doubt causes a struggle to attain a state of belief. I shall term this struggle *inquiry,* though it must be admitted that this is sometimes not a very apt designation. The irritation of doubt is the only immediate motive for the struggle to attain belief. It is certainly best for us that our beliefs should be such as may truly guide our actions so as to satisfy our desires; and this reflection will make us reject every belief which does not seem to have been so formed as to insure this result. But it will only do so by creating a doubt in the place of that belief. With the doubt, therefore, the struggle begins, and with the cessation of doubt it ends. Hence, the sole object of inquiry is the settlement of opinion. We may fancy that this is not enough for us, and that we seek, not merely an opinion, but a true opinion. But put this fancy to the test, and it proves groundless; for as soon as a firm belief is reached we are entirely satisfied, whether the belief be true or false. And it is clear that nothing out of the sphere of our knowledge can be our object, for nothing which does not affect the mind can be the motive for mental effort. The most that can be maintained is, that we seek for a belief that we shall *think* to be true. But we think each one of our beliefs to be true, and, indeed, it is mere tautology to say so".

as true and to raise a question is to desire – in the form of a question – to have a true answer. In this fundamental and basic sense cognition aims at truth: truth is the internal horizon of intelligibility, as it were. Therefore, we can't maintain that the real aim of cognition is simply related to the aim of avoiding suffering and achieving tranquillity. Moreover, the suffering associated with questioning and doubt can be explained by reference to the constitutive desire for the truth. The reason why we suffer when we have questions and doubts is because in having them we are expressing our ignorance of the truth and the corresponding desire to have an answer to our questions and resolve our doubts.

Chapter X

Constitutivism about Alethic Normativity

In the previous Chapter I have argued that truth is the constitutive aim of cognition. I have offered a particular understanding of the claim by endorsing a minimalist view. According to minimalism, there are three principal senses in which cognition aims at truth: judgment aims at truth is the sense that judging that *p* presents its content as true in the particular way in which judgment does; only alethic considerations can be grounds for judging; questioning aims at truth in the sense that a question as to whether *p* is true posits a true answer as its form of satisfaction.

In this Chapter I will rely on this minimalist view in order to provide the foundation for alethic normativity. In the next Chapter I will rely on the view about commitments defended in the previous Chapters in order to provide a foundation for epistemic normativity. Both alethic and epistemic normativity are complex phenomena, and it will be a substantial task of these chapters to unpack the several normative dimensions that we might want to vindicate.

The vindication I will seek here exploits an argumentative strategy that has been used mostly in the moral domain and that goes under the label of *constitutivism*. Constitutivism is a view about the source of normativity[269], and is an instance of the view I have called *transcendental constitutivism* in the *Introduction* of this Dissertation. It tries to account for normativity through the following steps. First, it points out that a given practice or activity is constitutively aimed at some goals, or governed by some norms (constitutivity step). Second, it points out that that practice is inescapable in a suitable sense (inescapability step). Third, it argues that that constitutive norms and aims of that suitably inescapable practice enjoy categorical normativity, or anyway a sort of authority that is satisfactory enough to provide a foundation for the normativity we initially wanted to account for (transcendental step). Fourth, it explains why the constitutive claims made at step one holds true (explanatory step).

Here I will pursue a similar strategy with respect to alethic normativity (and with respect to epistemic normativity in the next chapter). The first step of the constitutivist

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269Constitutivists view are defended by Korsgaard (1996), (1997), (1999), (2002), Railton (1997), Millgram (1997), ch. 8, Schapiro (1999), Velleman (2000), (2004), (2009), and Rosati (2003). See Chapter VI for a discussion of constitutivism about normativity, particularly for a discussion of the distinction between weak and strong forms of constitutivism.

strategy has been executed in the previous chapter, where I argued that truth is the constitutive aim of cognition. In this chapter I will execute the second and the third steps. The second step consists in showing that cognitive agency is suitably inescapable. The third step consists in showing that the sort of inescapability and constitutivity enjoyed by truth grounds the desired forms of alethic normativity. The fourth step is briefly touched upon at the end of the *Introduction*, it is discussed in general terms in Chapter VI, and it is again discussed in the last paragraph of the Dissertation.

Constitutivist strategies have received a lot of attention and criticisms in recent debates. Some of the most important criticisms that have been levelled against constitutivism in moral theory apply *mutatis mutandis* to constitutivism about alethic normativity and to constitutivism about epistemic normativity. I will revise and respond to them in due course. I will concede a lot to these objections, and will end up offering a constitutivist view about alethic normativity according to which alethic normativity is of a sui generis kind that deserves to be called transcendental for several reasons that will emerge as the discussion progresses. Crucially, I will argue that the sort of alethic values and norms that constitutivism can ground do not belong to the category of values and norms that can be conceptualised as instrumental or non-instrumental, extrinsic or intrinsic, categorical or conditional. Transcendental values and norms belong to an altogether different normative realm – they might be called transcendental because they govern the activity that makes it possible to be guided by values and norms that can be meaningfully conceptualised as instrumental or non-instrumental, extrinsic or intrinsic, categorical or conditional.

One of the central contention of the present chapter is that constitutivists and detractors haven't paid enough attention to the distinctions between different kinds of normative questions – and corresponding sceptical challenges – to which a constitutivist might want to provide an answer. I will distinguish three main kinds of questions. A *practical* question about what to do; an *evaluative* one about what is good or desirable; and an *existential* one about what is valuable or meaningful. I will argue that the failure to distinguish them has led to a failure to properly understand what a constitutivist account can plausibly promise to us. In particular, I will argue that although constitutivism can provide some foundation with respect to our practical questions, it can't provide the source for justifying our evaluative and existential claims. The justification, if any, must come from elsewhere. However, the transcendental layer of alethic normativity will be shown to characterise the alethic normative profile of the activity which is the condition of

possibility for providing an answer to evaluative and existential questions and challenges.

Many of the arguments against constitutivism that have been presented in recent literature purport to show that a constitutivist strategy can't ground the categorical authority of norms. Both sides of the debate seem to presuppose that categorical authority is the issue. However, in this chapter I will argue that, with respect to alethic normativity at least, constitutivism is best understood as a strategy that highlights a new layer of normativity, that is the one I call transcendental. Constitutivism properly understood shows that at the foundations the sort of normativity that we find is of a sui generis kind. I suggest that the conclusions and points argued here ought to be taken into considerations by other constitutivist theories in order to properly understand the nature of their proposals.

§10.1 *Constitutivism about normativity*

What is the aim of a constitutivist theory about normativity? As I see it, a constitutivist is trying to answer a sceptical challenge to the effect that we might be wrong in our normative judgments. The sceptical challenge here is not just (though it might also take the form of) an epistemological challenge to the effect that we don't know or aren't justified in believing the relevant normative claims that we want to claim. A sceptical challenge is any challenge against our pretension to know the truth about what is to be done, what is good and what is valuable, and the challenge might be presented in the form of arguments for thinking that the purported truths are false, and not just that we are unjustified in believing them. Constitutivism thus aims to answer some sceptical challenge by showing that our normative judgments are true[270].

Our normative judgments are answers to different questions. Here are three family of questions the distinction among which will be very important in what follows: *practical questions*, namely questions about what is to be done; *evaluative questions*, namely questions about what is a good or a desirable state of affairs; *existential questions*, namely questions about what is valuable and meaningful. A sceptical challenge to normativity might target just one family of answers to our normative questions (e.g., one might argue that there are

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[270]In this respect, constitutivist strategies provide *ambitious* transcendental arguments, starting from fundamental facts about cognition or agency (constitutivity step), and inferring from them the truth of some normative proposition (transcendental step). There might be ways of construing the constitutivist strategy as a modest transcendental arguments purporting to conclude, say, that we are justified in holding some normative proposition as true, or that belief or commitment to some normative proposition is especially invulnerable for us. In this chapter I leave on a side a modest understanding of the strategy and will rather try to provide an ambitious transcendental strategy.

no final values, though there are instrumental reasons for action), or the whole normative realm (e.g., by arguing that our normative claims are all false). Analogously, a constitutivist might attempt to provide a foundation for answering all these questions, or only some of them. To anticipate, the theory I am going to provide offers the resources to dissolve the practical question, but it is entirely silent with respect to the evaluative and existential questions and respective challenges.

In order to have a general grasp of the way in which the constitutivist strategy tries to answer these questions, it is useful to think of constitutivism as follows:

Constitutivism about normativity: the view according to which some normative judgments[271] are true in virtue of what is constitutive of a suitably inescapable practice or activity.

So understood, there are different parameters the variation of which yields different constitutivist views:

- *Kinds of questions.* Do we aim to answer practical, evaluative, or existential questions?

- *Normative realms.* What kind of normativity are we trying to justify? Are weconcerned with the alethic, the epistemic, or the moral realm?

- *Inescapability.* What is the relevant kind of inescapability that allows the constitutivist strategy to perform its job?

- *Practice or activity* What is the relevant kind of practice or activity that grounds our normative judgments?

The sort of consitutitivism which I will be interested in here is concerned with the realm of alethic normativity, and it aims to ground it in the activity of cognitive agency or cognition for short. The relevant sort of inescapability will be what Ferrero (ms) calls *dialectical inescapability*, namely the fact that in order to inquire about cognition we should rely on it. My constitutivism will answer some practical questions, though it won't have the resources to answer the evaluative and existential ones.

§10.2 *Alethic normativity*

271Speaking in terms of judgments might obscure the fact that to justify our normative judgments require, in most cases, to justify the *authority* of some norms. When we deal with normativity what we are trying to justify is the fact that some norm is applicable to us. It seems to be quite standard to understand the desired validity of a norm in terms of its unconditionality upon the particular desires and preferences of the agent. This is how Ferrero (ms) puts it: "The *objective* validity of the norms and reasons is a matter of their unconditional authority, of their being valid irrespective of the agent's *contingent* motives and attitudes", p. 4.

What does it mean to say that there is such thing as alethic normativity? What are the *contents* of the norms and values we want to vindicate? Here is a list of possible dimensions of alethic normativity that we might want to vindicate.

(1)   To have true judgments is valuable (intrinsically/extrinsically, finally/instrumentally)

(2)   A judgment that *p* is correct (if and) only if it is true

(3)   If a proposition is true, I should judge it to be true

(4)   I should judge a proposition to be true only if it is true

(5)   I am entitled to use only considerations that speak in favour of the truth of *p* in order to judge that *p*

(6)   It is good/better/preferable to be a cognitive agent, rather than not being one

(7)   I should make efforts to discover the truth about some subject-matter

I will have the occasion to say something more on all of them in what follows. These are just *candidate* plausible senses in which truth might be normative, but some of them might be revealed as unjustified as the investigation progresses. Most importantly, and relatedly, I will argue that constitutivism about alethic normativity doesn't have the resources to vindicate all these senses in which truth might be normative. Particularly, I will argue that constitutivism doesn't have the resources to vindicate (1), (3), (6) and (7), though it has the resources in particular to explain why (2) and (5) are true.

§10.3   *The regress argument in favour of constitutivism*

Why should we want to appeal to constitutivism about normativity to begin with? One way of motivating the appeal to constitutivism is by means of a regress argument. Here is how a prominent constitutivist like Valleman introduces and motivates the view. He starts asking:

"[W]hat is the substantive criterion of correctness for actions? What is it to act correctly?". p. 125.

And he begins by considering the following natural proposal:

"We can supply a criterion for correctness for any particular action by directing it at a contingent aim – an aim that is contingent in the sense that the action might or might not be directed at it

while still retaining its nature as an action". p. 125

Yet, as he notices, this proposal has a problem. Here is how he puts it:

"The problem is that if an action can be apt or inapt only in relation to a contingent aim, then its justification may seem to be incomplete until the aim itself is justified. And according to the present view, an aim is like an action in that it can be apt only in relation to a contingent aim – presumably a further aim – on which it therefore depends for its justification. I can justify flipping the switch as a means of illuminating the room, and I can justify illuminating the room as a means of finding my keys; and I can justify finding my keys as a means of starting the car; not no matter how long I go on with such justifications, I will always feel obliged to go further, so as to justify the latest aim in the series, which will be a further but still contingent aim at which I happen to have directed my action. The present view therefore seems to yield a dilemma: the justification of action must either lead to an infinite regress of justifications or stop short at a contingent aim that remains unjustified". p. 126

This should be a familiar dialectic. The solution here would be to think that there is an aim which is constitutive of action, so that satisfaction of that aim is not to be pursued for the sake of some further aim.

The initial question about the criterion of correctness for actions was of course motivated by the need to know what to do. What should I do? This is the question to which we are going to answer by pointing the finger to those actions that are correct actions, using the adjective that Velleman selects for the evaluation of actions. Appealing to contingent aims only – instrumental or hypothetical norms – won't do, because it doesn't offer the resources to *answer* the initial question (the assumption being that a regress of aims, or an arbitrary stopped choice won't constitute a satisfactory answers). Appealing to a constitutive aim here is thus meant to provide an answer about the 'what should I do?' question. Surely, if a given aim is really constitutive, then, if its being constitutive is a source of normativity, then it seems that I should have to pursue that aim. If pursuing this aim then gives rise to a justification of further norms, and thus gives normative authority to further contingent aims, then the strategy might be rich enough to provide us with enough instructions about what to do. (This is a point about the extension of the project. The project might be such that all it proves is that we should pursue the constitutive aim of action, but this will not give us any particular instruction about what we should do).

Here is the form of the solution to the problem for Velleman:

"The way to avoid [the problem] would be to show that actions can be justified as such, in the manner of beliefs – justified independently of any contingent aim at which they might be directed". p. 127

And he specifies in a footnote:

"My versions of the kantian strategy concedes that actions must be justified in relation to an aim; it simply asserts that this aim is inherent in the nature of actions and is consequently not contingent in relation to agency". Footnote 13, p. 127.

Thus, as these quotations make clear, the justification of an action is provided by specifying the aim for the sake of which the action should be done. Yet, not all aims are contingents, some of them are constitutive of agency, namely the activity we engage in when we decide what to do and when we consequently act. The idea is that these constitutive aims block the regress of justification of the aim for the sake of which an action should be done. The non-contingency of the aim is, as Velleman makes clear, the crucial point which blocks the regress and is meant to offer the basic source from which further normativity can emerge. Does the discovery of a non-contingent aim suffice for grounding normativity?

Interestingly, Velleman's argument for justifying the authority of norms for actions is inspired by the nature of belief, understood according to his teleological account introduced in the previous chapter. It is in the nature of belief to be aimed at truth. Truth is the non-contingent aim of belief and as such it sets a criterion for correctness for belief. If there is something analogous in the case of action, then the regress problem is solved for there is some aim which needs not to be justified by appealing to some further aim, since this aim is constitutive of action. This also invites us to think of what a similar regress argument in favour of constitutivism about alethic normativity would look like. Suppose we were asking: what should I believe? What is the criterion for correct belief, namely the criterion consideration of which should guide my doxastic deliberation? Suppose one were to offer the following proposal: believe what makes you happy. Here, one would be in a position to ask: but why should I believe what makes me happy? And here someone might then propose the following: believe what makes you happy, for by so believing you can avoid suffering. And one might add: but why should I avoid suffering? And one might add: because once you have avoided your own suffering you will then be in a position to help others. But again: why should I help others? Because... Here we have the

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regress of aims. The constitutivist move is to say that all this regress is not needed or can be stopped, since there is an aim which is constitutive of belief, namely truth, and the constitutivity of the aim sets the standard for correct believing and answers the initial question about what to believe: believe what is true. The idea is that if one keeps asking 'why should I believe the truth?', one is not realising that she ought to believe the truth because this is the constitutive aim of belief. The burder of the constitutivist strategy is to explain how the constitutivisty of the aim can ground the corresponding norm (transcendental step). In order to make the transition, constitutivists appeal to a characteristic feature of the practice or activity of which the relevant normative dimension is constitutive (inescapability step).

§10.4 *Constitutivism needs inescapability*

As we have seen in the previous Chapter, cognition is structured in such a way that truth is the aim it desires to achieve through questioning and that can be achieved only in a very particular fashion, namely by forming judgments on the basis of alethic considerations only. Can this suffice to ground alethic normativity?

The constitutivist first attempt to do so might go along the following lines. Think of cognition as a game, the game of truth. The game as a whole is structured in such a fashion that one wants to have true answers to one's questions. Questioning aims at truth in the sense that to raise a question is to posit an answer, namely a judgment, as the form of the satisfaction of the particular form of desire that questioning is. In this sense, having true answers is a constitutive aim of that game. Moreover, there are constraints on the way in which you can achieve the aim of the game, one of which is captured by exclusivity, namely the fact that you can form judgments only by relying on alethic grounds[272]. To put

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[272]Analogy with games (and chess, in particular) is often invoked in the metanormative literature in order to clarify the basic concepts of a metanormative theory. Here, some important distinctions to be kept in mind are the following.

Distinction between *rules* and *aims*. The aim of chess is to checkmate the opponent. The rules are the rules of chess, the rules that say what you can do in the game of chess. In the case of the game of truth, the aim is to have true judgments, and the rules are the constraints on how one can form true judgments, one constraint being that captured by exclusivity.

Can one play chess without caring about the aim and without wanting to respect its rules? That is a debated question. In the case of the game of truth, as we will see, the answer to the analogous question is positive, one can play the game of truth without caring about truth – provided that caring is here understood as a form of *personal* valuing (see previous Chapter IX, §9.1). One can be a cognitive agent even if one doesn't (personally) want to respect exclusivity and even if one doesn't (personally) want to have true beliefs.

Is it enough to be committed to follow the rules of chess in order to play chess, regardless of whether one actually succeeds in following the rules? This is, again, a contested question. In the case of the game of truth the answer is negative. It is not enough to be committed to respect exclusivity in order to be playing the game. Exclusivity ought to be respected and it is in fact respected, otherwise there is no

the points together, cognition is the game of answering our questions on the basis of alethic grounds only. One doesn't count as playing the game of truth – cognition – unless one respects exclusivity and aims at truth in the form of questioning and judgments.

On the ground that these are the constitutive features of the game of truth, one might want to conclude (transcendental step) that to play the game of truth is to be subject to some norms like the following: one should judge only on the basis of alethic grounds and one should judge a proposition to be true only if it is true. Or, one might want to draw the conclusion that within the game of truth, truth is not only constitutively valu*ed* (constitutivity step) but is also valu*able* (transcendental step), it is not only constitutively desir*ed* (constitutivity step) but is also desir*able* (transcendental step). Or maybe one might want to put the point about the normativity of truth in different ways. The important point to notice is that one might be tempted to conclude that truth is normative for cognition once one realises that truth is constitutively taken to be normative for cognition.

But this transition might be challenged. *One*[273] challenge is clearly made by Enoch (2006), in which he compares agency with the game of chess. It doesn't seem enough to take part to the game of chess in order to give authority to the constitutive norms of chess and to give authority to the aim of chess. For I might have no reason whatsoever to play chess, and a result the lack of reason to play chess would entail a lack of reason to act according to the constitutive norms of chess and a lack of reason to pursue the aim of chess. This challenge grants the point that one is not playing the game of chess unless one make moves according to the relevant constitutive norms. The challenges is that to play the game doesn't suffice by itself to give normative authority to the constitutive norms. If the game of truth is analogous to the game of chess in this way, then one needs a *prior* reason to play the game of truth, in order to provide authority to the constitutive norms of the game of truth (only alethic considerations count), and in order to provide authority to the aim of the game of truth (having true judgments). In order for constitutive norms and for constitutive aims of chess to be normative for me, I need to have a reason to play chess. Analogously: in order for constitutive norms and for constitutive aims of cognitive agency to be normative for me, I need to have a prior reason to play the game of truth. Thus: there is a normative truth which is not grounded in the constitutivist strategy but that is rather needed in order to ground the normativity of constitutive norms themselves.

The constitutivist at this point has to find a significant disanalogy between the

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reasoning or cognition, but something else.

273There are several challenges to the transcendental step just described, and we will see the most serious of them in what follows.

game of chess and the game of truth[274]. The disanalogy is that the game of truth is *special* in that it is *inescapable* in a way in which the game of chess is not (this is the second step of the constitutivist strategy, the inescapability step). Strictly speaking, this is not enough, though. For the constitutivist should also say that the request of a reason to take part to a game in order to activate the constitutive normativity of that game is a request that is reasonable in the case of chess precisely because the game of chess is not inescapable in the way in which the game of truth is inescapable. And that is precisely the point of a constitutivist: for an inescapable game there is no need to have a prior reason to be in it in order to activate its constitutive normativity because it is inescapable in the relevant way.

There are many things to be argued for and to be defended in this constitutivist line. First, one should explain what is the form of inescapability that is enjoyed by the game of truth. Second, one should argue that this form of inescapability (and lack thereof in the case of other escapable games like chess) is what explains why in the case of chess, but not in the case of cognition, we need a prior reason to enter into the game in order to activate its constitutive normativity. Both tasks face great difficulties, to which we will now turn[275].

§10.5 *Varieties of inescapability*

As we have seen, it is a crucial step in the constitutivist strategy to show that the practice that is governed by constitutive norms is inescapable in a way that grounds the normativity of these constitutive norms. This is arguably the most important and fundamental insight, if it is a good one, of constitutivism[276]. There are many kinds of inescapability, not all of

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274Another option is to argue, like Silverstin (2014) does, that there is no need to have a reason to take part to a practice in order to activate its constitutive normativity, because mere participation in a practice is enough for having a reasons to value the aim of the practice and to follow its constitutive norms. See Enoch (2010) for a reply to this suggestion.

275It is instructive to notice that the motivation for constitutivism comes from a double threat of regress. The first regress is the one that Velleman nicely notices and uses in order to motivate the thought that we should look for a constitutive aim: if any aim that could possibly justify an action is contingent, then there would be a problem of regress. But suppose that you find a constitutive aim for action. Then the question can still be: why engaging in action in the first place? Here, unless action is proved to be inescapable, there will still be a problem of regress. For one would have to appeal to the constitutive norms of another practice. But if the practice is in turn found to be optional, then we will have to appeal to another practice, and so and so forth, unless of course we find a practice which is inescapable in the required way that makes it unintelligible or just unnecessary to demand a reason to take part of that practice. Compare with Ferrero (ms) for an alternative way of presenting the regress.

276Most constitutivist are explicit about that: Ferrero (2009), p. 304 "the success of this [constitutivist] strategy depends on establishing (...) that we cannot but be agents, that agency is non-optional"; according to Katsafanas (2013) p. 47 the "core idea" of constitutivism is that "the authority of universal normative claims arises from a certain form of inescapability"; Korsgaard's (2009b), p. 32 "the laws of practical reason govern our actions because if we don't follow them we just aren't acting, and acting is something that we must do. A constitutive principle for an inescapable activity is unconditionally

which seem to be prima facie relevant for the constitutivist strategy.

Ontological and metaphysical escapability. Cognition is not ontologically inescapable because there can be beings who do not cognize. It might be an open question whether these beings could amounts to *selves* (ways in which *we* could have been). Even if the answer to this open question will turn out to be negative, we might still reasonably conceive of creatures that fail to be cognitive agents. If it were possible for selves like us to fail to cognize, then cognition will not only be ontologically escapable, but also, we might say, *metaphysically escapable.*

Biological escapability. Cognition is not biologically inescapable. Most of the time, we are not cognitive agents. We sleep, we form beliefs unconsciously, we think wishfully and in self-deceptive manners, we mind wonder. This however is not to deny the plausible claim that in order to be the sort of beings that we are we should have a suitable capacity to exercise cognition. The point of saying that cognition is biologically escapable is to say that we can be (or have) the organisms that we are (or have) without being cognizing all the time[277].

Dialectical inescapability. The fact that cognition is neither ontologically nor biologically inescapable is not taken as a threat to constitutivism. The relevant sense of inescapability, constitutivists argue, is that cognition is dialectically inescapable[278]. Dialectical inescapability amounts to the fact that in order to ask any question and form any opinion about cognition one should rely on cognition itself, for asking a question and forming opinions is to exercise cognition.

Suppose that one wonders what to think about cognition, and in particular wonder

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binding."

277 One way of arguing that cognition is inescapable consists in arguing that *agency* is necessary in order to be the sort of beings that we are, and that cognition is necessary for agency. Railton (1997) takes this line.

"Consider how deeply implicated belief is in our notion of agency. An agent acts on intentions and plans, which constitutively involve beliefs and are formed deliberatively in part on the basis of beliefs. To replace *all* belief with (say) wishing would be to form no intentions at all. Moreover, our notion of ourselves as agents extended over time constitutively involves *memories* and *expectations*. These, too, involve beliefs. There is all the difference in the world between believing that one is the father of John, or believing that one will experience the pains of an unattended-to toothache, and pretending or merely supposing these things. To delete all forms of belief from your mental repertoire would leave you with no recognizable notion of identity." 58–59.

This is not however the most significant form of inescapability given the aim of executing the constitutivist strategy for grounding normativity.

278 I take the label 'dialectical inescapability' from Ferrero (ms). In Ferrero (2009) he put the point thus: *"Agency is closed under the operation of reflective rational assessment. [...] ordinary enterprises are never fully closed under reflection. There is always the possibility of reflecting on their justification while standing outside of them. Not so for rational agency. The constitutive features of agency (no matter whether they are conceived as aims, motives, capacities, commitments, etc.) continue to operate even when the agent is assessing whether she is justified in her engagement in agency."* p. 308-9 This feature of cognitive agency is also noticed by Velleman (2000) pp. 30–1 and 142 and Velleman (2004) pp. 290 ff.; see also Railton (1997), p. 317, Rosati (2003), p. 522, and Rysiew's (2002) p. 451.

about whether one should exit the game of truth. The dialectical inescapability of cognition amounts to the fact that this wonder and the answers that it might give rise to are all moves within the game of cognition, the game of truth. What are the available candidate moves?

First, one move is to provide arguments to the effect that the game of truth should be escaped. Yet any such move will be a move within the game of truth, and as such it will not represent any exit from it. What eventually comes *after* that move will be a move outside that game. But it won't be *an exit*. The last move I make within the game of truth, a move whose content is something along the lines of 'I ought to go out of it and I will' is still a move within the game of truth. The moment immediately after this move, if there is such moment, will *already* be *outside* the game of truth.

Second, one might try to suspend judgment about whether one should remain or abandon the game of truth, yet this is another move within that game. For suspension of judgment would be a judgment about grounds, a judgment about what we have grounds to think about the issue whether we should belong or abandon the game of truth, the game of judging and questioning.

Third, one might try to be open-minded about the issue and remain in a state of wonder about it. But wondering still is aimed at the truth. To wonder about *p* is to wonder about whether *p* is *true*, and to wonder about the answer of an open question is to wonder about what is the *true* answer of that question.

Fourth, Pyrrhonian silence is an impossible stance, as argued in Chapter VI. Hence, there is no way of moving outside the game of truth by means of entering in a pyrrhonian silent attitude, because there simply is no such attitude that we can occupy.

Dialectical inescapability is a very peculiar feature that makes cognition a very special activity. As Ferrero (2009), p. 308 notices "it is the locus where we adjudicate the merits and demerits of participating in any ordinary enterprise". *All* activities with the exception of cognition are not such that an evaluation of their credentials involve an engagement with them. To illustrate, the activity of eating ice cream is not to be evaluated by itself.

It is important to grasp what dialectical inescapability involves, and to distinguish it from the biological inescapability of a given aim, namely the fact of valuing that aim all the time. To see this, suppose that as a matter of fact we are all desiring ice cream all the time. Why wouldn't the biological inescapability of a desire for ice cream ground the norm that one should desire to eat ice cream and do what is required in order to achieve that aim, or

something like that? Suppose that ice cream were in fact something we value all the time because we desire it. Yet, we would have the possibility of intelligibly asking with respect to it the following question: should I second this desire? Is it really valuable? Similar things apply to things that are more likely to be unavoidably desirable given our natural constitution. Think of survival or of avoidance of pain and search for pleasure. Even if survival and pleasure are persistent desires of us, it is entirely intelligible to ask: should I follow them? The question is intelligible in such a way that even answering 'no' would be an intelligible and legitimate answer. In fact it is easy for us to imagine cases in which these unavoidable desires could be rejected for the sake of other values, maybe even for the sake of values we do not naturally desire to pursue.

The same intelligibility does not seem to be present in the case of truth. Can I intelligibly ask: should I care about the truth? Should I second the desire that this very questioning expresses? If I am in a questioning attitude, I am valuing it. If I answer 'yes' I am valuing it. If I answer 'no' I am valuing it. If I suspend judgment I am valuing it. There is no other available move. The only things that can happen is that I forget the issue and stop reasoning.

A fundamental difference, then, between truth and ice cream, is that even if the latter could always be present in my experience, it is something I can intelligibly reject, whereas the same doesn't apply to truth. The activity of seeking the truth is the very activity that would make the rejection. The activity of desiring ice cream is not the activity we use in order to evaluate ice cream's desirability!

The fact that cognition is so special in that it is dialectically inescapable is important, as we will see, in order to resist most objections that have been raised against the constitutivist strategy. Yet, as we will see, there are many objections that put pressure on the idea that dialectical inescapability suffice to ground alethic normativity and I will argue that *some* of these objections are correct and that we should limit accordingly the foundational aspirations of the constitutivist strategy.

§10.6   *Varieties of challenges to constitutivism*

Having distinguished ways in which cognition is inescapable and ways in which it is not, we are now in a position to see potential objections to the constitutivist strategy.

The most important challenges target the entailment from the the inescapability of a practice with constitutive norms and values to the claim that these norms and values are

genuine, or really authoritative in the desired sense. (These are challenges that occur at what I have called the transcendental step).

To this family there belongs a family of challenges that I would call the *cognitive shmagency objections*. What is a cognitive shmagent? A cognitive shmagent is someone who is outside cognitive agency – she is not exercising cognitive agency – and wonders (or shwonders?) whether to enter into cognitive agency. Thinking about the possibility of such a standpoint seems to put pressure on the viability of the constitutivist strategy for grounding normativity. As we will see, there are many ways in which one can present the cognitive shmagency challenge.

The name comes from Enoch (2006) and (2010) in which he criticises constitutivism by raising what he called the shmagency objection. Enoch's focus in these papers was mainly on constitutivist strategies defended as foundations for *practical* normativity. Yet, the objections he levelled are structural, and target the viability of a constitutivist strategy in general, regardless of the specific content that the norms and values it vindicates have. Hence, I will largely rely on the debate that Enoch's papers have generated, mostly in connection with moral theory, in order to frame the discussion of constitutivism as a strategy for justifying *alethic* normativity. Hereafter I will speak of the *cognitive* shmagency objection in order to refer to the particular form that the shmagency objection takes when it targets a constitutivist strategy which puts the foundation in the nature of *cognitive* agency in particular, rather than in agency more generally[279].

Before proceeding to the analysis of the many forms that the shmagency objection takes, it is important to note that the shmagency objection is not the only one that puts pressure on the entailment from the existence of an inescapable practice governed by constitutive norms and values to the authority of these norms and values. There are other challenges that appeal to the impression that the mere fact that we find ourselves being cognitive agent is normatively arbitrary. Why the mere fact that it is inescapable for us to be cognitive agents does have any normative relevance? These, I will argue, are the most formidable challenges to the constitutivist strategy. Finally, and relatedly, there are other challenges to the entitlement that occurs at the transcendental step, and according to these challenges there are kinds of sceptical challenges that the constitutivist strategy cannot answer: particularly, there are dimensions of normativity like what I will call the evaluative and existential one which can't be protected from a sceptical attack using the constitutivist

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279As we will see, the notion of agency that constitutivists use is quite thin and general at the same time, and it often seems to reduce to what I here call cognitive agency, namely the sort of agency that we exercise when we reason in a way that respect exclusivity. If this is so, the following discussion is directly pertinent for other forms of constitutivism in the practical realm.

strategy.

§10.7   *Do we need a reason to be agents rather than shmagents?*

Recall that in order to have reasons to comply to the rules of chess and to pursue its aim, it seems that I would have to have a prior chess-independent reason to play chess. Shouldn't I have a prior cognitive-independent reason to be a cognitive agent in order to make truth really valuable and make exclusivity really authoritative? No, this is because cognitive agency is dialectically inescapable. In order to produce or have a reason to start playing the game of truth I must *already* be playing it. Hence, there can't be any prior reason to be a cognitive agent, and the very demand for one such reason is not intelligible.

The point is that it is not intelligible to raise the *practical* question as to whether I should aim at the truth, because *when* I raise the question I am *already* aiming at the truth in the relevant sense specified by minimalism. Thus, to illustrate, if the question is: should I judge in such a fashion that only alethic considerations count as grounds for judging?, then the question is answered by noticing that if one is asking it then one is exercising cognition and so is judging in the only way in which she can judge, namely on the basis of alethic grounds. Or, if the question is: should I want true answers to my questions?, then the question is answered by noticing that in asking that question one is wanting a true answer to it because asking a question is to want, in the particular way in which questioning represents a form of desire, the true answer to it. There is no practical option that one can choose to take here, for in order to take any option – that is, to deliberate about what to do – one ought already to be exercising cognition.

There is another form of practical non-optionality that responds to a slightly different kind of question. If the questions are: should I reason according to exclusivity? Should I want a true answers to my questions? Should I present the content of a judgment as true? Should I conduct cognition in the way in which I currently conduct it? Why shouldn't I conduct it otherwise?... if these are the questions, then the answer is that we are simply not free to choose how to cognize. This is the point of saying that some norms and aims are constitutive of cognition not merely in the sense that in cognizing we are committed to follow them and pursue them, but rather in the stronger sense that we can cognize only if we follow and pursue them in the way cognition does.

To sum up, the practical non-optionality of cognition has two aspects. The first hinges on dialectical inescapability and consists in the fact that in asking whether to *start*

being a cognitive agent I am already one. The second hinges on the strong constitutivist claim that cognition has normative structural features in such a way that it doesn't make sense to ask *how* to cognize, for there is only one way in which one can cognize.

The appeal to dialectical inescapability could be used for three purposes. One is to offer a reply to the sceptic by *defusing* the sceptical challenge. In this way, one shows that it doesn't make any sense to ask for a practical reason for entering into cognition. Another is to *refute* the sceptical challenge by explaining on the basis of dialectical inescapability why one does *positively* possess a reason to enter into cognition. The third strategy is a particular instance of a defusing strategy. The third strategy appeals to dialectical inescapability in order to show that it doesn't make any sense to ask for a reason to be a cognizer, for the issue of being a cognizer is not the sort of issue for which there could a reason – it doesn't belong to the space of practical reason, as it were. This latter strategy slightly differs from the first defusing one, for the first might be done in such a way that one still believes that it makes sense to ask for reasons to be a cognizer, though it also points out that as it turns out there can't be any reason *not* to be one. This is still compatible with implementing the defusing strategy with the more positive strategy that also shows that the dialectical inescapability of cognitive agency makes it somehow self-vindicating in that one can also possess a reason to be a cognizer given that she is already one.

I endorse the third strategy, and deny that there is anything like a positive reason to be a cognizer that can be extracted by relying on the fact that cognition is dialectically inescapable (or by relying on any other fact, for that matter). The dialectical inescapability of cognition shows that the question whether to enter into cognition cannot raise a genuine practical question. The question, understood as practical, is dissolved, rather than answered.

§10.8   *Cognitive Shmagency objection I. It is possible for us to be cognitive shmagents and shwonder whether to be cognitive agents or cognitive shmagents*

One objection to the constitutivist strategy is the following. It is granted the claim that truth is the constitutive aim of cognition. Yet, it is denied the claim that cognition is inescapable in the required sense. In particular, it contends that it is entirely possible for *us* to shwonder whether to be cognitive agents or cognitive shmagents. Since this is a possibility that we have, we need a previous reason (or shmreason?) to be cognitive agents rather than cognitive shmagents. Constitutivism can't account for that reason, hence it

comes too late, and doesn't provide us the foundation for normativity[280]. (This is a challenge that occurs at the inescapability step).

Now, I think that we should simply deny the claim that it is possible for us to be cognitive shmagents in the sense that is required in order to have an objection to the constitutivist strategy. Surely, the point here is not that we might fail at times to be cognitive agents. It is obvious that we often so fail (this is the sense in which cognition is not biologically inescapable). Yet, the possibility of wishful thinking or of belief-formation which occurs sub-consciously is not a threat to the claim that cognition is inescapable in the dialectical sense – in the sense that it is by engaging in cognition that we can evaluate what is the truth about cognition.

So, the kind of failure to be cognizers that is required in order to have the objection should possess the following features: it should show that there are cases in which something that we can recognise as a deliberation about some issue takes place, is governed by something that is recognizable as a wonder without properly being one, and has as output something that is recognizable as a judgment without really being one. Moreover, the judgment should issue as a result of the deliberation in such a manner that it is formed on the basis of some ground without this ground being an alethic one (or without this ground being only an alethic one). So, it should be something recognizable as cognition without really being one. The important point is that it issues in something like a judgment that the subject can then endorse in order to decide (or shdecide?) to be a cognitive shmagent instead of a cognitive agent.

Now, I don't think that we can make sense of this possibility. We could have tried to make sense of it if it were possible to judge on the basis of non-alethic grounds, but this is not possible. We might think that this *is* a possibility because we know that wishful

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280Ferrero (2009) notices that if it is true that cognitive agency is optional as the possibility for us of being a shmagent is meant to imply, then we would have open up again the regress that was stopped by claiming that cognitive agency is inescapable. "The shmagency objection is even more general in scope than it might appear at first. The objection can be extended to undermine all forms of constitutivism, even those that are not centred on agency. If Enoch is right that agency is optional, the same appears to hold of shmagency as well. The question whether there is reason to be an agent rather than a shmagent is thus to be adjudicated outside of both agency and shmagency. This adjudication is a move in a distinct enterprise, one that provides a standpoint external to both agency and shmagency. Let's call it 'uberagency.'
Could constitutivism be relocated at the level of uberagency, of the more comprehensive enterprise that includes both agency and shmagency as optional sub-enterprises? The problem is that an Enoch-style objection could still be moved to this kind of constitutivism. Couldn't we always imagine the existence of shm-uberagents, subjects who are indifferent to the constitutive standards of uberagency? That is, subjects who would be bound by the standards of uberagency only if they had an independently established reason to be uberagents? The same move used to show that agency is optional can thus be used to show that uberagency is optional. Moving at an even higher level would not help because the move could be repeated ad infinitum. The possibility of this regress shows that, pace constitutivism, appeal to the constitutive standards of any enterprise (be it agency, uberagency, or what have you) could never account for any categorical ought". p. 307-8

thinking, self-deception, and all sort of irrational belief-formations take place. Since we know that they take place we also know that we might have formed in such manners the quasi-judgment that these processes of belief-formation are preferable than those that occur when we are reflexive, namely those processes that respect exclusivity. But these processes simply can't make judgment stable *reflexively*, and it is in reflection that the last word about the truth takes place (see Chapter VI, §6.3, and Chapter XII, §12.4). There is no wondering what to judge when we are not reflexive. Hence, there is no cognitive shmagency in the required sense that would make sense of a situation in which we shwonder or wonder whether to be cognitive agents or cognitive shmagents[281].

§10.9   *Cognitive Shmagency Objection II. It is not possible for us to be cognitive shmagents, yet it is conceivable the existence of a cognitive shmagent*

Let us grant that we can't wonder whether to be a cognitive agent or shmagent unless we are engaging in cognitive agency. Still, the objection goes, it is *conceivable* the existence of someone who can raise that challenge as a cognitive shmagent. That would be a cognitive shmagent who is capable of shwondering whether to be a shmagent or an agent. Since this cognitive shmagent is conceivable, somehow it follows that *we* have a problem. We should now check whether this cognitive shmagent is really conceivable, and also whether its conceivability will have any impact on the question whether *we* have a reason to be agents rather than shmagents.

First, what sort of conceivability, if any, can we grant to this objection? Here the sort of conceivability that we can be reasonably asked to grant is simply that there doesn't seem to be any *conceptual* absurdity in the description of this scenario. It is not obvious that this scenario is conceptually impossible. Yet, we can't grant to the objection the possibility of conceiving such a shmagent in the sense that we can imagine what it would be like to be such a shmagent. If it were a possibility for us to so imagine, we could raise the shwonder ourselves, but we can't.

Though it is not obvious that the scenario is conceptually absurd, I think that there are grounds to think that it is. After all, since we can't know what it feels like to be such a shmagent, and since the sort of phenomena of questioning, judgment, grounds, and so on

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281For more on this line of reply and the connection between this sort of objection to constitutivism and the distinction between weak and strong constitutivism, see §6.3, Chapter VI. The crucial move here is to rely on the phenomenological distinction between reflexive and unreflexive cognition, to argue that strong constitutivism about alethic normativity holds in the case of reflexive cognition, and to argue that reflexive cognition is the place where *we* deliberate. Reflexive cognition must authorize the verdicts of unreflexive cognition, but not the other way around.

which are under investigation here have their nature exhausted by their phenomenology, it seems that we can't really use our concepts of question, judgment, and grounds in order to give any recognizable meaning to concepts of shmquestion, shmjudgment, and shmgrounds, because our concepts are anchored in the very phenomenology of cognition. I understand what it is to wonder about whether to be an agent because I know what it is to wonder by having the relevant phenomenology. But then, since the concept of wonder that I am using to describe the scenario is anchored to the phenomenology of wondering, how could I conceptualise a different wondering without being capable of associating any experience to it? It seems that the only way we can describe (or have the impression of being describing) the possibility of such a shmagent is by using concepts of judgment, questioning and grounds that are captured by their functional role, rather than by their phenomenological core. This would probably allow us to make sense of the scenario[282].

Even though I am inclined to deny the conceptual consistency of the scenario, let us grant it for the sake of the argument. A first thing to ask about the scenario is whether this 'someone' who is raising the shwonder or who is shreasoning about whether to be a cognitive agent or a shmagent is someone who is recognizable as a *self* like us or is someone who should be conceptualised as an altogether different creature. The question is whether such a shmagent is something that *we* might have been, or rather something that a completely different creature might be. If we can't make sense of this creature as a possible version of our *self* then it is unclear how that can make it normatively arbitrary for us the fact that we are engaged in cognition and thus regard as having authority the aim of truth and the norms that we follow in order to form judgments. The fact that other creatures are completely different in their motivational set doesn't typically put any pressure to the prima facie desirability of things that are taken as being good for us. (The fact that a plant can't love doesn't put any pressure to the value of love for creatures who are capable of love). So, the defender of the shmagency objection needs arguments here in order to use his scenario so conceived. (We will see one such argument in what follows, when we move from practical questions to question about goodness and value).

But let us even assume that here we are describing a scenario in which there is a possible version of our *self* that has the capacity to be a shmagent (and to be such a shmagent in the way in which the objection of the previous paragraph required in order to pose a challenge to the constitutivist). What does this establish? Nothing, I think. The fact that there is someone for which it is an open *practical* question whether to be a shmagent or

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282Ferrero (ms) takes it that such a shmagent is not conceptually conceivable, though he doesn't try to argue for that claim in the way I have suggested here.

an agent doesn't entail that it is an open *practical* question for *us*. Simply, because cognitive agency is dialectically inescapable for us, it is not required for us to have a reason to become cognitive agents.

Maybe the objection stills seems alive even if it is shown that it is not a practical question for *us* to be shmagents. Maybe the residual worry can be dramatised by imaging a cognitive agent – maybe me, maybe you – who reasons as follows:

"Fine, it is not possible for *me* to be a shmagent. Yet it is conceivable someone who can be a shamegent. This someone is not an *I* like I am now. She doesn't represent a possibility that *I* might occupy in my current existence, though maybe I might have occupied it, or at least it is conceivable that I might have ended up occupying it. Anyway, is it *better* to be the sort of *I* that I ended up being, or rather the sort of thing that she/it is? What would have been *preferable*? Why is it that the way in which I am structured is better than the way in which she/it is structured?".

These questions are meant to provoke the feeling that being the sort of *I-thing* that I am is normatively arbitrary, and the arbitrariness is meant to transmit to what is constitutive of cognition. This is a very powerful objection, and we will discuss it later on. For now, the point remains that even if it is in some sense normatively arbitrary that I am the sort of thing that I am and that I value truth in the way in which cognition happens to value it, there still is no intelligible *practical* question as to whether *I* should enter cognition or not, for, as it happens, when I so deliberate, I am already cognizing.

§10.10 *Defusing, defeating, dissolving*

So far, all that I have been arguing for is the claim that we can't intelligibly raise the practical question whether I should start cognizing. The claim has been made by noticing that I can't raise the challenge unless I am already cognizing. Notice that this reply to the sceptical challenge that asks us to have a reason to enter into cognition has been done without considering the details of the *argument* whose conclusion is meant to be that there is no such a reason to enter into cognition, or that there is no such a reason that can be provided by constitutivism. Yet, one might think, to show that it is unavoidable for us to cognize when we wonder about whether to cognize seems to be compatible with the fact that there is no reason whatsoever to cognize. Are they really compatible? And if so, doesn't this show a serious limitation in the constitutivist strategy?

Enoch (2006) brings this point into explicit focus by presenting an analogous

constitutivist strategy that can be used to protect logic form sceptical attacks. In the case of logic the sceptical attack consists in an argument whose conclusion can either be that we are unjustified to rely on any logic, or to the effect that there is no correct logic. Either way, the constitutivist reply goes, in order to be convinced by the conclusion, one would have to infer, and to infer is to be committed to the validity of some logical rules, as well as to the fact that one is justified in taking these rules as valid. There are some logical rules the validity and justification of which is presupposed in any engagement with reasoning. What does it follow from that?

One option is to say that the fact that we are unavoidably committed to the validity of some logical rules of inference entails (given some further premises) that these rules are really valid. Yet, as it is often pointed out in the literature on transcendental arguments[283], the mere fact that some propositions or rules are unavoidably taken as true or valid by us doesn't by itself entail that they really are true or valid. After all, the natural thought goes, we might be structured in such a way as to be unavoidably committed to take some false propositions as true or to take as valid rules that are not valid. The user of this transcendental strategy seems to need some further premises in order to move from unavoidability to truth or validity. Yet these very further premises seem to be objectionable on several grounds[284].

But then, Enoch (2006) points out, this leaves the transcendental arguer in an unsatisfactory position. For, showing that we are unavoidably committed to the validity of some logical rules doesn't show that the sceptical *argument* is defective in any way. If the conclusion is that logical rules are not valid, and if the argument is a good one, then we must either accept that our logical rules are not valid, despite the fact that we can't but take them as valid in reasoning, or rather find something wrong in the premises of in the logical form of the argument. This is how Enoch (2006) puts the point:

"Skeptical challenges [...] are best seen, I think, as highlighting tensions within our own commitments, as paradoxes arguing for an unacceptable conclusion from premises we endorse, employing rules of inference to which we are committed. [...] The philosophical challenge is not to defeat a real person who advocates the skeptical view or occupies the skeptical position (*what* view or position?) but, rather, to solve the paradox, to show how we can avoid the unacceptable conclusion at an acceptable price. If we must think of the situation in dialectical terms, we should

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283See Stroud (1968), and (2003).

284It seems that to bridge claims about unavoidability and claims about truth and validity one would have to embrace some form of verificationism or transcendental idealism, both of which are not without problems – and, anyway, appealing to them makes the use of transcendental arguments redundant. See Stroud (1968) for a classic statement of this point.

think of skeptical challenges as ad hominem arguments, with all of us as the relevant homini. "The skeptic" is entitled to use, say, logic because *we* are committed to the legitimacy of doing so. […] In other words, the skeptic is entitled to use our own weapons against us. If, using these weapons, he can support a conclusion we are not willing to swallow—one stating, for instance, that the very weapons he is using are not ones we are entitled to use—then it is *we* who are in trouble, not him, because we have been shown to have inconsistent commitments. Think of the situation as an analogue of a reductio ad absurdum: a good reductio argument assumes a certain claim only to prove it false. And just like a sound (reductio) argument establishing that a certain claim is false may assume that it is true, a sound argument concluding that a certain method of reasoning is incorrect or unjustified may employ that very method." p. 184-5.

Thus, if Enoch is right about the nature of sceptical arguments, then the simple fact that we are unavoidably committed to take some propositions or rules as true or valid wouldn't entail that they are not false or invalid. I have already explained in Chapter VII what is wrong about this way of considering sceptical challenges against propositions or rules the presupposition of which is constitutive of cognition. Here I will explain again the point in particular connection with the question of the vindication of alethic normativity.

Let us apply the analogy with logic and Enoch's understanding of sceptical challenges to the constitutivist transcendental strategy about alethic normativity. Suppose then that an argument is provided to the effect that it is not really desirable to have true judgments and that it is not the case that one should judge by relying on alethic considerations only. That is the sceptical challenge. The constitutivist points out that we can't reason otherwise and that in this sense we are committed to the falsity of the sceptical argument. Yet, Enoch would point out, from this fact about unavoidability nothing follows about whether truth is really desirable and about whether we should really only use alethic considerations for judging. Thus, the sceptic argues, it is entirely possible that our unavoidable normative commitments are false.

This way of understanding the constitutivist move and the sceptical challenge against it is however misguided. The constitutivist about alethic normativity should grant to the sceptic the claim that from the fact we unavoidably value truth and reason on the basis of alethic grounds nothing follow as to whether truth is really valuable and as to whether we really should reason by using alethic grounds. Yet, the constitutivist denies that there is any *practically* relevant sense in which we can ask whether truth is really valuable or whether we should really judge on the basis of alethic considerations only. All that constitutivism is claiming, at least so far, and as I am defending it, is that the very *demand* for a reason to

value truth and reason according to exclusivity is a misguided demand. And it is misguided in the sense that there is no fact of the matter as to whether I should or I should not enter into cognition and cognize in the way in which cognition works. It is not that there is an intelligible question – should I enter into cognition? – and that we are condemned to answer 'yes'. Rather, there is no intelligible question for the question presupposes that there are options among which one can choose – namely to enter or not to enter cognition – but in fact the very conditions in which the practical problem is raised are conditions in which the presupposition doesn't hold. This is the sense in which I earlier claimed that transcendental valuing is outside the realm of practical reason: it is not the sort of activity with respect to which it is intelligible to ask practical questions about whether one should or should not enter in it[285], but it is rather the activity with the help of which any other practical question can be raised.

In order to see clearly the point that I am making here, consider a parallel between the transcendental strategy used by the constitutivist about alethic normativity, and a transcendental strategy that someone might want to use in order to protect the belief in the existence of the external world from the sceptic (on which more will be said in Chapter XII). The believer in the external world will point out that so long as we cognize we are unavoidably committed to believe that there is an external world. Yet, in this case, it seems that the sceptic is entitled to say that this fact about unavoidability is entirely compatible with the possibility that there is no real external world. There is no obvious reason that would prevent us from thinking that our being unavoidably committed to take the world as existing is incompatible with there being no real world. This intuitively contrast with the practical question as to whether to enter into cognition: there it is very hard to see how we can make sense of the fact that there is a fact of the matter out there as to whether we should enter cognition even if it is not a practical option for us to be guided by this reason. In order to defend the constitutivist strategy from the sceptical attack considered in this

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285Will the same strategy works in the case of logic? There are two questions in the case of logic: are these logical laws valid? And: should we reason according to them? *If* the latter is understood as a practical question, and *if* it turns out that the logical laws are strongly constitutive of cognition, then one could say that the practical question embeds a false presupposition: namely that it is possible to reason otherwise, and in that respect the resolution of the practical problem will be the same here as in the case of alethic normativity. Yet, there seems to be a significant different between the case of logic and the case of truth: in the former case, the question of validity (or truth) seems to remain wide open because we have a pressure to think of logic in objectivist terms: that is, we think that the laws we rely on should be accountable to the way things are. We would have to be transcendental idealists of some sort to think otherwise (like Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus*). In the case of truth, where the relevant law is 'judge on the basis of alethic considerations only', say, it is not clear whether this norm is accountable to reality in the same way in which logic would have to be if we followed our objectivist impressions. What is the relevant corresponding alethic reality? These are important and significant differences, an appreciation of which is crucial for a philosopher interested in the constitutivist strategy and more generally in the prospects of a transcendentalist understanding of cognition.

paragraph, we need to show that the realm of practical truths is significantly different from the realm of empirical truths in such a way that the fact that *we* have no practical problem as to whether to enter into cognition entails that there is no fact of the matter as to whether to enter into cognition[286]. I will make that argument below. Before arriving there, we should consider some other objections that might confuse us.

§10.11 *Cognitive Shmagency Objection III. Should I keep being a cognitive agent?*

We have seen that it is not possible for us to be shmagents and that in this sense it is not possible to raise a challenge to the normativity of cognition from the outside of cognition. Also, we have seen that even if we grant that it is conceivable some shmagent that could raise for herself/itself the challenge whether to enter or not cognitive agency, this possibility doesn't affect us, for it is not a viable choice for us to enter into cognition, since we are already in it.

One can however put the challenge as an *internal* challenge that doesn't so much concern the question whether to step in, but rather the question whether to step *out*. Here the challenge can be put in terms of this question: should I keep being a cognitive agent, or should I quit cognitive agency? The question is not that of becoming a cognitive shmagent but rather the question of stopping being a cognitive agent.

This stepping outside could take several forms, the most innocuous being to just start mind wondering rather than deliberating, or falling asleep, where the most serious is ending one's life (assuming the claim that after physical death cognition is destroyed as well). To this question I think that the constitutivist has no resources to answer. Or, at least, the sort of alethic normativity that is founded on what is constitutive of cognitive agency is too thin to derive norms to the effect that one should *continue* to be a cognitive agent. This doesn't mean, of course, that there are no reasons to keep being an agent, not even that a broader constitutivist strategy that focuses on agency rather than on its cognitive part doesn't have the resources to provide such reasons. It just means that these reasons won't come from what is constitutive of cognition. This is part of the point that there is a different between the transcendental layer and the personal one: truth might be transcendentally valuable, but this doesn't have any straightforward consequence about personal value. And the question 'should I keep being a cognitive agent?' is a practical

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[286]We might compare these two transcendental arguments with the one I provided against global scepticism. We are unavoidably committed to the existence of good grounds for believing or to the existence of justifications. Yet, the sceptic, argues, this *seems* to be compatible with the possibility that in fact there are no good grounds for believing nor justifications.

question which occurs at the personal level.

§10.12 *Why should I care about the truth*?

Enoch (2006) at times presented his shmagency objection as pressing the following question: why should I care about being an agent? One way in which this question can pose a threat is by means of arguing, as did the objections presented in the previous paragraphs, either that we can step outside of cognition and ask whether to enter in it, or that someone else can step outside of cognition and ask whether to enter it. This is one way of putting the question 'why should I care about the truth?' in a way that threaten constitutivism.

But there is another way. Let us grant to the constitutivist all she has claimed so far. Particularly, let us concede that cognition is dialectically inescapable in a way that makes it unintelligible the *practical* question whether to be a cognitive agent. Yet, it seems possible for us to wonder whether we should *care* about being cognitive agents. Now consider again the game analogy I presented earlier in order to motivate the appeal to the inescapability of cognition. As Enoch (2011) observes commenting on his own previous presentation of the analogy, there are two ways in which it can be used:

"one in which games are an example of an activity that is constitutively governed by certain norms (so that the relevant success criteria are given by those norms), and another in which it is (arguably) necessary, in order to count as taking part in a certain activity, that one already care about (what is arguably) its constitutive aim." p. 212.

If one understands the analogy in the second way, then in order to be a cognitive agent one must already *care* about the truth, and so the question whether one should care about the truth is moot in the sense that by raising it one is already caring about the truth since one is exercising one's agency. If, however, one understands the analogy in the first way, then one can be a cognitive agent without already caring about the truth and so it seems intelligible for a cognitive agent to wonder whether she should care about it, and it seems so intelligible even if one grants dialectical inescapability and so the point that by raising the question one is already being a cognitive agent. The new objection would concede this, and insist that there is a sceptical threat posed by the fact that being a cognitive agent doesn't require caring about what is constitutive of agency.

The first question to ask is what is the right understanding of the analogy. In order to answer it it is important to rely on the distinction between personal and transcendental

valuing. As the minimalism I advocate suggests, when we exercise cognition we transcendentally value the truth. Yet, this is entirely compatible with the absence of a *personal* form of caring about the truth. There is no need to have a conscious intention to have the truth, or a conscious desire to have it, or the belief that it is desirable or valuable or something that I ought to pursue. This means that the opposition between a game that is constitutively governed by certain norms without needing that one cares about the aim of the game and a game which also requires one to care about its aim is spurious, for it fails to take appropriate notice of the fact that there is a distinction between personal and transcendental valuing activities[287]. In cognition we transcendentally care about the truth, though we might not personally care about it. In fact, the point of opposing transcendental to personal caring is to say that there are forms of caring that doesn't involve the subject's conscious endorsement of the relevant aims and norms. So, in a sense, when cognizing, it is not *we* who care about the truth, so it is not that *we* transcendentally care. It is cognition itself that has the structure of a caring activity.

How does this distinction reframes the question? One the one hand, it makes clear that in one sense the question is moot: for, by being engaged in cognition one is ipso facto transcendentally caring about the truth, and so, if the question is why should I transcendentally care about the truth, then the answer is that one is already transcendentally caring about it. If, however, the question is why should I *personally* care about the truth, then the constitutivist about alethic normativity has no resources to answer *this* question[288]. According to minimalism[289], it is not constitutive of cognition that one personally cares about it, and so it is unclear how one can derive the normative necessity to personally care about it from the fact that we do transcendentally care about it.

Is this a problem for constitutivism? It is a problem if we approached the constitutivist strategy with the intention to prove that it is grounded on what is constitutive of cognitive agency that we should *personally* care about the truth. For my part, I had no such a pretension. Indeed, I think that constitutivism helps us in seeing a difference

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287 The difficulty to see the distinction is connected to the difficulty of seeing how experience itself can be imbued with normativity in the way in which the minimalism I advocate suggests. This difficulty is also one of the reason why minimalism is not seen as a viable move in the debate on the aim of judgment.

288 The fact that a constitutivism like mine does not have the resources to answer the question why truth is personally valuable doesn't mean that it is incompatible with a further story that would vindicate this further claim about personal value. The point here is just that there must be a *further* story that vindicate personal caring about the truth.

289 Of course, another constitutivist about alethic normativity might have a different constitutivist claim from the one endorsed by minimalism and so might have the resources to answer this question. Thus, to illustrate, if one thinks that whenever we exercise cognition we have an intention to get the truth, then maybe one can argue that in this sense it is constitutive of cognition that we care (in the form of intention) about the truth. I just think, as argued in the previous chapter, that such a view would fail to capture the phenomenon of cognition.

between two levels at which normativity arises, namely the transcendental and the personal level. This has profound implications for a general foundational theory of normativity.

A sceptic about constitutivism might however want to press the point that this is indeed a problem. The next objection tries to provide some intuitive ground that it should be a problem for constitutivism the fact that it can't ground personal valuing for the truth.

§10.13 *Playing under protest*

Enoch (2006) at one point concedes pretty much everything to the constitutivist and yet presses another objection. He concedes the constitutivity claim, the inescapability claim, yet he argues that one might fail to internalise the constitutive aim of the suitably inescapable practice. Here is how he puts the point.

"I cannot opt out of the game of agency, but I can certainly play it half-heartedly, indeed under protest, without accepting the aims purportedly constitutive of it as mine." The kind of necessity the game of agency has to enjoy in order to solve the problem we are now in is normative necessity. Invoking other necessities here will just not do.
… you can continue playing or "going through the motions," grudgingly, refusing to internalize the aims of the game. And absent some normative reason to play the game, there need be nothing irrational about such an attitude. Non-optionality of this constitutive (rather than normative) kind is thus simply neither here nor there. The anti-naturalist challenge raises its head again: nothing short of an explicitly normative claim seems fit to settle normative questions". p. 188-90

As we saw before, a way out for a constitutivist is to argue that what is constitutive of agency is the very internalisation of the aim (namely, in my terminology, its adoption at the personal level). But this, as argued in the previous chapter, seems false. If the internalisation here takes the form of a *personal* valuing, then it is clear that the candidate aims that a constitutivist can appeal to are not the sort of things that are personally valued whenever the activity takes place[290]. In the case of cognition, it is clear that one can keep exercising cognition without personally valuing the truth. One might desire not to discover the truth about one's own health, even if one keeps obsessively asking herself whether she is really healthy. One might judge that truth is not valuable, neither in general, nor on occasion. And one might intend to refrain being in the circumstances that would allow her

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[290]The same considerations seem to apply to constitutivism about practical normativity: in the case of Korsgaard, we can be agents without personally value self-constitution; in the case of Velleman, we can be agents without personally valuing self-understanding.

to know the truth. Thus, it seems entirely possible to cognize under protest, or grudgingly, as Enoch puts it.

Does this show that constitutivism is under pressure if it makes room for such frustrated cognizers? Again, I would say 'no'. Simply, constitutivism based on minimalism about truth as the aim of cognition makes salient the distinction between transcendental and personal valuing. It is entirely possible to grudgingly exercise cognition, but one will keep transcendentally valuing it nonetheless. One should not think of the job of a constitutivist theory of normativity as being that of providing the source for justifying personal forms of valuing. I think that many constitutivists went wrong in thinking of their aim as that of answering a *practical* foundational question that arises at the *personal* level. Rather, the constitutivist view highlights that the structure of normativity has a bifurcation at its foundations. There is a normative layer which is transcendental and doesn't need to have (though it might, but we need further arguments to establish that) anything to do with the personal layer of normativity[291].

This doesn't mean, however, that there are important questions concerning the truth that do arise at the personal level. Here are some examples: 'should I inquire about that particular subject matter?', 'should I spend time and effort on this question?', 'should I make an effort to find myself in a position such that I believe only what is true?', 'should I make an effort to put myself in a position to increase the probability that I end up having true beliefs?... these are all questions about personal valuing, that is questions about what I should personally intend to do and desire to do. These are practical questions in the sense that answer to them will have the effect, if I am not akratic, that I will do some actions that will pursue the aims that the questions invite us to consider (e.g., having true beliefs about any issue, having true beliefs about a particular issue, and so on...). But no answer to these questions can be straightforwardly derived from what is constitutive of cognition, for constitutive norms only concern the transcendental layer of normativity, not the personal one.

§10.14 *There is no practical question and no fact of the matter as to whether to enter cognition*

The various challenges revisited so far tried to show that constitutivism doesn't have the resources to provide a practical reason to be a cognitive agent, to aim at the truth. The

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291 Cliffor (1877)'s question was why taking evidential considerations as grounds for judging. His answer was that we have a moral obligation to do. This might also be true; but the minimal point the constitutivist is interested in is to show that anyway we can't do otherwise.

constitutivist reply is not that it can offer such a practical reason, but rather that the demand to have one is misguided, even unintelligible. If one is wondering whether to enter cognition (or to aim at truth), one is already within cognition and already aiming at truth. The point is that it is not a practical question whether to enter cognition or not, and that as a result there is no fact of the matter as to whether one has a reason *in that sense* (the sort of reason upon which we can act). There is no need to *practically justify* entrance into cognition, for when we ask the practical question whether to enter it we are *already* in it[292]. The point is not that whenever we engage in cognition we are unavoidably committed to there being a reason to cognize. The point is that there is no reason to cognize, because in order to ask and rely on that reason one must be already cognizing.

As I said before, however, this claim needs further argument. Why is it that the fact cognition is dialectically inescapable makes it belonging to a realm in which it is not intelligible to ask questions as to whether one should take part to cognition rather than not? As we saw with the case of the transcendental defence of the existence of the external world, even if we grant that believing in the existence of the external world is constitutive of cognition, it seems entirely possible that what we are unavoidably committed to, namely the existence of external world, is a false proposition. Why couldn't the same be true of the issue whether to enter into cognition? I don't think that constitutivists have been explicit enough on this point, nor that they have clearly distinguished between the aim of defusing and of dissolving the sceptical challenge. I will try to fill the gap now in connection to alethic normativity.

Part of the thought should be of course that if I am already doing something, then I need not a reason to *start* doing it, for I am already doing it. I might need a reason to *keep* been doing it, but not to start doing it, for I am already doing it. But this is not the whole

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292It seems to me that the view defended here is the same that Street (2009) is gesturing at toward the end the paper. Street calls this view anti-realist – because it denies the claim that there are attitude-independent normative facts about whether one should believe on the basis of alethic considerations – and says that it is a form of constructivism. I don't know whether it is useful to think of the view as an anti-realist constructivist one. Anyhow, the crucial aspect of the view is that it denies the intelligibility of the question whether one should enter or not into the business of cognition. This is exactly my claim, and will further defend it in that paragraph. Here is Street discussion of this constructivist view: "One possible answer would be to deny that the question "Why engage in the belief business?" is a well-formulated question. The constructivist might argue that normative questions (of which "Why should I engage in the belief business?" is one) can only coherently be asked from the standpoint of a creature who is already engaged in the belief business- i.e., of one who is already going ahead and taking considerations that make *P* more likely to be reasons in favour of believing that *P*. Engagement in the belief business, on such a view, is a necessary part of agency. And if this is right (so a constructivist might argue), then, in asking "Why should I engage in the belief business?", one is implicitly divorcing oneself from the kind of context in which normative questions make sense in the first place – i.e., a context in which one is already taking considerations of truth to bear on what one should believe – and hence one's question is ill-formulated. On this view, one is either engaged in the belief business or one is not; there is no proper question of "should" here". p. 244.

story, as we have seen. The fact that I am already playing chess makes it moot to ask for a reason to start playing chess now, yet it doesn't make it moot to ask for a reason to play chess tout court, or in general. Regardless of the fact that I am already playing it, do I have a reason to start play it in general?

If the question is intelligible in the case of chess, the constitutivist will say, it is because I can also not playing chess. Yet, this can't be the whole story, the objector of constitutivism says, for we might also not being cognizing – when we sleep for instance. Then the constitutivist introduces the idea of dialectical inescapability, namely the fact that the only way in which I can settle the question whether I should play the game of truth or not is by engaging in cognition. So, the thought is, we are back to the case in which one is *already* playing a game and wonder whether to *start* playing it, and noticing that she is already playing it, her practical question evaporates as idle.

One can still have the feeling that the practical question is alive despite the dialectical inescapability pointed out by the constitutivist. To dramatise:

Ok, I see, now I am reasoning, and if I ask whether I should start reasoning, I am asking a stupid question because I am already doing it. But should I reason? I understand that it is not a question that *I* am in a position to ask in such a way that it will make some practical difference. Yet, this might just be a contingent feature of the way in which my reason works. Why should I take the impossibility I have to intelligibly ask a question to show that the question really is unintelligible and doesn't have an answer? Maybe there is a fact of the matter to the effect that there are no reasons to reason. It is a defect of our human predicament that we are not capable of discovering that there are no reasons. In fact, we are so defective that we can't even seriously raise the question whether we should reason! Better to proclaim ignorance, rather than making man the measure of all things and declare that the practical question doesn't need to have an answer just because it is so for us.

If we abstract away for a second from the context in which this thought arises, we might see it expressed in all its seducing intuitiveness: the way things are might fail to be as we think they are, and there might be truths (and questions) which we are not capable of discovering (of raising), maybe not even of grasping.

This is a natural declaration of humility. And it is especially natural when it concerns empirical issues, like the existence of the external world. But it is hard to make sense of that declaration in the realm of practical reason. The thought of objectivity can take at least three forms in this realm. One form says that there might be truths about what

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we should do that can't even be entertained by our mind. They simply are beyond the scope of our comprehension. Another form says that there are truths about what we should do which can be grasped, yet they can't be truths that become reasons on the basis of which we can *act*, nor can we seriously raise a question as to whether to act on their basis or not. The last form says that there might be truths about what we should do such that we might fail to have enough grounds to know them, yet we are in a position to wonder about them and to entertain them. Are these positions intelligible[293]?

The argument against the first form is simple. A practical problem is a *problem* only if it is a problem *for you*. In order for it to be a problem for you, there must be possibilities among which you can choose. Suppose that you knew that it is impossible for you to fly. It is not then a problem for you to know whether on a given occasion you should fly or not, where the 'should' here is used in order to give form to a practical problem[294]. Since you can't fly, it is not even intelligible for you to raise that practical question. Hence, the options of your choice that shape the practical question that you will raise will have to be options that you are capable to entertain and, moreover, to entertain as options that you are capable of taking. But then there is an important constraint on any plausible view about the objectivity of practical knowledge. There can't be truths about what you should do that mention possibilities that you are not in a position to entertain and such that, even if you are in a position to entertain them, you recognize that they are not viable options for you. This results capture the intuitive thought that since it can't be a practical question for you whether you should create a new planet or not, there is no fact of the matter whether you should create it or not. There might be practical counterfactual truths that respond to questions like the following: were *I* in the position of a God who can create at will new planets, should I do it, in such and such circumstances? The intelligibility of these counterfactual questions maybe explain the reason why we might find practical questions intelligible even when they do not apply to us. But the true answers, if any, to these practical questions, are not truths that answer *your* practical questions. These truths answer other questions.

The case of the second form of objectivity targets the sort of scenario that our objectivist proclivities would like to entertain in the case of a practical question as to

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293 I won't discuss here the third version of the objectivist thought, though it promises to be a truth about practical truths. Surely, sometimes we don't have enough grounds to know what we should *do*. An open question is whether there are practical truths such that it is *in principle* impossible for us to know them. This seems to be hard to conceive. But we don't need to work on this point for the sake the aim of the present chapter.

294 One might of course use 'should' here in order to give voice to another question, namely whether it would be *valuable*, were it possible, to fly on that given occasion. We will see questions about value below.

whether to reason. What we are invited to think is the possibility that there be a truth of the matter as to whether there are or not reasons to enter into cognition which exists even if it is not possible for us to act upon them and even if it is not possible for us to genuinely wonder whether to act on them or not. But, again, to think in this way is to fail to notice that a practical problem is a problem *for* someone. Who has the problem whether to cognize or not? It is me (or you). And it is me *now*. Even if I judge that my past self didn't have the problem, I have the problem now. Even if I judge that in the future I will not always have the problem or not have it at all, I still have the problem now. And now, the only relevant moment in which there *is* a problem, now cognition is inescapable. This is what it means to *have a problem*: to be doing what we call 'cognition' for short, namely to be doing the things that I am doing right now that I am inquiring about whether I should transcendentally care about the truth, namely whether I should ask questions and form judgments in a way that is responsive to alethic considerations only. Thus, it is not intelligible to suppose that it is a fact of the matter that I don't have (or that I have) a reason to cognize if this reason is not something that can function as a reason for a possible practical deliberation.

But, the external observer might say:

What if you *stop inquiring* for no reasons (it is not that you stop because you take it to have solved the question, for this would be a move in inquiry that display its value)? What if, say, *you simply forget the problem*? Can't there still be a fact of the matter as to whether now that you are not even thinking about the problem you have (or not) a reason to start cognizing? It seems that there can be such fact of the matter, hence it is entirely irrelevant whether or not you are thinking about the problem – regardless of what you are thinking, there is a fact of the matter as to whether you should be thinking. For, after all, who cares whether there is no problem when I stop asking, what we want to know is the truth *regardless of whether* we ask the question of which the truth is the answer. What we want to know is whether the game of truth is a game worth playing regardless of whether there is *me* (or *you*) who asks whether the game of truth is a game worth playing'.

Here the reply should insist that the objector is failing to notice that there is no fact of the matter about what one should do if there is no practical problem about what I should do, and that for there to be a problem is for there to be a question about what to do, and a question about what to do is to be engaging in cognition.

One can still be unsatisfied and reply:

'Look, before I was mind wondering, then I started to reflect again about an important philosophical problem that I had to solve. It makes perfect sense to say that when I was mind wondering it was a fact that I had a reason to start cognizing, for it is good that I then started cognizing, for instance because I had to solve a problem. Analogously, yesterday I was half-sleeping then I suddenly woke up and started thinking about the mental health of a dear friend, and that made me suffering a lot, and for no reasons for there is nothing I can do to help her. You see, in that case too there was a fact of the matter as to whether it was good to start cognizing. And maybe (who knows?!) there is a fact of the matter that shows that it is always bad to start cognizing. Hence, there is a fact of the matter even if there is no problem, even if there is no question, even if there is no possibility for me to act upon the relevant reasons'.

I think that this reply doesn't so much show that there can be practical truths without practical questions, but rather, that the realm of normativity is wider than the realm of practicality. Let me first illustrate the point with a case we are already well acquainted with, since we have met it several times in the Dissertation. Our *evaluative* practice is different from, and in a sense wider that our *deliberative* practice. The question about what I should judge can be answered by relying on alethic considerations only, yet it is possible to take a detached perspective on our beliefs and come to form judgments about whether it is *good*, according to several dimensions of goodness, to have that set of beliefs. *Evaluatively* speaking, it is an open question whether it is better to have true beliefs or not. *Deliberatively* speaking, there is no open question and in fact no intelligible question as to whether it is better to judge on the basis of alethic grounds or rather on the basis of prudential ones, for we can only judge on the basis of alethic grounds. This shows that there are two normative realms, as it were.

The same occurs here with the issue about entrance into cognition. There is no practical question as to whether to form judgments in a way that respect exclusivity, for in order to wonder how to form judgments one is already judging in a way that respect exclusivity (and, moreover, but this is a further point, one is not *free* to keep cognizing while stop forming judgments in a way that respects exclusivity)[295]. Yet, there is a question about

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[295] I have been mostly focusing on the question 'should I cognize?' or 'should I aim at truth?'. To unpack them, they amount to: 'should I reason in such a way that my judgments will be responsive to alethic considerations only?', 'Should I ask questions in such a way that in asking them I am wanting true answers?', 'Should I judge in such a way that when judging I present its content as true?'. In sum: 'should I cognize in the way in which I do?'. These questions, understood practically, they can all be rephrased as questions of the form: 'should I *start* cognize / aim at the truth', where this question includes the three more specific questions: namely, 'should I *start* asking questions in such a way that in asking them I am wanting true answers', 'should I *start* judge in such a way that when judging I present its content as true?', 'should I *start* reason in such a way that my judgments will be responsive to alethic considerations only?'. So understood, as practical questions, they are moot because in asking them one is *already* cognizing, and cognizing in the particular way in which cognition takes place.

the value and the goodness, if any, of that activity. This is why it makes sense to say that before starting to cognize, when I was asleep, there was a reason for me to wake up and start cognizing – because, say, to make the case vivid, if I started to cognize I might have realised that I forgot the pot on the fire, and by so recalling I might have saved all the people who were in the building that was about to explode. It does make sense because what we are really meaning is that it would have been good for me to wake up. It would have been valuable, given other aims that I or we have, or for its own sake, to wake up and start cognizing.

Having recognized this further dimension of normativity – which we will have to further elucidate – we are now in a position to begin to reconfigure the debate between constitutivism and its detractors. We have seen that the practical question is dissolved by the constitutivist strategy. Yet, a new question or set thereof is now wide open: how does the inescapability of cognition helps us in answering the question whether cognition and the truth it aims at is really valuable or good?

Here again, we must clearly distinguish between three ways in which one can appeal to dialectical inescapability in the service of executing a constitutivist foundation of normativity. One *negative* way consists in showing that we can't but *value* the truth so long as we cognize, and to show on this ground that any attack to the effect that truth is not really valuable are not successful, for we can't but value the truth while we raise the attacks. This is a version of a *defusing* response to the sceptic. The *positive* or *defeating* strategy consists in appealing to the fact that we can't but value truth when we cognize in order to ground the claim that truth *is* really valuable. The last strategy is to say that the question whether truth is valuable or not does not make sense. Cognition eludes the realm of questions about value.

§10.15 *Is it really good or valuable to cognize and have true judgments?*

This, as we have seen, is a normative question that remains intelligible even once we have recognized that the practical question whether to start cognizing or to cognize in the way we do asks for a reason that one doesn't need to possess. What does the constitutivist have to say about this question?

One point is that cognition is the 'context' in which choices about what to do take

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But, there is a further dimension of unintelligibility here, namely the fact that in asking whether I should cognize in the way I do I am kind of presupposing that it might be otherwise, that it might be a practical option for me to cognize and yet to cognize differently from the way I cognize. This is impossible, and in this sense the question so understood is shown having a false presupposition.

place. These choices will make considerations about goodness and will rely on them in order to produce practical reasons and then act on their basis. Thus, the recognition that it would be beneficial to do a certain action will be a practical reason for doing it. This practice is almost completely left untouched by the constitutivist move, with the exception of the following point. There are considerations about what is good or bad to pursue that can't produce practical reasons to *enter* into cognition or to cognize in the way in which cognition works. With respect to the latter impossibility, the considerations won't produce reasons to act for the relevant act is impossible, and reasons to act implies the possibility to act – it is impossible to judge in a way that is not responsive to alethic considerations only. With respect to the former, as we have seen, there could be no practical reason to enter cognition, and as a result, no consideration to the effect that cognize is good/bad will have the effect to produce a reason I can act on to the effect that I should/shouldn't cognize.

Thus, there is no challenge to consitutivism that consists in arguing that truth is not good. The negative project works. What about the positive project? Is it possible for a constitutivist to exploit dialectical inescapability in order to show that truth is good? I don't think so. In order to show that it is good, she would have to rely on cognition, which posits truth as valuable in the way in which it does. Yet the way in which truth is posited as valuable falls short of establishing its goodness in the sense intended here. The fact that by asking a question we want the truth doesn't amount to the fact that having true judgments would be prima facie good. Considerations about goods are considerations that can weigh different goods in order to select what would be the overall good. (Is it really good to have a true judgment about this issue given that having a true judgment here will lead suffering to many animals that need to be tested in order to discover the relevant truth?) Again, here we should recognize the specificity of transcendental valuing and distinguishing that dimension from the dimension of personal valuing. The sense in which truth is transcendentally valuable does belong to a dimension that can't be *compared* to other goods. The comparison takes place at the level of personal valuing.

§10.16 *Naturalistic fallacy*

One objection to the constitutivist strategy is that it is committed to a familiar form of naturalistic fallacy, namely the fallacy of deriving some normative truth from some purely descriptive truth.

One first way of responding to the objection is to deny that there is any descriptive

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truth from which some normative truth is then derived. If one considers the experience of judging itself, it is not the case that one has an experience devoid of a normative component and that one then infers from the presence of the experience which is devoid of any normative component to the conclusion that there is some normative truth. The reply here would insist that the experience of judging, questioning, and of doxastic deliberation more generally is an experience of a normatively oriented activity. Thus, there is no purely descriptive *fact* from which we are then trying to derive any normative conclusion, since the fact in question – namely the experience of being cognizing – is already imbued of normativity.

Whatever the merits of this reply, the problem is that it misrepresents the objection. The objection doesn't deny that the experience itself displays some normative orientation. The objection just says that the very fact *that* the experience has this normative structure is a *descriptive point*. And deriving from that point a normative conclusion seems a paradigmatic instance of a naturalistic fallacy.

The constitutivist reply here is to accept the objection and to say that *yes* it is indeed a form of what goes under the name of naturalistic fallacy, but there is nothing fallacious about it. Indeed, it is precisely the *spirit* of the constitutivist project to say that *at the foundations* the very fact that our agency values some aims and accept some norms justifies the authority of these aims and norms.

The constitutivist might try to dissipate the force of the objection by pointing to the following difference. There are cases where it is objectionable to derive a normative conclusion from the descriptive point that we value something or unavoidably accept some norm because the values and norms in question are not to be used or displayed in the very activity of wondering and settling about the truth about values and norms. Thus, even if it were true that we unavoidably desire to survive to avoid pain, it would still be objectionable to conclude that just because we unavoidably desire them they they are really valuable. The constitutivist will then point out that there is a *relevant* disanalogy between unavoidably valuing survival and the avoidance of pain and unavoidably valuing truth. For the way in which we value truth is such that its value is displayed even when we try to put it into question or just to wonder about it. Whereas it is not clear in which sense in asking whether we really ought to pursue survival and avoidance of pain we are displaying our desire to survive and to avoid pain. This disanalogy, the constitutivist might argue, is normatively relevant in that values that are inescapable in the dialectical sense – namely ta they are displayed in the very attempt to wonder about what is the truth about them – do

not give rise to any fallacious derivation of a norm from a descriptive claim.

Though this is ingenious, it is not clear what is the normative relevance of this dialectical inescapability. There still is a residual sense in which it is wrong to derive normativity from the mere fact that we unavoidably value something and recognize the authority of some norm. This doesn't mean to reject the point that in being dialectically inescapable it is not possible for an agent to intelligibly raise a *practical* question as to whether to follow the norms of cognitive agency or not.

If we have foundational aspirations, as all constitutivists do, then we need to understand the source of this residual worry. This brings us to the next objection.

§10.17 *Reflexive distancing and contingency*

We finally come to what I take to be the most powerful objection to constitutivism, though it is, quite surprisingly, the one who seems to have received lesser attention. Enoch (2006) at some point voices this objection, particularly in connection with the way in which Connie Rosati has discussed her naturalist constitutivism. Let us go back to beginning, again. Why do we need to vindicate normativity? Where does this necessity come from? Suppose I find myself with a desire to do something. Why isn't the simple fact that I have a desire normatively binding? The reason is that, of course, we can ask this very question. It is a possibility we have: we can ask for reasons why we should comply with a desire.

Suppose I came up with my own desire. Suppose that the desire is not something that I am saddled with, but rather something that somehow I came to resolutely judge as right/justified/the one to be had. In this case, there is no normative question for me. If I have already judged that this desire is justified, then the normativity question, so long as I don't shake for whatever reason my judgment, will be closed. There is no open question here that I need to solve.

Why then the problem arises? What are the conditions for its arising? How do I come to judge that some desire might not be the one to be had? These are important questions, but let us put them on a side for now. The point we need here is that once, and only once, I have raised these questions and accepted them as legitimate, then I have a problem that is not going to be solved by merely pointing out that I have some desires rather than others. For, my question just is a question about why should I rely on desires? And this question is such that just presenting me with these desires is not going to solve it.

The situation here parallels the one we find in epistemology. We are saddled with

experiences. Sometimes we take them at face values, and when we do we have no problem. But it is a possibility we have to wonder whether we should take them at face value. Now, forget about the important question *why* we can legitimately step back from experiences and ask whether we should take them at face value. The point here is that once, and only once, I have raised the question 'Why should I rely on experiences?', it is then not going to be helpful any answer which takes for granted the fact that I can rely on experience, for this is precisely that which I am putting into question. As soon as the question is raised, no reasons relying on experiences are going to satisfy my question. Of course, one might argue that there are no legitimate reasons to raise the question in the first place. But this is independent from the point that *once* the question is raised and one gives credit to the doubt that the question expresses, one can't rely on experience in order to answer it.

So, back to desires. Once we have raised the normative question, we have a problem, and the simple existence of desires is not going to solve it, since the question is putting into question their very legitimacy. One might think that the problem can be solved when the desire whose legitimacy is under question is not like the contingent desire for ice cream, but some sort of inescapable desire. But if the original problem originated because we are capable to step back from our desires and wonder whether we should follow them, what would it change the fact that a given desire in inescapable? What do I have to do with this desire? It is not me who has decided to have it. It is already there. What does it change the fact that I can't escape it? Why, instead of seeing it as normative for me, shouldn't I find it as blind cosmic sentence?! These questions do indeed make sense.

As I read him, this point is also pressed by Enoch (2006) and (2010), though he doesn't seem to give central stage to it – he rather focuses on the shmagency objections. And it was already recognized very clearly by Rosati (2003). She writes:

"The complaint about both brute and hedonistic naturalism was that they treat as normative certain natural forces or tendencies that lack sufficient normative credentials. But why think that the motives and capacities that render persons agents do not have the same problem?". p. 521.

It is interesting to see how Rosati herself thinks that the constitutivist strategy can solve this problem. Here is what she writes:

"Unlike our other motives and capacities, our autonomy-making motives and capacities are not arbitrary but, rather, make self-governance possible: they are motives and capacities without the effective operation of which we would not be agents and evaluators at all. Insofar as we are agents,

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the effective exercise of these motives and capacities matters to us, and our caring about them involves no identifiable mistake. Their operation, we might say, is self-vindicating, and efforts to challenge them cannot even get going without relying on them". p. 522

Even if one concedes to Rosati and constitutivist more generally the claim that a given desire is dialectically inescapable, it is unclear how does this answer the *initial problem*. If the problem was whether the desire is legitimate, then the fact of having found an inescapable desire doesn't remove the initial question. Finding an inescapable desire allows us to answer the question by saying that in so far as we are agent we can't but follow that desire, willy nilly. But this only solve the practical problem whether to desire as one is inescapably compelled to do by showing that the practical question doesn't apply, since it presupposes that there is a choice to be made, but there isn't. Yet, the initial question was about why this desire should be something that I ought to follow, or that it is worth to follow. To this question, the constitutivist hasn't offered a reply just by pointing out the inescapability of the desire.

To put the point in terms of the distinction between a practical question and questions about goods and values, the constitutivist gives us a convincing reply to the practical question 'should I second this desire?', but she doesn't offer any answer to the question about the goodness of having true judgments and of cognizing in the way we do, nor does she give us any answer to the question about the value of cognition and truth.

It is important to see as clearly as possible the limit of constitutivism here. Another way of making perspicuous its limitation is this. It is typical to introduce the goal that a constitutivist theory is meant to achieve by saying that it wants to ground the *categorical authority* of norms or normativity more general. Categorical authority is typically understood as being the authority that a given norm enjoys regardless of the *contingent* desires and motives that we happen to have. This does parallel the discussion just done about the possibility of making a step back from our desires and ask a justification for them. Speaking of categorical authority locates the possibility of making that step back in the contingency of these desires. The contingency might in turn be captured in several ways, and depending on how we understand that contingency that makes desires normatively arbitrary we would have different kinds of tasks.

To give a first illustration, if the relevant troublesome contingency of desires is the fact that strictly speaking they are contingent in the sense that they might have been otherwise, then the problem for constitutivism would be to find foundations at which there are desires that couldn't have been otherwise. But it seems conceivable that the way in

which our mind is structured could have been otherwise. Then, if the contingency is so understood, how does consitutitivism help here exactly?

Another illustration. Suppose that the relevant notion of contingency that makes contingent desires normatively arbitrary is the fact that desires, like experiences, are typically things which happen to us, instead of being actively authorised by us. We are saddled with experiences and desires. They belong to receptivity rather than spontaneity. If that is the problem, then it is unclear how constitutivism helps us here. For, in a fundamental sense cognition is something that I am saddled with (it is not *me* who has authorised my own existence, nor my own existence with that particular cognition!). Then how could dialectically inescapable desires solve the initial problem?

I don't think that the constitutivist has any straightforward way of replying to this objection. There are indeed very strong residual feelings of normative arbitrariness at the foundations. But before deciding whether they should be endorsed or explained away, it is important to understand them and their source. In what follows I will provide some suggestions about what can explain these residual feelings.

§10.18 *Possible sources for the feeling of residual arbitrariness*

I think that much more work should be done in order to understand what might reasonably lie at the foundations of normativity. In order to make some progress in this direction I will here list some sources that might explain why we feel dissatisfied, if we do, by the sort of foundations for normativity that the constitutivist is providing us with. I will make the point in connection with alethic normativity, but the same point applies *mutatis mutandis* to other kinds of normativity. I am not going to argue that all these possible sources of dissatisfaction are *justified* sources of dissatisfaction – though I will tentatively argue that some of them are. I mainly want to point the finger on them and leave the work for another occasion.

Our condition is not chosen. There is a sense in which it is not *me* who have decided to be structured in such a way as to being seeking for the truth. It is as though the constitutivist is inviting us to think that the foundation upon which normativity rests is just a condition that we find ourselves saddled with, just like a desire that obsesses us against our will. So, why should I be constrained by norms or values whose ground is a condition that I have not chosen, and that I might even find undesirable, like our frustrated cognizer? It is like being put in a cage or in a world in which the rules have been chosen by someone

else – or not chosen by anyone at all, which might even seem worst.

It is not possible to choose what to transcendentally value, for it is the very defining feature of transcendental valuing the fact of being a valuing activity that occurs a-personally – neither personally nor sub-personally – that is, at the level where the preconditions for choice are found. The valuing activity that is oriented towards the truth structures our very experience and furnishes the framework within which the act of choice is possible. It is like the relationship between space and locations. Space itself can't be located, for it is the framework "within" which there are locations – it doesn't make any sense to ask: '*where* is space itself?'. The same applies to time and moments. Similarly, questioning and judging can't be willed, for they constitute the framework that makes our willing activity possible (in order to make a choice I must ask myself a question and give myself an answer).

I don't think it is obvious that this source of uneasiness is a legitimate one. Why is it in the first place that some norm can be recognized as valid or genuinely authoritative only if it is something whose authority has been *chosen* by me? It is not clear to me that there are compelling arguments for this claim[296]. Though I do not want to argue on this point, it is important for our purposes to see the distinction between two ways in which the condition we find ourselves in might be one that we have not chosen.

I might be thrown in an activity – that is, the activity of looking for pleasure. As I am thrown in that activity, I can't but value pleasure precisely because that is the activity I find myself thrown in, namely the activity of seeking for pleasures. I might take part in that activity, and so unconsciously and unproblematically value pleasure. Then, at some point in my life I might realise that this is precisely what is happening: I am seeking for pleasure. Why? Why should I value it? Here, even if the activity is, by hypothesis, something that I can't (biologically) escape – that is the condition I have been thrown in – the question does make sense[297]. But the same question doesn't make sense *in the same way* when we ask it with respect to the game of truth we have been thrown in. In the case of pleasure, the question doesn't display the value which one is questioning. Yet it is (biologically) inescapable. But the sense of inescapability in the case of cognition is much more fundamental (it is

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296 For what is worth, I do find plausible an account of the phenomenology of moral experience like the one defended by Murdoch (1971) and (1992). In this account, the role of choice as the source that removes normative arbitrariness is significantly downplayed and even criticised.

297 Of course, talk of throwness can be misleading. When I am saying that *I* have been thrown in a certain activity, I am not thereby saying that *I* might have been thrown somewhere else. This implies that what I am is independent of the particular activity I have been thrown in. Though it is unclear, as we will see, whether I could have an *I* without valuing truth in the way in which I inescapably transcendentally do, there are other activities such that they are not essential of what I am. I *can* conceive of *myself* as being something which do not have legs, do not have a body. Can I understand myself as something that do not have questions? This is harder to answer in the affirmative.

dialectical inescapability): it is an inescapability that concerns the very question about its value. When I wonder why should I value truth, I am still valuing it.

Since it is plausible that we think that a condition that we have not chosen is normatively arbitrary because we think of examples of desires that have not been personally chosen, to appreciate the distinction between the two forms of valuing might be important to resist the temptation to think that the fact that we haven't chosen what we transcendentally value is the source of the feeling of normative arbitrariness. Anyway, as said, I don't want to insist too much on this point. I think that there are most serious candidates for explaining and vindicating the feeling of residual arbitrariness that the constitutivist leaves us with.

Biological escapability. Now that we have moved the discussion from the practical issue to the issue of good and value some of the points that seemed to be irrelevant becomes now relevant. In the discussion of the varieties of inescapability we remarked that the fact that cognition is not biologically inescapable doesn't pose a threat to the constitutivist strategy. Ferrero (2009), commenting on biological escapability, says: "this is not the kind of optionality that is at stake in the debate on the grounds of normativity". p. 309. Yet, if the question we are now considering is whether judging the truth is valuable – and not just the practical question whether we should judge the truth – then it seems that biological escapability puts some pressure on a constitutive defence of the value of truth. The simple fact of knowing that, even if alive, we are not *all the time* agents (because sometimes we sleep, we don't pay attention to what we are doing, and so on) might naturally prompt a feeling of uneasiness. For, if something is valuable, it is valuable at all time (if not a-temporally). But the ground for the values constitutive of agency is in place only when we are agent. And we are not agents all the time. It seem then that their value is time-bound. But can this be genuine value? It is not that when we are agent we realise that what is constitutive of agency is valuable *all the time* precisely because it is constitutive of agency. What we rather discover is that so long as there is agency we can't but value it. There seems to be some gap between this sense of value and the more general notion of value that we seem to possess and to care about.

Our condition might have been otherwise/or it is conceivable that it could have been otherwise. There is another very interesting distinction the recognition of which helps us in shaping the understanding of what normative arbitrariness amounts to. This distinction has to do with the way in which considerations about other possible or just merely conceivable worlds affect the way in which we relate and understand values in our present world.

Ontological escapability I: an alternative me. I happen to exist in such a way that I transcendentally value the truth. But *I* might have existed with a different constitution. It is not that I am thinking of a world in which there exists something which doesn't aim at truth and which is no longer something that I might recognize as being a possible version of *me* or as being an *self*. Rather I am thinking of *me* being in such a way that I don't seek for the truth in the way in which I here now do. Is this really an *intelligible supposition*? Everything depends on whether judging and questioning are so essential to what *I am* that I can't think of me without them.

Here we should distinguish between two way of conceiving of this possibility. First, there is a way of conceiving that involves trying to put myself through imaginative variation into another *first-personal perspective* such that it will be a perspective I might recognize as being *my* perspective (not in the sense of a perspective that preserves my psychological past, but rather in the sense of a perspective that preserves the fact that it is the perspective of an *I*), and yet an I-perspective which is not structured so as to make the quest for truth one of its constitutive features. This, as argued above, is not possible. Another way is to think third-personally of that putative scenario. This is probably doable. There is no easily detectable conceptual absurdity in conceptualizing a world with such features (though see § above for some reservations on this point). Suppose, for the sake of argument, that this *I* who doesn't seek the truth is conceivable in this minimal way. Even if we don't claim that conceivability here entails possibility, the sheer conceivability of such a scenario is enough to engender a sense of profound arbitrariness. Since *I* might have been such that truth is not of value for me, what *does it mean* that truth is valuable for me *now,* in the world and in the condition in which I happen to find myself? There is a feeling of arbitrary constriction. Why *truth* and why *in this way*? Why not something else?

Metaphysical escapability II: no me. There is another way in which I might think of the arbitrariness of the present desire for truth. Here the fundamental recognition that engenders the sense of arbitrariness is not the recognition that *I* could have been different. Rather, the recognition is that *I* could have not been *at all.* The recognition is not that *everything* might not have existed[298]. The recognition is rather that I might not have existed, and that the course of events might have been such that I am not a part of it. Regardless of whether this possibility is real, this scenario is quite easy for us to conceive of: it would have been enough for evolution to take a slightly different course than the one it followed.

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[298]For, moreover, we should reject the possibility that everything might not have existed, since there is no other possibility than being – nothingness, in fact, doesn't have any existence whatsoever, so how could it have *been the case* that there is 'only' nothingness?!

But then, why truth would have to be really valuable? It is just because I exist, it seems, but clearly I might not have existed (or, even if the possibility is not real, the fact that we can conceive of it makes us think that there would have been nothing strange had we not existed and had we not valued truth). Here I think we might also feel a sense of arbitrariness.

Given this feeling, we should not immediately rule out as irrelevant, as it is typically done in the debate, the fact that cognition is ontologically escapable. Even if this fact doesn't change the verdict about whether there is a *practical* question about whether to enter into cognitive agency, reflecting on ontological and metaphysical escapability might provide us with insight into why we keep feeling that the constitutivist strategy isn't capturing and vindicating all the normativity that we want to capture.

We might make vivid the way in which the two forms of escapability impact on our conception of value by imagining ourselves being in a position of God who is wondering how to create the universe. He/she might ask himself/herself: Should I arrange things in such a fashion that humans will exist? And if so, how do I make them? Will I give them cognitive agency, or will I give them cognitive shmagency? What is best?

A normatively arbitrary genealogy. There is yet another sense of *arbitrariness* which I haven't discussed yet (and which is much more common in contemporary discussions and philosophical discussions more generally). The sense is originated from an appreciation of the genealogy that leads us to the present instant. The history – evolution – that lead us to have the cognition we have makes it arbitrary the value of what we value since the history itself can be seen as valueless and meaningless. As it is standardly understood nowadays, there is no teleology in evolution.

Materialism. There is yet another sense of *arbitrariness* which, I fear, is not discussed enough and yet is arguably at the origin of the feeling of uneasiness that pervades our contemporary western culture. If one thinks that our human experience is reducible to (or significantly dependent on) material stuff (whatever the details of the stuff ends up being), then there is a sense in which the mere fact that we unavoidably value something can't be the source of its value. Why can't it be? Because the very valuing activity that is supposed to ground the value is made of *meaningless* and *valueless stuff*. How do you create value from something which is made up of valueless things? Here is where metaphysical virtuosity kicks in. Be that as it may, recognizing that our valuing something is just material stuff or anyway crucially depend on material stuff – which is devoid of meaning – is another possible source of a feeling of arbitrariness[299].

299Incidentally, this might offer the resources for a diagnosis of why *realism* in moral philosophy is quite

No ultimate explanation. Finally, there is a most fundamental and hardly eliminable sense of arbitrariness. Precisely and simply because valuing truth *exists*, it is devoid of meaning. In a fundamental sense, *everything* is *arbitrary*. Since there is no possible explanation why there is something rather than nothing, *that the world is*, and *that the world is as it is* are fundamentally without explanation. Hence their arbitrariness. Here the arbitrariness depends from the fact that *there is nothing that vindicates or justifies or explains existence as such* (why is there anything at all?!), and *there is nothing that vindicates of justifies the way in which what exists exists* (Why two hands, rather than three? Why valuing truth, rather than something else? Why being capable of love? Why death? …). The recognition of all this is what might trigger the reaction 'but what is the meaning or value of all that?' in the face of the constitutivist theory. If the constitutivist were to reply: 'but look, in so arguing you are precisely valuing the truth', the constitutivist would fail to understand the spirit of the question. The question here doesn't mean to deny that we transcendentally value the truth. Indeed, the defender of the question would also notice that it is precisely by valuing the truth that she ended up understanding this fundamental truth about the inevitable apparent meaningless of all things (and for this, she might be grateful). Yet, she would insist that valuing the truth is itself valueless, in some sense, precisely because it exists, and its existence is arbitrary and can't receive any justification.

It is important to realise how radical this point is. One might try to dissolve the feeling of arbitrariness by invoking the following line of thought. The sort of agency that I do have and the sort of reason that I do use are not contingent features of what *I* am. They are somehow constitutive of my being the sort of 'thing' that I am. So, it is not conceivable an *I* which doesn't have the agency and reason that I now have. This line is very rough as it stands. But let us suppose that one can defend it. Still, it would be intelligible to wonder something along the following lines: but why do I *exist*? I will grant you that I can't be the sort of *I* that I am if I do not have that cognitive agency that I am now exercising. Still, why do I exist? The lack of an answer seems to carry a feeling of arbitrariness.

This question has the force of putting us in the presence of an experience that shows that there couldn't be any ground for the values and norms that we posit (or that we

popular. For if one thinks of the mind in reductivist terms or if one thinks of the mind as crucially dependent on, though not reducible to, the physical, then it is unclear how what belongs to our mind can be the source of value. For, after all, it is either identical to or dependent on for its workings on valueless stuff. Thus, it is unclear how value could come from within. A natural way of saving it is to think that it must come from without. Naturalist forms of realism are not better off in this respect, for they still reduce value to something which can't be conceptualised as imbued of meaning and value. Only robust non-naturalistic forms of realisms seem to promise to offer a source of value which is not corrupted by the meaninglessness of the physical or of nature more generally.

are condemned to posit, as a result of our constitutive features) as objectively valid. One might start trying to offer an answer to the why-question by pointing to historical facts whose occurrence is taken to explain why I showed up at some point in the history of the universe. This sort of answer would be fundamentally incomplete, as we saw, unless the history itself is imbued of value and of some sort of teleology. But let us even suppose that history is not morally inert: *somehow*, the history is such that it grounds it being valuable the sort of aim that we structurally find valuable. (Maybe God created us in such a way that value is preserved and transmitted, as it were). Anyway, even if we were in a position to offer such a story, we would still have a residual worry which has the power to let us perceive the normative arbitrariness of our predicament. The worry has the form of the realisation that there couldn't be any ultimate explanation of why anything exist *rather than not*. There is no possible explanation, since any candidate explanation would appeal to something that exists (even God, if It exists, It exists and can ask: what do I exist?), and so *the very fact of existence* and *all the facts about how things are* would be left unexplained. Once one understands that, the recognition that it is arbitrary that things exist as they do can be achieved. This is a recognition that will always leave *open* the question: but why does it *really matter*? The question doesn't take the form of a practical question any longer – for one might even recognize that the practical question is settled by the fact that one unavoidably aims at something, like truth. The question takes the form of an amazement in the face of a mystery that puts pressure on our notion of value[300].

§10.19 *Reflexive distancing*

The feeling of arbitrariness that is discussed in the literature and that is often recognized as that which prompts and sustains the residual feeling of arbitrariness is the fact that we seem to be capable to make a step back with respect to the desires we happen to be saddled with. Even if it is very persistent and dialectically inescapable, the desire for truth still is a desire that we happen to be saddled with.

Why is it that we are capable of making a step back from our desires? What does explain this capacity? In the case of our candidate grounds for believing, reflexive distancing takes the form of a question as to whether the candidate ground is a good one for believing. Does it show that *p* is true? When we can raise a question about whether a

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300This is why some sort of nihilism that asserts that life is devoid of meaning is compatible with constitutivism. Nihilism would assert something along these lines: "of course, I can't but value truth, as I am doing right now, and of course truth is transcendentally valuable, as you like to put it, but this doesn't mean that everything is not fundamentally meaningless".

candidate ground is a good one we can do so either because it is still uncertain whether it is pertinent at all for the truth of *p* or because it is still uncertain whether the ground establishes the truth of *p* – that is whether it is a conclusive one. And what does explain this possibility? Well, the fact that we have a relation to the truth in the form of judgment: it is because we judge that we haven't found yet conclusive grounds for taking *p* as true that we can step back from the candidate grounds for *p* and refrain from judging *p* to be the case. (This is in a very condensed form what I have argued in Chapter II Chapter VI).

Why is it that we can make a step back with respect to our desires? Here the story would have to be different. It is not my purpose here to give this story. All I want to point out is that, first, there are two sorts of reflexive distancing here that appear prima facie to demand for different explanations of their possibility, and, second, that the previously listed sources of the feeling of normative arbitrariness promise to provide an explanation of why distancing is possible even in the case of dialectically inescapable desire like the desire for the truth.

§10.20 *On the relationship between truth and other personal values*

The value of truth has a transcendental role with respect to other aims that can be endorsed at the personal level. The reason is simple. In order to endorse any value whatsoever at the personal level, I would have to *judge* of this aim that it is valuable. It would therefore be in light of the truth that a given aim is endorsed as valuable. If I try to be compassionate with others it is because I judge that this is the way to be. Practical choices are done *in the light of the truth*.

Truth has a transcendental role also with respect to the value of discovering the truth about some particular subject matters. If I decide to inquire into philosophy it is because I take it to be the correct thing to do. So doing is to proceed according to what one regards to be the truth. This applies even if one regards discovery of the truth about some subject matter as invaluable or anyway less valuable than other choices. These choices will still be made in the light of what one takes to be the truth, the truth about what to pursue and value.

Truth is also the transcendental horizon of our emotional life. In this respect we can draw from the work of Raimond Gaita[301], who is himself drawing from the work of Iris Murdoch and Simone Weil, among others. When we feel and experience we want to do

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[301] See Gaita (1999) and (2004), particularly the following chapters 'Goodness and truth' and 'Truth as the need of the soul'.

so truthfully, that is, in a way which is faithful to the reality to which we relate through our emotional reaction. Here is how Gaita (1999) articulates the point:

"It is of the nature of the states that compose the inner life that they profess their authenticity, that they profess to be truthful and true. To grieve is to take oneself to be properly related to the reality of someone's death; to be related, that is, in a way that makes grief true to ('correspond to', 'be in tune with') that reality. When it is pure, grief is a form of relatedness to reality whose cognitive character is marked by the critical vocabulary that distinguishes real from false forms of it. Sentimental grief falsely professes what pure grief achieves.
One can no more be indifferent to whether one's grief takes one to or away from reality than one can be indifferent to whether one's beliefs are true or false. And to grieve, is to take oneself to grieve authentically, that is, in accord with the reality whose nature – and whose status as genuine form of reality – is revealed in the grammar of the critical concepts to which grief is answerable". p. 240-1.

This sort of truthfulness can't be straightforwardly reduced to having true judgments. What can be in tune with reality or not is not judgment, but one's emotional and spiritual life. It would be the task of another dissertation to articulate this normative dimension that applies to our emotional life and where truth is the horizon. Here we must content ourselves of having noticed this important point, for this is another way in which truth can be seen as being the transcendental aim that pervades our mental life.

§10.21 *Conclusion*

In this Chapter I have argued that there is a dimension of alethic normativity that is worth calling transcendental and that is distinguished from another level at which normativity arises, namely the personal level at which a subject can consciously endorse aims, desires, intentions, judgments, values. I have relied on the distinction in order to argue that the *practical* question about what there are reasons to do does not arise at the transcendental level, but only at the personal one. Thus, it is not so much that constitutivism provides a reason to transcendentally value the truth or form judgments according to exclusivity, rather constitutivism shows that the level at which it makes sense to ask for a reason is not the transcendental one: there is no fact of the matter as to whether one has or has not a reason to cognize and value the truth, because transcendental valuing is not the sort of activity with respect to which it makes sense to ask for reasons for engaging in it.

Then I have argued that this position leaves open many normative questions that arise at the level of personal valuing. At that level it makes sense to take a detached perspective upon one's own cognition and ask whether it is good to be structured in such a way that it is dialectically inescapable for us to cognize in the way we do. Also, at that level, it makes sense to ask, with respect to specific instances of cognitive agency, whether it is good to be in them. This sort of normative evaluation is the one we work with when we evaluate, for instance, whether it is good to have (or fail to have) the sort of beliefs that we have (or fail to have). At that level, it makes sense to argue that some prudential good or value trumps the good or value of having a true belief, on a given occasion, about a certain issue. This is compatible, however, with the point that at the transcendental level truth is the sole 'good' or 'value' that is pertinent for cognition.

Finally, I have distinguished what seems to be a further layer of normative evaluation. The previous level is the level at which we evaluate things in terms of their being good or bad, valuable or not. This is the level at which the distinction between instrumental and non-instrumental value makes sense. But there is another level which asks questions about value in a different and arguably more fundamental sense. Here value is understood in terms of meaning. Thus, this level is the one in which it is entirely intelligible to recognize that truth is transcendentally valuable, to even concede that truth is (non-)instrumentally valuable or good in some circumstances, and yet to insist that in some sense it being valuable in these ways is not *enough*. The most dramatic version of scepticism that arises at this level is the recognition that fundamentally speaking it is all meaningless – even if truth is unavoidably taken as valuable, what is the meaning of all that? This level takes into account the truth that we are thrown into existence, and our being thrown into existence removes the ground to fully adhere to the transcendental and (eventually) personal value of truth.

Chapter XI

Constitutivism about Epistemic Normativity

In the previous Chapter I have explained what is the source of alethic normativity. The explanation took the form of a constitutivist account about normativity. In this chapter I will extend the constitutivist explanation of the source of normativity to epistemic normativity.

Having argued that truth is normative because constitutive of an inescapable transcendental activity doesn't suffice to prove the point that epistemic normativity is a form of transcendental normativity. One might take truth to be a transcendental aim that gives rise to epistemic norms, and yet understands epistemic norms as *instrumental* norms that tell us how we should judge *given the aim* of truth.

Here I will pursue another strategy[302]. As argued in previous chapters, by engaging in cognition we make alethic commitments. This committal nature of our cognition grounds the fact that by engaging in cognition we commit ourselves to the validity some norms. To illustrate, by judging that *p* we are committed to possess good grounds for *p* and in that sense it is constitutive of judgment that it has to be evaluated as epistemically correct only if there are good grounds for *p*. This is, as I will explain, a way in which some norms are *weakly constitutive* of cognitions. However, some further norms are arguably

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[302] Korsgaard (2009a) also sketches an account of epistemic normativity that goes along the constitutivist lines defended here. Unfortunately she doesn't clearly distinguish between weak and strong constitutivism (though from what she says she seems to be committed to weak constitutivism), and she doesn't explain what is the source of evidence for the presence of the relevant norms (this is, again, the suggestion that the Dissertation is making to current constitutivists, namely that phenomenology is needed in order to ground a constitutivist account of some truths). In the next passage we can see what are her examples of commitments (and corresponding norms); we can also see what kind of evidence she might have in mind as that establishing the presence of norms, namely evidence rooted in our social practice, though I think she will be willing to move to make room for my suggestion to ground the norms on phenomenology; and we also see a passage that might be read as suggesting to take the norms are weakly constitutive, rather than strongly constitutive.
"Almost all philosophers would agree that believing P is related to the following things: being prepared to affirm P; being prepared to treat P as a premise in your reasonings about other matters; being prepared to accept the logical consequences of P; and being prepared to act as if P were true. Let's call these things the concomitants of belief. Some philosophers suppose that a belief is a particular mental state, something that simply exists or not, and that the concomitants of belief serve as evidence as to whether someone is in that mental state or not. If,say, someone sincerely affirms something but does not act as if it were true, the evidence is unclear. Other philosophers suppose that the concomitants of belief are constitutive of belief: to say that you do those things is what it means to say you believe something. If someone sincerely affirms something but does not act as if it were true,we seem to have a contradiction on our hands; perhaps we will be tempted to deny that he could have been sincere after all. I myself take the concomitants of belief to be constitutive principles of believing: normative standards that arise from the very nature of believing". p. 37

strongly constitutive of cognition, in that when we engage in cognition we can't fail to respect them. To illustrate, since any judgment is always formed on the basis of some ground, the norm that a judgment should be formed on some ground is constitutive of cognition.

As these quick illustrations might easily show, the sense in which epistemic norms are constitutive for cognition is different from the sense in which truth is primarily constitutive for cognition. Truth is fundamentally constitutive of cognition because to judge that *p* is to present *p* as true in the particular way in which judgment does that, and to ask a question about *p* is to want the truth about *p*. That one *ought* to have some grounds for one's judgments is not constitutive in the same way: it is not the case that by judging that *p* one is presenting *p* as being grounded, nor is it the case that by judging that *p* one is presenting *p* as being well grounded or even conclusively grounded. Having (good) grounds for *p* is not the horizon of intelligibility of judgment in the same way in which truth is. Yet, the epistemic norm to possess good grounds for *p* is analogous to the truth norm of correctness for judgment because they are both weakly constitutive of judgment. In both cases, it is possible to judge that *p* even if the epistemic and alethic norm are not respected – that is, it is possible to judge that *p* on the basis of bad grounds, and it is possible to judge that *p* even if *p* is false. Yet, it is constitutive of judgment that it is correct only if it is true and only it is based on good grounds. Thus, in this respect, some dimensions of alethic normativity and some dimensions of epistemic normativity turn out to be structurally the same.

In what follows I will start by presenting three arguments for a constitutivist account of epistemic normativity. The first argument is in favour of the claim that to have alethic grounds for one's judgment is a strongly constitutive norm of judgement. The second and third arguments are in favour of the claim that to possess certainty is a weakly constitutive norm of cognition[303]. These three arguments represent the first step of the constitutivist strategy, namely the steps that consist in making a claim about which norms are constitutive of a given activity, namely, in this case, the activity of cognition. The second step (the inescapability step) has been argued for in the previous chapter, in which I explained in what sense cognition is dialectically inescapable. In what follows I will then concentrate on the transcendental step, namely the step in which it is appreciated what follows form the fact that some norms are constitutive of an inescapable practice. Here the threefold distinction between practical, evaluative and existential questions introduced in

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[303] I will focus on certainty because this is the norm that interests me in this work and because if it is true that certainty is normative for cognition in a weakly constitutive way than we have achieved a highly significant philosophical result, since certainty will be discovered as being the aim of our inquiring mind. Yet, I think that these arguments can be used in order to support many more norms.

the previous chapter will be important in order to appreciate what can be achieved through this constitutivist strategy. Again, I will claim that this constitutivism about epistemic normativity allows us to respond satisfactorily only to the practical question (and to the corresponding sceptical challenge), and will explain how it fails to answer the evaluative and existential one. Yet, I will also suggest that there is no way in which one can convincingly and coherently argue that certainty is not good or valuable, in the sense of personal valuing which responds to the evaluative questions. This much doesn't show that certainty is personally valuable, but it shows that there is no way in which it can convincingly established that it is not personally valuable.

§11.1   *The argument from exclusivity*

In the previous Chapter, I have argued that there is no ungrounded judgment, that is, a judgment which is formed without taking something as the alethic ground for it. If this is so, then the following norm is strongly constitutive of judgment:

Ground Norm (GN): a judgment that p is epistemically[304] correct only if it is grounded on alethic   grounds.

To recall, a norm is strongly constitutive of cognition just in case it is impossible to cognize and to fail to comply with it. Thus, GN is strongly constitutive of judgment in the sense that for something to qualify as a judgment – rather than some other thing – is for it to be formed on the basis of some ground.

Now, what does it follow from that? If the arguments advanced in the previous chapter are sound, then one consequence is that the *practical* question whether to judge according to GN embeds a false presupposition, namely that to form ungrounded judgments is an option we can choose. But since cognition is dialectically inescapable, and GN is strongly constitutive of cognition, when the practical question is raised then one is bound to answer it by a judgment, which is going to be grounded, if it has to be a judgment at all. Hence, the presupposition of the practical question is false, and the practical challenge evaporates. In this sense GN doesn't represent a norm of practical

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304These principles are principles about *epistemic* correctness, rather than *alethic* correctness. Alethic and epistemic norms capture different kinds of constitutive norms. They do not belong to the very same level, since a judgment might be alethically correct and fail to be epistemically correct. Thus, my judgment might be true, yet uncertain. However, if certainty is the norm of judgment, since certainty that p entails that p, an epistemically correct judgment is also an alethically correct one.

reason, but rather a transcendental norm that governs the way in which cognition takes place.

Some questions might remain open, however. The evaluative question whether it is good/desirable to judge in that way might be open (recall that an evaluative question as to whether some state of affairs is good or desirable doesn't necessarily presuppose, though it may, that we might choose otherwise). It might be an open question whether, on a given occasion, it is good/desirable to judge on the basis of some ground, and it might be an open question whether in general it is good/desirable to so judge. The same goes for the existential question whether there is any value in the fact that we judge according to GN. The considerations made in the previous Chapter applies *mutatis mutandis* to the present norm.

Another important consequence is that all *monistic* accounts of justification and/or knowledge (like most externalist ones) are wrong if they make room for justified/known ungrounded judgments. The inquiry into the structure of cognition shows that even thought externalist accounts might ex hypothesi capture our intuitions about justification and knowledge, in so far as they make room for justified ungrounded judgments,[305] they fail

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305We can put the points in another way by displaying a conflict between the first-personal deliberative standpoint and the content of the externalist account of doxastic justification. Accounts of justification typically distinguish between propositional and doxastic justification (see Firth (1979)). As can be made intuitive by relying on some cases (see, for instance, Turri (2010), p. 312), it is one thing to *have* good evidence to judge something, but it is quite another thing to *use* this evidence in order to come to have the relevant judgment in a proper way. Accordingly, to be propositionally justified is *to be in a position* to justifiably judge that *p* or to be justified in judging that *p*, though one may not have considered the question whether *p* is true yet. To be doxastically justified is, on the other hand, to actually judge that *p* in the right way, or to have a well-founded or well-grounded judgment that *p*. In short, we should distinguish between *having a justification for a judgment,* and *having a justified judgment*. Now, suppose there is an externalist account according to which there are ungrounded justified judgments. There are ways of construing doxastic justification that make room for ungrounded doxastically justified judgments, if one thinks that "Propositional justification concerns whether a subject has sufficient reason to believe a given proposition; doxastic justification concerns whether a given belief is held appropriately" (Jenkins Ichikawa & Steup 2012). To be held appropriately is neutral enough so as to make room for judgment that are doxastically justified without needing to be based on grounds – it is enough that the belief be properly formed through a suitable process. Yet, at the level of doxastic justification, there would be a strange clash between what the theory dictates and the first-personal deliberative perspective of the cognitive agent. For, if it is true that there are no ungrounded judgments, then one will be judging on the basis of some ground. Yet, according to the externalist picture, this ground doesn't contribute in any way to the (doxastic) justification of the judgment, for by hypothesis this particular judgment is one that doesn't need to be grounded – it is enough that the process of belief-formation, say, be actually reliable. To illustrate the problem, we might take a view like the one defended by Wright (2004). According to the view, there are propositions (cornerstone propositions) that can be entitled without being grounded (without there being evidential considerations that contribute to their being entitled). Now, suppose an agent comes to judge a cornerstone proposition. Given the constitutivist claim that there is no ungrounded judgment, the subject will be judging the proposition on the basis of some ground. Yet, according to the view, this ground has no role whatsoever to play in the justification of the judgment. Yet it is this ground that makes intelligible to the subject her judgment as her judgment and so as the one to be had.
Alternatively, the externalist might reply that those judgments can only be propositionally justified, and not doxastically justified. If we think that "Doxastic justification is what you get when you believe something for which you have propositional justification, and you base your belief on that which

to capture the epistemic normativity that is constitutive of our mind, namely the object whose epistemic credentials we are asked to evaluate according to externalist standards. In this respect, externalism is wanting and can't be the whole story about epistemic normativity, nor the most important and central one.

Finally, one might try to raise a different sceptical challenge to the validity of GN. One might try to construct an argument whose conclusion is that GN might not be valid. This argument doesn't rely on the contention that we might follow other instructions than those offered by GN, for if GN is strongly constitutive there can't be any other possible instruction that we can follow. The argument rather purports to show that our condition is dramatic in the following sense: GN might be not the good norm to be followed, but precisely because we are condemned to follow it, we are condemned to follow a bad instruction. Yet, any argument that would purport to establish that conclusion will be an argument that purports to show that it is *true* that GN is invalid, and the argument will provide alethic grounds to so judge. Hence, any such argument would be self-stultifying: by trying to judge on its basis one is deeming as valid the norm that the argument is attempting to put into question. This is another way in which the dialectical inescapability of cognition blocks a sceptical attack to a constitutive norm for cognition.

§11.2   *The argument from commitments*

Here I will argue that the following is a weakly constitutive norm of judgment:

Certainty Norm (CN): a judgment that *p* is epistemically correct only if it is certain

This norm is only weakly constitutive, since it is obviously possible to have judgments which fail to be certain. Also, it is possible to have a judgment about *p* without also judging that *p* is certain. Hence, the ground for the norm must come from commitments that are implicit in nature.

In Chapter III I offered two ways of understanding the claim that judgment is

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propositionally justifies it" Kvanvig (2003: section B1) (see for similar viewsPollock and Cruz (1999: 35–36). Feldman (2002: 46). See also Feldman (2004: esp. section 1) and Feldman and Conee (1985: section IV)), then one natural thought is that since there is no ground on the basis of which one can ground one's judgment, then, according to the relevant externalist account, there is no doxastic justification either (at least in the case of very specific propositions). But then the point can be made again by noticing that there is a conflict between the theory of justification and the first-personal deliberative context of the agent, since from her perspective it is her ground that makes it intelligible to her to judge as she does, whereas the theory of justification remains entirely silent about the issue of how to form the judgment.

committed to certainty. One option is to claim that whenever one forms a judgment that *p* one is committed to *p*'s being certain in the sense that it is *impossible* to keep judging that *p* while one is open minded as to whether *p* is certainly true or while one judges that *p* is not certain. This is the notion of commitment which is tied to facts about uncotenable combinations of cognitive attitudes. If there are this sort of commitments, then there is a very natural sense in which judgment is subject to CN by being so committed to certainty. When we judge that *p* we commit ourselves to *p*'s being certain, and in so doing we set the standard for correctness of our judgment.

Another starting point might make room for the idea that there are commitments while renouncing however to the various claims about co-untenability. This view will appeal, as I briefly explained at the end of Chapter III and in Chapter VI, to the idea that there is an experience of normative pressure or rational necessitation that pushes us to stop judging that *p* is true upon recognizing that *p* is not certain (or while being open minded as to whether it is certain). Again, if this is so, there is a natural sense in which judgment is subject to CN by being so committed to certainty. The experience of normative pressure to abandon the judgment *p* signals the fact that certainty is taken as the norm that sets the standards for an epistemically correct endorsement of *p*.

These appeals to the idea that certainty is the norm of judgment might be found controversial. But I think that there is another very powerful argument for the contention that certainty is the norm of cognition, and hence of judgment.

§11.3 *The argument from doubt*

This argument for CN relies on the normative profile of doubt. I will make the point by focusing on doubt, minimally conceived as a closed question – about whether *p* or not-*p* – but the same point can be generalised to any act of questioning.

As we have seen, a doubt as to whether *p* is possible so long as one is not certain that *p*. If I am not certain that *p*, then from my perspective *p* might be false, and if it might be false I can doubt whether it is and keep inquiring about its truth-value. Now, since when we doubt whether *p* is true we are not also judging whether *p* is true, there is a very natural sense in which certainty is the norm of judgment. A judgment that *p* would survive reflection only so long as one is certain of *p*, since as soon as one focuses on *p* and realises that *p* might be false one is ipso facto no longer taking *p* to be true, and one is then in a position to (re)open an inquiry about *p*. In this sense certainty is the norm of judgment, for

only a certain judgment will no longer be open to doubt.

There is one interesting way in which one can try to block this argument. The reply would be that there is a distinction between a rational doubt and an irrational one. Surely, the reply says, we can always doubt a proposition if it is not certain, yet this doesn't mean that the doubt will be rational: I might be irrational to doubt in the existence of the external world, say, even if I can do so[306]. This argument fails, however. It fails to take notice of the fact that doubt is an internal business, and that doubt has what we might call an *epistemic primacy* over any other cognitive resource that we might want to appeal to in order to discover the truth, included the truth about the nature of doubt (more on the epistemic primacy of doubt in the next chapter). When one entertains the reply that some doubts are irrational even if possible, the reply can either be accepted (and therefore judged to be right) on the basis of certainty-conferring grounds, or on the basis of grounds that fail to be certainty-conferring. So far we are far from being in the presence of any argument which can remotely hope to claim to provide certainty for the conclusion that some doubts are irrational even if possible, so this option can be safely discarded, and we can wait for such an argument, if any. So let us consider a reply based on less than certainty-conferring grounds. If the grounds fail to provide certainty, then I can doubt them and as a result I can also doubt the very conclusion, namely that some possible doubts are irrational. But then there is no way in which I can convince myself that some doubts are irrational. As a result, it will still be a norm for my mind that a judgment is epistemically correct only if it is certain.

Having this argument from doubt before our eyes, we are also in a position to strengthen the argument from commitments. Suppose it is not the case that it is impossible to both judge that *p* and that *p* might be false. Yet, the experience of normative pressure to abandon the judgment in *p* can be nicely explained by noticing that once one recognises that *p* might be false then the possibility to raise a doubt about *p* and to start or keep inquiring about its truth-value is wide open. The normative pressure is in a way the symptom that a disruptive doubt can be launched and can then reopen the issue that was closed by judging that *p*. In this sense certainty can be seen as something like the *telos* which structures the dynamics of our cognition. It is as though cognition has built in an aiming at *perfection* in relation to our apprehension of the truth, and the possibility of aiming at perfection in knowledge is guaranteed by the possibility of doubting so long as one doesn't

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306There are also views that seem to suggest that it is even impossible to doubt some propositions, like the proposition that there is an external world. Hume, for instance, might taken to argue for such a view. I will respond to these views in the next Chapter.

possess perfection in knowledge, namely certainty.

This much provides an argument for the claim that CN is a weakly constitutive norm of cognition. What does it follow from that? Here again the answer parallels the one offered for GN as well as the one offered in the case of alethic normativity. Given the fact that cognition is dialectically inescapable, we have now the resources to respond to some sceptical worries about epistemic normativity. The practical question as to whether one should judge a proposition to be true only if is certain is answered by showing that by the mere fact of raising the question one is subjecting oneself to CN in the sense that the form of an answer to one's question will be committed to certainty and so evaluated as epistemically correct or not accordingly. Thus, the practical issue is closed.

The evaluative and existential questions might however remain wide open. One can ask whether it is good or valuable to have epistemically certain judgments, and this question is not answered by simply recognizing that by asking it and answering it one will be subjecting herself to CN. Yet, as I will argue in a moment, though it is intelligible to ask the evaluative question as to whether it is valuable to seek for certainty, it is not possible to conclude that it is not valuable.

§11.4 *Constitutivism and other views of the source of epistemic normativity*

In order to further appreciate the nature of the constitutivist view defended so far it is useful to compare it with other theories of the source of epistemic normativity that can be easily conflated with mine.

For one thing, the view is different from a view which grounds epistemic normativity on the fact that truth is the aim of judgment. This is a kind of *instrumental constitutivism*, for it doesn't make epistemic norms constitutive themselves, but rather derivative on a *constitutive* aim or norm, depending on how one understands the idea that truth is the aim of judgment[307]. I endorse a minimalist account of the aim of judgment, but I do not ground epistemic norms on the aim of judgment. Alethic and epistemic normativity do capture two constitutive dimension of normativity for cognition.

According to an alternative instrumental theory of epistemic normativity[308], epistemic norms are instrumental norms for achieving some independently valuable

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307See Coté-Bouchard (2016) for a critical discussion of this form of constitutivism and many references to people holding variations of this view.

308People defending instrumentalism about epistemic normativity: see Foley (1987), Kornblith (1993), (2002), Laudan (1990), (1991), Maffie (1990), Nozick (1993), Papineau (1999). See Kelly (2003), and Lockard (2011) for criticisms of epistemic instrumentalism.

contingent aim (thus, this view differs from the previous one in that here the aim or end is contingent instead of constitutive of cognition). This view is compatible with the constitutivism about alethic normativity defended in the previous chapters – it only insists that epistemic normativity is parasitic on *other* aims than the constitutive one of cognition, namely truth). Yet, this view makes epistemic norms optional, and I think that a phenomenological investigation of the nature of cognition persuades us that at least some epistemic norms are not optional.

Both forms of instrumentalism – whether based on constitutive aims or on contingent ones – are different from my form of constitutivism, yet the two instrumentalist theories are compatible with mine to some extent. We do not need to claim that *all* epistemic norms are to be taken as constitutive of cognition. I think that a fully developed theory of epistemic normativity should distinguish between different layers of epistemic normativity. At the transcendental level, there are some epistemic norms which are grounded in the committal structure of cognition. Then there might be room for arguing that there are other norms which are grounded instrumentally. This allows for the generation of contextually bounded epistemic norms, which is something that we have reasons to take as needed since we might desire to construct epistemic notions that allow us to make sense of our commonsensical epistemic practice. This is the natural place where externalist and modest internalist norms can be located[309].

Thus, even if certainty is a transcendental norm for cognition, this doesn't mean that there also are other normative dimension of evaluations which don't take certainty as central. The important point to be noticed here is that these instrumental norms enjoy a kind of a normativity that is both *different* and *secondary* with respect to transcendental epistemic norms. They are different because they are not constitutive of cognition. They are secondary because constitutive norms *trump* instrumental norms. If there is a fallibilist norm which is grounded on an aim which governs our inquiry in a particular social context, say, then even if according to this norm it would be justified to judge that *p*, the primary constitutive norm still trumps the secondary instrumental one. For, so long as *p* is

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309Lockard (2011) usefully distinguishes between *intellectualist* and *pragmatist* forms of instrumentalism. The former take the end to be cognitive – like the end of having true beliefs and avoiding false ones. Foley, (1987) is an intellectualist. Pragmatist forms of instrumentalism takes prudential ends to be the source of epistemic normativity: see Kornblith (2002). Both views are beside the point here. As we have seen, there are constitutive aims – aims that are built in in the very nature of cognition – and derivative aims. To ground the normativity of epistemic norms on instrumental grounds is to move at the level of derivative aims. Consequently, even if we suppose for the sake of argument that there are instrumentally based epistemic norms, these norms will be derivative, in that there are fundamental norms anyway that are grounded in the constitutive aim of cognition. An instrumental view of epistemic norms has then to explain why the end is valuable. This is not a problem for a constitutivist. The end is valuable because it is the constitutive aim of cognition.

not certain, I am in a position to doubt it, and to transcend, as it were, the norms that are operative in the limited social context which offer the aim for the instrumental norm. Thus, instrumental norms are useful to describe and capture particular contexts of belief-formation, but in so far as our cognition is the same in all the contexts in which it can be used, the transcendental norms will always be operative and primary with respect to the other ones. In the next Chapter we will see this point about the interplay between different norms: we will see that there is an activity, cognition, whose legislation supersedes the *local* legislation of other (socially, and practically bounded) activities.

A related important point to be made here is about the interplay between transcendental valuing and personal valuing. The dimension of constitutive epistemic normativity occurs at the transcendental level, but it is entirely silent at the personal level. Personal norms are norms that can be endorsed at the personal level by the subject and that can guide the subject in orienting her own inquiry. From the fact that certainty is a transcendental norm for cognition it doesn't follow that it also is a personal one. So, it is not the case that one ought to seek for certain knowledge just because one's doubts will be definitively shut down only when one reaches certainty. It seems entirely possible for one to conclude with certainty that *on some subject matter* certainty is not necessarily to be pursued, if not even to be avoided. Yet, I think that it is impossible to convincingly argue that certainty is not valuable or not to-be-pursued *at all*. Here is why.

§11.5   *Silencing scepticism concerning certainty as a aim of inquiry*

As a matter of fact, we *can* raise our epistemic standards at the level of certainty. We can ask questions – e.g., is it true that I have a body? – and we can ask them in such a way that we will *explicitly* take ourselves to possess a satisfactory answer only when we are certain of it, namely when we have reflexively accessible conclusive reasons for believing the answer. Thus, whereas we are always *implicitly* committed to there being certainty that *p* whenever we judge that *p*, and though we are always implicitly desiring (transcendental valuing) to possess certainty when we doubt whether a given proposition is true, we also have the possibility to *explicitly* (personal valuing) wants for ourselves certainty on a given subject matter under investigation.

In order to refer to grounds that put you in a position to be absolutely certain of a proposition I will speak of certainty-conferring grounds, and I will speak of grounds that are not certainty-conferring whenever they fail to confer certainty. These latter grounds

could fail to provide certainty either because they are not conclusive (they don't satisfy the Infallibility Principle) or because they are not certainly known to be conclusive (they don't satisfy the Reflexivity Principle).

How far does this possibility to ask for certainty extend? It seems that we can seek for certainty whenever we can entertain a proposition. If I can entertain the thought that things are thus-and-so, I can also wonder whether it is certain that things are thus-and-so. Absent any compelling grounds to think otherwise (and I will argue that it is impossible to provide such grounds) it seems that it is enough to be capable of entertaining a proposition in order to then seek for certainty about its truth-value.

What does the actual capacity to seek for certainty prove? Surely, from the simple fact that something is possible for us, it doesn't follow that it is valuable, namely that it is something that it is good to possess. It is possible for us to try to achieve the best of our athletic capacities, but this by itself doesn't make athleticism valuable for humankind as such. Thus, by parallel reasoning, one might claim that even though our mind is capable of a quest for certainty, the quest itself is not valuable for our mind as such, but merely valuable for some of us if we happen to have the right sort of desires and dispositions.

The fact that when we cognize we are unavoidably committed to certainty is then clearly compatible with the fact that desiring certainty (at the personal level) is not unavoidable for us. We might very well lack the interest in having certainty so that when we investigate an issue we content ourselves with less than certainty-conferring grounds and come to believe on grounds that fail to provide absolute certainty. This seems to be our default condition, for we surely don't look for absolute certainty in our everyday epistemic practices – though if the arguments offered in Chapter III are correct, we do proceed by implicitly assuming the propositions we judge are certain. Moreover, our intellectual culture has arguably evolved in such a way that certainty is no longer felt to be a desirable achievement. So, even if the possibility of consciously raising the standards to those of certainty will persist, our everyday practices and our culture at large might fail to provide any personal desire for seeking for certainty, and as a matter of fact it will only be in very rare moments that people do actively engage in an inquiry which explicitly aims at certainty.

So, to actively seek for certainty is possible, though not inevitable. Certainty could fail to be something that we personally care about in at least two ways:

A)   because as a matter of fact we simply a-rationally don't care about it; it is not that we have grounds to believe that we should not care about it, we simply don't care about it.

B)   because, regardless of whether one cares about it, one has grounds to believe that

she should not care about it.

(A) is not relevant here. If one simply doesn't personally care about the problem, it doesn't follow that one should *not* personally care about it. Hence, what we really need are reasons to settle the question whether we *should* personally care or not about it.

This brings us to (B). What grounds could there possibly be for believing that certainty should not be personally valuable[310]? Here is a direct argument in favour of the claim that it is impossible to convince oneself of the fact that certainty is never personally valuable. In order to introduce the argument, consider again the case of athletic activity. We can engage in athletic activity, but it is optional. Now take notice of this important fact: the sort of resources which we use in order to establish whether athletic activity is valuable or not are resources that *differ* from the sort of thing (athletic activity) whose value is under investigation. It is not an athletic activity which is used in order to certify whether athletic activity is indeed valuable. Rather, I use my cognition in order to settle the issue of the value of athletic activity.

Crucially, the same point doesn't apply to the case of certainty. The sort of activity whose value we are trying to evaluate is this: the activity of seeking for grounds that conclusively establish the truth of some proposition and that we know for certain to do so. Here the sort of activity we are going to use in order to learn whether this activity is valuable or not is the very general sort of activity which includes that of seeking for certainties: namely the activity of seeking for grounds for judging. We can think of it in this way. The activity of seeking for grounds for judging can be conducted in such a way that one takes oneself to be satisfied with a grounded and yet uncertain belief or rather in a way such that one is satisfied only when she has certainty. Thus we are using this very general activity in order to evaluate whether this activity should be conducted with certainty in mind or with something that falls short of it.

Two things can happen when we engage in this activity in order to come to the conclusion that certainty is not valuable:

(1)   while trying to vindicate the claim that certainty is not valuable we eventually content ourselves with grounds that are less than certainty-conferring;

(2)   while seeking for reasons against the value of certainty in general we won't take ourselves to have finished our task until we have found certainty-conferring reasons for thinking one way or another[311]

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310 Here by saying that absolute certainty is valuable I mean that it is a desirable achievement – something that it is good to possess. Later I will also speak about a more stringent sense in which certainty is valuable, namely about the idea that we should believe according to the standards of certainty.

311 In order to simplify the discussion, I omit mention of the fact that the activity can also lead to suspension

On the one hand, If (2) is the case, then the argument won't work, for it is self-defeating – one is valuing precisely the sort of activity that one is trying to show not to be valuable at all. If I want to be certain of whether certainty is sometimes valuable or never valuable, I am displaying the fact that certainty is now valuable for me in this occasion. Hence, I can't consistently end up trying (and eventually succeeding) to be certain that certainty isn't valuable in general, for by so doing I am displaying the fact that certainty is valuable for me now.

On the other hand, if one pursues argumentative strategy (1), one won't be in a position to establish that certainty is invaluable. For there is an important sense in which the project is question-begging against the claim that certainty is valuable: by relying on standards that are different from those of certainty one is already rejecting in practice, at least relative to that particular inquiry, the value of certainty. In order to see this, suppose that one were to respond to the argument that relies on standards less demanding than those of certainty as follows: 'fine, but I can doubt your premises, for they fail to be certainty-conferring'. How would one reply to that? Either by showing that the premises are indeed certainty-conferring, but then we fall in category (2), where the project is self-defeating; or one is again going to offer grounds that are not certainty-conferring. And again, one will be in a position to doubt them. It would be always possible for the person who defends the value of certainty to care about certainty in such a manner that she will then doubt the premises and the conclusion of the opponent and will then take herself to be entitled to judge only when she possesses certainty.

I have presented my reflection in terms of the dialectic between two sides, one who tries to argue that certainty is not valuable, and the other who tries to resist this argument. But this is not the best way of presenting the point. The best way consists in raising the question of the value of certainty from a first-personal perspective. Suppose you wonder whether certainty is valuable. Upon some reflection, you can eventually answer that it is not by providing grounds that are not certainty-conferring in favour of your opinion. But when you do so, you are in a position to challenge your own grounds (you don't need an external pressure upon your own opinion, for you could challenge them yourself, the existence of this possible challenge is a constitutive feature of doubt). If you do challenge them to prove them to be certainty-conferring, then you are ipso facto displaying the fact that certainty is valuable for you (for you want certainty). If, however, you do not challenge

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of judgment. The same points apply to suspension of judgment. When wondering about the truth-value of a proposition *p,* one can eventually concluding that suspension of judgment is the correct attitude to have. But again this conclusion can either be reached with certainty or not.

them and leave them as they are, you will not have proved that certainty isn't valuable. Simply, you will display the fact that as a matter of fact it is not valuable for you now. But the possibility of raising the standards to those of certainty is always open for you, and when you do so, your grounds for thinking that certainty is not valuable will be ineffective.

It is useful at this point to consider a couple of possible objections that might help us in appreciating the structure of the present argument. Consider the second horn of the dilemma – namely the horn that says that grounds that fail to be certainty-conferring cannot effectively convince us that certainty is not valuable. One might think that the following situation is possible: when I consider the issue of the value of certainty I end up possessing conclusive grounds to think that it is not valuable, and yet I fail to appreciate that they are conclusive reasons. One might think that in this scenario we have all we need in order to convince ourselves of the fact that certainty is not valuable. Even if we grant for the argument's sake the intelligibility of this scenario, we still don't have any stable standpoint from which we can believe that certainty isn't valuable. For, since I don't know my grounds to be conclusive, I can't appeal to the fact that they are conclusive in order to resolve the doubt that I might have about my own grounds for believing that certainty isn't valuable. As soon as I start doubting my grounds and their conclusion, I have raised my standards to those of certainty, and I can't help myself with these grounds in order to dissipate my doubt.

Another objection is this. Suppose that even if we didn't menage to provide certainty-conferring grounds for believing that certainty is not valuable we had nonetheless investigated the issue with some care and ended up believing that all the evidence points against the value of certainty. Why shouldn't one believe that certainty is not valuable if everything supports this conclusion? Again, we might end up believing on that basis that certainty is not valuable, but as soon we start desiring certainty these grounds will not be convincing, because we will be in a position to doubt them or to doubt whether they establish that certainty is indeed valueless. But suppose now that we believe that the only possible evidence that we could ever be in a position to have in order to settle the issue whether certainty is valuable is evidence that speaks in favour of the conclusion that it is not. Shouldn't we then believe that it is not? No. If we content ourselves with standards that fall short of being certainty-conferring, then we might end up believing that certainty is valueless. But if we raise the standards to those of certainty, then the right attitude to take is suspension of judgment. For, if we have grounds (even certainty-conferring ones) to believe that all the evidence we could possibly have doesn't settle with certainty the

question whether certainty is valuable, then we should suspend judgment about this issue. When we suspend judgment in a context where fallible grounds are enough, if we have fallible grounds for *p*, we might take ourselves to be justified in believing that *p*. But in a context where we want certainty, even if we possess some fallible grounds in favour of *p*, and even if we have grounds to believe that the only grounds we could possibly find about *p* are in its favour, one should not believe that *p*, but rather suspend judgment about it, for one is not certain that *p* is true.[312]

I have argued that when one wants certainty-conferring grounds, one is valuing certainty. Also, I have argued that this possibility of valuing certainty is always open to us, and that when one values it, no non-certainty-conferring grounds could effectively convince ourselves that certainty is not valuable. But one might insist that from the fact that we (can) personally value certainty it doesn't follow that certainty is objectively valuable. First of all, notice that even this claim can be debated once one considers it while wanting certainty – for, unless it is known with certainty, one will be in a position to doubt it. But anyway I don't want here to positively argue that certainty is objectively valuable – where this notion of objective value is meant to refer to a thing's being valuable regardless of whether we actually value it. All I want to argue for here is that one can't convincingly argue against the claim that certainty is personally valuable. Thus, my transcendental argument here is modest, not ambitious.

It can be appreciated that the value of the quest for certainty is unassailable when we try to attack the value of *each* of its constitutive components. As we saw in the previous section, two such components are that its justificatory status is *infallible* – namely that the grounds for certainty are conclusive – and that its justificatory status is captured by a *strong form of internalism* – namely that certainty requires that one has certainty that she possesses infallible grounds for believing.

Consider infallible justification first. Suppose you wonder whether it is valuable or not. When you are engaged in the enquiry, you might either want fallible or infallible grounds for your answer. If you want infallible grounds, then you can't intelligibly convince yourself that infallibility isn't valuable. If, however, you are contenting yourself with fallible grounds, then you are begging the question against the value of infallibility, and you are always in a position to be unconvinced by your own argument because you are always in a position to actually ask for infallible grounds.

Consider now internalist justification. Suppose you raise the question whether it is valuable, and you offer to yourself a ground to think that it is not. Then you can either

312See Chapter IV for a detailed account of the nature of suspension of judgment.

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content yourself with the reason you have without inquiring any further, or you can ask: is my reason good enough? If it is a belief, you could ask whether it is itself justified, or whether you are justified in taking that belief as a good ground for believing that internalist justification isn't valuable. And if the reason you used in order to believe that internalist justification is not valuable is just an experience, then you could still ask whether you are justified in taking this experience as a good grounds for believing that internalist justification is not valuable. Either way, you *can* look for internalist justification. And if you do, you display its value for you, whereas if you don't, you are begging the question against the view you are opposing, and you can appreciate this as soon as you start asking for internalist justification.

This is in a nutshell the reason why no argument whatsoever could ever establish the point that certainty is not valuable. Notice again that this much does not establish that certainty *is* valuable, but only that it is impossible to effectively argue against its being valuable[313].

§11.6 *Humean and Wittgensteinian moves*

In order to further our understanding of the sort of scepticism against Cartesian certainty that characterises contemporary epistemology, and in order to further appreciate the way in which my defence works, I will now revise some particular arguments that purport to downplay the importance of certainty. I won't try to be exhaustive and touch all possible arguments that in one way or another attempts to downplay the importance of certainty. As you will notice, the core of the reply to each of these arguments is the one presented in the previous section.

We can start with two possible moves against the value of Cartesian certainty. One is a Humean move and consists in arguing that it is strictly speaking impossible to look for certainty in the case of some propositions[314]. The second is a Wittgenstenian move and consists in arguing that even if it is possible, one should not, because one is getting wrong the structure of justification and knowledge if one wants certainty for them[315].

313Lawrence BonJour (2010b) can be read as offering a direct argument for the claim that certainty is valuable.

314There are passages in Hume – see next Chapter for quotations – where he seems to claim that it is strictly speaking impossible to doubt some propositions, like the existence of an external world.

315It is controversial whether something like this claim was really made by Wittgenstein. He does make the descriptive point that there are hinges which we don't doubt nor support with grounds; yet, he doesn't clearly claim that we should not doubt them. Also there are positive reasons to think that he didn't hold this view, for he claimed that hinges can change, and when something is no longer an hinge, then it can be doubted.

We now have all the resources to answer these objections. The first one is easily discarded. It seems entirely possible to look for certainty whenever we are capable of entertaining a proposition and raise a question about its truth-value. I can wonder whether it is certain that there is an external world, for instance, and in fact it is precisely because this is possible, and because one has evidence that it is impossible to know the existence of external world with certainty, that one tries to develop a theory which doesn't require certainty for these basic propositions that provide the framework for understanding reality as a whole. Moreover, it is very hard to think of a convincing argument against the possibility of raising questions about any proposition that can be entertained. The argument would have to provide grounds that are more convincing than the seeming of being wondering whether a given proposition *p* is certain.

The second objection is easily discarded as well. Suppose that one puts forth an argument to the effect that it is wrong or simply not required to try to have certainty for hinge propositions. What should we think of this very argument? If it only provides less than certainty-conferring grounds, then it will not be convincing, for I will always be in a position to doubt its premises as soon as I raise my standards to those of certainty. The argument could hope to be persuasive if it provides certainty for the conclusion that we should not look for certainty for hinge propositions. But we haven't been presented with such certainty-conferring argument so far.

§11.7 *Certainty is not required for knowledge and justification*

One sort of implicit argument to be found in the literature hinges on the point that certainty is not required for justification and knowledge. Of course, this by itself doesn't suffice, for it is easy to see that certainty could be valuable regardless of its relation with other valuable things – like knowledge and justification. Even if one grants that certainty is not necessary for knowledge and justification, why would this make it valueless? Why can't certainty be as valuable as knowledge and justification, if not even more valuable than them?

Current analytic epistemology is largely constructed around two central questions: what is knowledge?, and what is epistemic justification? These notions – knowledge and justification – have been selected as those that should be understood in order to address our epistemological problems. Crucially, there is a widespread monist presumption that characterises the way in which current epistemology understands these questions. Monism,

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in this context, amounts to the view that there is a single kind of justification and a single kind of knowledge[316]. Having assumed monism, people started to debate about the correct account of these notions, offering arguments that seemed to generate disagreement about the true nature of these phenomena. By so proceeding, the debate has understood certainty-based epistemology (like Descartes's) as being trying to offer the correct account of knowledge and justification. So, they thought that the right way of evaluating a certainty-based epistemology was to ask whether certainty is indeed necessary for knowledge and justification. As it happens, given the methodological guidelines of analytic epistemology, if we assume that there is only one kind of knowledge and one kind of justification, then we have plenty of reasons for thinking that they don't require certainty. As a result, to defend the idea that certainty is required for knowledge and justification have been seen as (and still is seen as) a desperate project[317]. The main complaints are easy to list: what about children and animals, since we do attribute knowledge and justification to them even if they clearly aren't capable of satisfying the conditions for absolute certainty? And what about our ordinary everyday epistemic practices, since we do ordinarily content ourselves with standards for knowledge and justification that are less stringent than those of certainty? And, relatedly, what about the fact that if certainty is required for knowledge and justification, then our commonsensical non-sceptical picture of our epistemic condition is completely mistaken?

These are formidable objections against the claim that certainty is necessary for knowledge and justification, *but only so long as one is a monist about knowledge and justification*, namely only so long as one believes that there is only a single kind of knowledge and justification. Monism, however, seems false. This is not the place where an argument against monism in epistemology could be provided[318], but I might quickly point to a couple

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316It is notoriously tricky to provide a good formulation of the monism/pluralism distinction. There is a sense in which monism is trivially false, for there are various kinds of knowledge and justification, like inferential/non-inferential knowledge/justification, a priori/a posteriori knowledge/justification, doxastic/propositional justification, and so on. The important point is that even if most epistemologies recognize the existence of these distinctions, they all understand them within their preferred general account of knowledge and justification. So, externalist understand in externalist terms these distinctions, whereas internalists understand them in internalist terms. A pluralist theory would be one that allows for both internalist and externalist understandings of these many distinctions. The distinction between monism and pluralism has been mostly worked out in other debates. For alethic pluralism, see Lynch (2009); and Wright (2013); for logical pluralism, see Beall & Restall (2006); for ontological pluralism, see McDaniel (2009); Turner (2010); for causal pluralism, see Godfrey-Smith (2009).

317But see Lawrence Bonjour (2010b) for reasons for thinking that knowledge is some kind of Cartesian certainty.

318I argue against monism Zanetti (ms2). The monist view in epistemology is recently receiving a lot of criticism, though it is fair to say that it is still the assumption that frames many debates. Here are some papers that implicitly or explicitly challenge the monist assumption: Alston (2005), BonJour (2010a), Burge (2003), Foley (2002), Fumerton (1995), Gerken (2013), Goldman (1988), Lammenranta (2004), Pedersen (ms), Swinburne (2001); see the papers contained in Coliva & Pedersen (forthcoming).

of reasons to think that it is false. We surely understand what it means to speak of absolute certainty as being a kind of knowledge (with its specific kind of justification). We are comfortable in speaking about *certain knowledge*. Moreover, it is entirely intelligible (and, indeed, standard practice) to speak of Descartes's *Meditations* as being concerned with knowledge. True, we also have ways of speaking about knowledge that justify the thought that there are kinds of knowledge and justification that don't require absolute certainty in order to be had. But it is only if one has already assumed monism about knowledge and justification that one is then required to choose which one of these uses of knowledge and justification *really* tracks their real nature. In fact, if one doesn't start by assuming monism, the plurality of uses motivate a form of pluralism about such fundamental epistemological notions, namely the view that there are more kinds of knowledge and justification, one of which is Cartesian absolute certainty. Moreover, epistemologists often seem to be animated by different theoretical preoccupations. Thus, theories that radically depart from the certainty-based Cartesian epistemology often seem to be preoccupied by the aim of preserving and capturing common sense, whereas theorists who accepts strong internalist accounts of knowledge and justification seem more interested in taking the sceptical challenges as seriously as possible. Different theoretical projects seem to focus and to require different notions of knowledge and justification in order to address their respective problems. But again, it is unclear how one can decide without begging the question against the opponent which one of these projects is the project that concerns knowledge and justification rather than some other notions in the vicinity.

So, we have reasons to think that monism is false and to think that absolute certainty is a kind of knowledge with its specific kind of justification. But we don't necessarily need to argue for these claims in order to preserve the claim that certainty is valuable from contemporary detractors. Suppose that one were to accept the claim that certainty is not required for knowledge and justification. How can one argue from this to the claim that certainty is not valuable? One can if one endorses what we might call *exclusivism*, which is the idea that all there is of epistemological interest can be said by offering the correct theory of knowledge and justification (and by applying these theories to the many specific epistemological problems). But it is very hard to see how this thought could be made true. Given the fact that we understand what it means to desire certainty, and given the fact that there is a clear sense in which this is important for our epistemological concerns – whether or not we might want to express this point in terms of it being an important kind of knowledge and justification – there is no obvious reason why

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certainty should not be at the centre of our epistemological theorizing. Indeed, to start from the assumption of exclusivism while putting certainty outside the scope of what counts as knowledge and justification is to beg the question against those who believe that certainty is valuable, for by so proceeding one is excluding certainty from the valuable aims of epistemological inquiry almost by stipulation.

One can however accept the previous claims, recognize the value of certainty, and yet argue that certainty is less valuable then other kinds of knowledge and justification. Or one might accept the previous claim, saying that certainty would be valuable if possible at all, and yet insist that when it is not possible there is a second best option. Both claims are acceptable, so far as my aim in this Chapter is concerned, for I only want to argue for the claim that it is impossible to argue against the value of certainty and to expunge on such grounds certainty from our intellectual concerns.

Notice, moreover, that these arguments can be responded to using the strategy introduced above. Let's consider each argument in turn. First, suppose that one claims that certainty is less valuable than other positive epistemic statuses. Now, if one wants certainty for this claim, then one's argument for it is self-defeating, whereas if one doesn't want certainty but is rather contenting himself with lower positive epistemic statuses, then one is begging the question against the claim that certainty is more valuable than other epistemic statuses. Second, one can claim that certainty is valuable whenever it can be had, whereas it is not the highest value in cases in which it can't be had, so that one can save the apparently reassuring thought that at least in some domains, like the empirical one, something less stringent than certainty is what we should be looking for. But again, either the argument provides certainty or not. If it doesn't, it is not going to be convincing. If it does, then it is convincing, but we haven't been presented with any such certainty-conferring argument yet.

§11.8   *Certainty leads to widespread scepticism*

The previous remarks on the relationship between certainty and the contemporary task of giving an analysis of knowledge and justification can be used in order to appreciate the role that the problem of scepticism (particularly, the problem of scepticism about the external world) plays in the debate between certainty-based epistemology and contemporary epistemology.

One argument that is often presented for believing that certainty can't be required

for knowledge and justification is that if it were it would lead to widespread scepticism, a consequence which is taken to be widely implausible, at least on the face of our commonsensical picture of our own epistemic position[319].

Arguably people who go for non-certainty based notions of knowledge and justification do so precisely because, having assumed exclusivism and monism, they think that avoiding scepticism is a desideratum for the correct theory of knowledge and justification. Since certainty is thought to be impossible to obtain – or to be obtainable only in very few cases – a theory which takes knowledge and justification to require certainty will score badly with respect to this desideratum, and so will be less likely to be true than its alternatives.

Thus, to illustrate, Crispin Wright[320] tries to defend the thought that we have an entitlement to accept 'there is an external world' because absolute certainty can't be had for it.

The same point can be seen as motivating all externalist and modest internalist accounts. Externalists largely motivate their views by pointing out that they avoid the sceptical consequences of strong internalist accounts like those which are certainty-based. But the same motivation is appealed to by people who want at the same time to be internalises of a sort and to preserve common sense as much as possible. People like James Pryor and other evidentialists like Earl Conee and Richard Feldman[321] think that having suitable truth-conducive grounds is enough for justification and, eventually, knowledge, thereby renouncing to the apparently unsatisfiable desire for reflexive access to the adequacy of one's grounds that the Reflexivity Principle is meant to capture.

Another general strategy – exemplified by Stewart Cohen[322] – that allows to preserve internalism without falling into scepticism is to hold a contextualist view of justification according to which demanding internalist justification is needed in some context, whereas in other contexts it is not.

These moves are quite natural once exclusivism and monism provide the framework for understanding one's own epistemological theorizing. Interestingly, one can also read these moves as providing the resources for downplaying the value of certainty. In fact, it seems that most of our sceptical anxieties might derive from the fact that we value certainty and that we realize that it is so hard, if not impossible, to have. But why being so anxious about the fact that we can't have many absolutely certain beliefs once we realise

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[319] Lammenranta (forthcoming).
[320] Wright (2004)
[321] Pryor (2000), Fledman (2004).
[322] Cohen (2002).

that we seem to possess knowledge and justification for most of our beliefs? Attractive as they might seem, these observations can't be convincingly used in order to downplay the importance of certainty. First of all, if one denies that certainty is required for knowledge and justification in order to preserve common sense, one is not really saving common sense but rather hiding the fact that it is threatened by the fact that we can't have certainty for our commonsensical assumptions. These views do not deny that certainty is hard if not often impossible to obtain. Indeed, it is precisely by accepting this fact that they reject its necessity for knowledge and justification. Hence, by saying that there is a kind of justification and knowledge that our beliefs possess or might possess (if we are lucky enough and the relevant external conditions are satisfied), one is not changing the fact that our beliefs fall short of certainty. Thus, so far as certainty is deemed as valuable, there is no consolation against the threat that our beliefs fall short of certainty if one says that certainty is not necessary for knowledge. This point might be obscured by the fact that one uses the word 'knowledge' in order to describe a sort of epistemic status which is less demanding than certainty, and do so in a context in which exclusivism is a framing assumption. But the point can be easily brought to light if one redescribes the move without using the expression 'knowledge'. So, let's consider a view according to which certainty is not required for justification and knowledge, and the sort of justification which is sufficient for knowledge is captured by an externalist account according to which a belief is justified if formed through a reliable process. This view will then hold the following: our beliefs might be true and reliably formed (thereby amounting to knowledge), and yet we will never have certainty for them. It is clear that recognizing the fact that our beliefs might satisfy the necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge (namely being true and reliably formed) doesn't change the fact that they don't amount to certainty. Thus, the mere fact that certainty is not required for knowledge doesn't entail that certainty is not valuable. Indeed, if it is valuable, the move consisting of putting aside certainty from epistemology will not remove the problem that our beliefs aren't certain. It is only because one has already assumed something like exclusivism and monism that one then thinks that the threatening force of scepticism can be downplayed, but both these assumptions are highly questionable.

There are other ways in which one can use the thought that there are few certainties in order to downplay their importance. One way is to say that it can't be valuable to obtain something that we can't obtain if not in very rare circumstances. A related thought is that surely we can be more modest than desiring certainty, for valuing something that is so hard

to obtain is irrational. Both these thoughts are unconvincing, for they are blocked by the dilemma I presented before, for either these arguments offer certainty-conferring reasons and so become self-defeating, or they provide reasons that are not certainty-conferring, and in this case they fail to be convincing.

Finally, one might complain that if we were to believe only what is certain or to value only certainty, then we would have to stop doing science. For science doesn't rely on certainty-conferring grounds, yet it is extremely powerful and valuable. But we need not think that certainty is the sole value.

§11.9 *The certainties we have are not central in our lives*

There surely are other apparent reasons for thinking that certainty is not itself valuable. One such reason is this. If there are certainties, then they are very few, and of no importance. The real business, it is often thought, occurs in the realm of fallible knowledge, namely in the realm of our everyday commerce with the world and other persons. Thus, many people will grant that there are certainties about the way things appear, certainties about the existence of oneself and of anything at all, certainties in mathematics, in conceptual truths, and maybe in other cases. However they will be ready to add that these truths are not very important when compared to the issues we bother about in our daily life.

But this can't establish that certainty isn't valuable. Even if we accept the premise that we can't get certainty about most of the things we value, it is precisely because certainty is valuable that it is an important discovery about our human predicament that we can't have certainty about them. Maybe we can't but help believing propositions in these subject-matters. This is a well-known point about scepticism (think of Hume, for instance), namely that even if one is persuaded that it is impossible to know with certainty claims about empirical reality or morality, say, one will not be capable of suspending judgment about them, but will rather proceed as if one didn't know that certain knowledge is impossible to obtain. This descriptive point doesn't falsify in any way the normative claims that certainty is valuable and that it is the norm of belief. For, if we were to provide such argument, we would be back in the dilemma between a self-defeating dialectical move and an ineffective question-begging one.

§11.10 *Certainty is valuable only if the old foundationalist Cartesian enterprise is doable*

Another apparent reason is this. Surely the Cartesian quest for certainty is a lost cause if it is understood as the quest for providing a secure foundation for *all* our knowledge, and, in particularly, for our *scientific* knowledge. This project is of course a failure. No cartesian absolute certainty can be had of everyday empirical claims (e.g., I have two hands), let alone of more complex empirical statements belonging to scientific discourse. This point is well known and famously stressed by Quine[323]. But, from the fact that there is no secure foundation for *all* the things that we commonsensically take ourselves to know, it does not follow that certainty isn't valuable and that it shouldn't have central stage in our epistemology. Here again we might see at work the monist assumption that we have already seen in play before. Anyway, it is wrong to suppose that a certainty-based epistemology is valuable only if it secures foundation for all our knowledge as Descartes appeared to require in his *Meditations*. Certainty might be valuable even if very few beliefs amount to certainties. Something might be valuable even if we can't easily or can't at all have it.

§11.11 *Certainty is impossible to obtain*

Another apparently more powerful objection consist in pointing out that certainty is impossible, and so that no proposition whatsoever is ever known with certainty. If it is impossible to obtain, how could it be valuable? This argument is, on the fact of it, ineffective: first of all, there are absolute certainties (e.g., the cogito, the sum, that there is something rather than nothing, to mention just few of them). Second, the supposition that certainty is impossible to obtain is not coherent, and in fact the sort of transcendental defence I used in order to protect the value of certainty can also be used in order to establish that it is impossible to provide a convincing argument to the effect that certainty is impossible to obtain. Again, such argument could be of two sorts: either it provides certainty-conferring grounds for believing that certainty is impossible to obtain, or it merely provides fallible grounds. If it provides certainty-conferring grounds, then it is clearly self-defeating, for it will be at the same time committing itself to the fact that there is at least one certainty, namely the certainty that there are no certainties. If, however, it provides mere fallible grounds, one will always be in a position to doubt the grounds and so to doubt the conclusion that certainty is impossible to obtain[324].

323Quine (1969).

324Much more could and must be said about this transcendental defence of the claim that certainty is possible.

Pragmatists have provided some influential objections to the adoption of the personal aim of seeking for certainties. It is useful to briefly consider a couple of them

One famous argument is put forth by James (1879), 'The Will to Believe', in which it is argued that we have two desiderata: one is to avoid error, the other to obtain truths. The desideratum to avoid error is well served by constraining one's inquiry in such a way that one will believe only what is taken to be certain. Yet, James urges us to notice, if we follow this restrictive epistemic practice, then we are likely to end up having very few beliefs. But since another desideratum is to obtain truths, we have a pressure to lower our standards so as to maximize the probability of believing true propositions. The thought is quite intuitive: if we allow ourselves to believe only what is certain, then we might miss many many truths that would have been otherwise available were our standards be less restrictive. Maybe the external world really exists, and most of our empirical beliefs are true, but since they plausibly fail to be certain, if we follow the strict guideline we might end up missing almost all empirical truths about the external world.

The argument is fine if the conclusion is that it is reasonable *sometimes* to demand less than certainty in our doxastic practices. In fact, when we do so, namely most of the time, it is not that we positively impose on ourselves fallibilist standards for believing; rather, I believe[325], we mostly proceed under the assumption that all the conditions that would render our beliefs certain are in place. Thus, to recall an argument presented in Chapter III, when we form beliefs about the external reality, we do almost always presuppose that the external world exists, that our perceptual system is reliable, and generally that all the relevant conditions that would prevent us to acquire an accurate picture of the world as not obtaining. Thus, in this sense, James's argument is useless, since it leaves everything as it is, and a defender of the transcendental and personal value of certainty doesn't need to argue that we should seek for certainty all the time. What we need to stress for the purposes of a defence of the personal value of certainty is simply the point that *if* one happens to *care* about certainty – that is, to be reflexive about the issue whether a given issue is known with certainty or not – then James's argument can do nothing to convince this person to stop care about certainty. Suppose that one were to say

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[325]See also Bonjour (2010b) and Lammeranta (forthcoming) for arguments that support this picture of our everyday epistemic practices. My argument for this comes from the phenomenological investigation of the normative profile of cognition provided in the previous Chapters.

that if you care about certainty then you will risk to miss many important truths. Well, the problem is that if one cares about certainty then one will reply that this is a possibility, but one which might be false, and in fact, it is even possible that it is false that if one raises the standards to those of certainty one will be leading to miss some truths – this is precisely something whose status is uncertain, hence a carer for certainty can't rely on that consideration in order to downplay the importance that she has attached to certainty.

A last objection worth mentioning is very nicely voiced by Lynch (2005).

"Certainty is the privilege of the fanatic. The most dangerous man is he who is certain, absolutely sure, that his way is the right way. Once you feel you are absolutely positively unable to be mistaken, you feel justified in not listening to questions, or considering the other side. You are just right, and anyone who disagrees is just wrong. This is dogmatism. Much harm could be avoided if people were less dogmatic, if they worried a bit more about whether they were right before acting. In other words, we might all be better off if we worried more, not less, about whether our beliefs were true" p 29-30

Interestingly, this objection is levelled in a book entitled *Why Truth Matters* and whose overall aim is, as the title suggest, to defend the many guises in which truth is valuable. To equate certainty with dogmatism is to have in mind someone who claims certainty for a view which we believe to be mistaken (someone claiming certainty for some religious view, say, that we deem as absurd). But the point is that if the certainty is yours then you are not a dogmatic, but simply a spectator of the way things are – one can't qualify oneself as a dogmatic if she is positively certain of some issue – I don't take myself to be a dogmatic because I am absolutely sure that I exist; I must however have the strength to deem myself as dogmatic when I keep holding views as if they were certain even if I know that I am not absolutely certain about them. Lynch's reasons for downplaying the value of certainty are wrong (beside, we might as well ask Lynch: 'are you certain of what you have just claimed?'), yet they are quite instructive because they voice the way in which talk of certainty is regarded in the present intellectual climate and culture.

§11.13 *On the nature of the transcendental defence*

One might be tempted to argue that my argument has a negative side effect. We have a capacity for raising our standards to those of certainty. We can either actually raise them or

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not. When we do, certainty is valuable for us in that moment, when we don't it is not valuable for us in that moment. There is no independent cognitive perspective from which we can evaluate whether absolutely speaking certainty is valuable of not. For any cognitive perspective we might take will either be a perspective such that it aims at certainty, or a perspective such that it doesn't aim at it. But then, if this is so, one might think that the shape of the argument I provided for denying the possibility of personally disvaluing certainty provides similar resources for saying that one can't really provide an argument in favour of the value of certainty either. For, one might think, if I try to put forth a certainty-conferring argument for the value of certainty, then I am begging the question against the one who says that certainty is not valuable.

But this is not so. Suppose that we were to discover with certainty that certainty is valuable. If this is so, then there is no possible reason that could speak in favour of the contrary claim – otherwise we wouldn't have a certainty in the first place. And thus there would be no opposition between the verdicts of the two different standpoints either, for if one looks for fallible reasons for believing that certainty is not valuable, then one will find none, whereas if one looks for infallible reasons for thinking that certainty is valuable one will find them. Once it is established with certainty that certainty is valuable and it is established not simply because one is actually looking for it, but because there is a ground which conclusively establishes that certainty is valuable, then it will seem to follow that it is valuable tout court to look for certainties.

The discussion I have conducted so far leaves open the question whether there are certainty-conferring reasons for thinking that certainty is valuable. Moreover, notice that I have proceeded under the generous assumption that if one were to reason using standards less demanding then those of certainty one would have reasons to think that certainty is not valuable. But this is not clear at all. Rather, on the face of it, certainty seems to be a highly valuable thing, since it is something that we typically want whenever we deal with issues which constitute the core of our understanding of our existence as a whole – think of religious and, indeed, philosophical contexts. We also often forget the fact that in order for certainty to be valuable it need not be the case that we have many positive certainties; it might be valuable to possess negative certainties, namely certainty that something can't be known with certainty. These sorts of negative certainties can have a central role in our understanding of our existence as a whole. Being agnostic is also a response to the realization that our desire to have certainty can't be satisfied.

§11.14 *Conclusion*

To sum up, the impossibility of effectively arguing against the value of certainty teaches us something important about the role that certainty plays in our enquiry and in our intellectual life. How should we then think of the problem of certainty, namely the problem of discovering the certainty about the issue that matter for us? The problem can be forgotten, or its urgency can fail to attract us, for the desire to have certainty might simply disappear from the history of humankind. The problem, as a felt first-personal problem, however, can't definitively disappear because there is no way in which one can effectively *show* that it is not a genuine problem. *Once* the problem is raised one can't show that it is not a genuine problem animated by a valuable concern. The reason is that our cognition constitutively aims at absolute certainty, even though we might disregard this fact at the personal level. This is why current epistemology might very well have forgotten or replaced the concerns that were behind Cartesian epistemology, but can't be taken to have established by convincing grounds the unimportance of a certainty-based epistemology. In order to bring certainty back at the centre of our epistemological concerns, we should not only provide arguments in its favour, but rather strive to put the sort of intellectual and existential urgency that support the quest for certainty back at the centre of our lives.

Chapter XII

Transcendental Hinges

In this chapter my aim is to argue that there are hinges for cognition that have a transcendental role, that is, they are propositions to which we are committed for the simple fact of engaging in cognition. To put the point in terms of the transcendental constitutivist strategy that has framed our discussion so far, they are constitutive alethic commitments of an activity, cognition, which is dialectically inescapable.

The chapter is structured as follows. In §12.1, I explain why the motivation for current hinge epistemologies can be seen as stemming from the debate on the role of transcendental arguments. I explain that hinge epistemologies rely on modest transcendental arguments in order to silence the corresponding sceptic. In §12.2 I focus on some recent works that attempt to silence an external world sceptic by showing that the belief in the existence of the external world is a hinge. I argue that these attempts fail to silence their corresponding sceptic because the belief in the existence of the external world is not a transcendental hinge, but a mere local (empirical) hinge. In §12.3 I further elaborate the point made in the previous section by offering a direct argument to the effect that transcendental hinges only have the power to silence a sceptic. In 12.4 I explain that doubt has a fundamental role for cognition, because it represents the supreme court to which we can appeal when we deliberate about what to believe. The role of doubt explains why transcendental hinges are the sole hinges that have the power to silence the sceptic. In 12.5 I focus on the epistemic status of transcendental hinges. Since we are committed to them whenever we engage in cognition, any attempt to justify them will display a special sort of circularity which I call 'transcendental circularity'. This puts pressure on the idea that it is possible to possess positive grounds for judging transcendental hinges. In 12.6 I offer concluding remarks that help in locating this discussion of transcendental hinges in wider dialectical contexts. In particular, I briefly address the explanatory step of the transcendental constitutivist strategy and connect the discussion on hinges with the defence of the existence of alethic and epistemic constitutive norms of cognition that I have offered in the previous chapters.

§12.1   *Hinge epistemology, transcendental arguments, and transcendental constitutivism*

There is a growing literature in epistemology which appeals to Wittgenstein's remarks in *On Certainty* in order to construct a novel picture of the structure of justification. To a first approximation, according to these hinge epistemologies[326] there are some propositions – the hinges – which have a special role in our epistemic practice. Their specialness is meant to protect them from sceptical challenges, not so much because they will be revealed as being especially well grounded on evidence that makes their truth highly probable, but rather because they possess a special status (epistemic or otherwise) which silences the corresponding sceptic.

To see the attraction of hinge epistemology, and to locate them in the dialectic of the present Dissertation, it is particularly useful to see their motivation as stemming not so much from a direct discussion of some form of scepticism in the context of a theory of knowledge and justification[327], but rather from the discussion on transcendental arguments that has arguably been initiated by Stroud (1968)[328]. For our purposes, Stroud's point in his paper was essentially the following. A transcendental arguer who wants to respond to some sceptic, like a sceptic about the existence of the external world, would have to show that the *truth* that there is an external world is a condition of possibility for the truth of some proposition (the 'fact' from which the transcendental argument starts) which the sceptic is prepared to accept or anyway willy nilly committed to accept. The problem, of course, is that it is unclear how one can have at the same time a starting point which has both properties: the sceptic is committed to accept it; and one of its condition of possibility is the truth of the proposition that the sceptic is denying. In order to serve its anti-sceptical purpose, the starting point should be a fact about experience or cognition, since even the sceptic should recognise the claim about experience and cognition in order to raise its challenge. But the trouble is that it isn't clear how one can bridge the gap between experience and reality in such a way as to show that the existence of external reality is a precondition for the fact that our experience and cognition are as they are. The transcendental arguer is then caught in a dilemma: either it appeals to some form of verificationism or to some form of transcendental idealism that would help to bridge the gap between appearances and reality – but then, beside the fact that both doctrines are independently objectionable, if one appeals to them then one is no longer required to appeal to some form of transcendental argument; or another way to go is to claim not so

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326I follow Coliva (2015)'s use of the label.

327Though this is of course a fine entry to the importance of hinge epistemology. See, for instance, Coliva (2015)'s way of introducing hinge epistemology that locates it in the epistemological debate on external world scepticism and the debate on the nature of perceptual warrant.

328Korner (1966) and (1967) was also criticising transcendental arguments at the same time.

much that the existence of the external world is required for the way in which experience and cognition are, but rather that in order to account for appearances it is a precondition that we merely *believe* that there is an external world. Now, since the verificationist and idealist routes are not palatable to most contemporary tastes, the natural direction for the subsequent debate was to explore the second horn of the dilemma. It seemed to many, Stroud (1999) being again one of the central figures in the debate that took this direction, that a transcendental strategy could be fruitfully rescued if the ambitious pretension of establishing the truth of the claims doubted by the sceptic were substituted by the modest aim of establishing the special role of the propositions whose truth is doubted by the sceptic. The idea is that by showing that some of these propositions have such a special role, then we are in a position to reassure ourselves to some reasonably sufficient degree against the sceptical voice, even if we are not in a position to show that their *truth* is a condition of possibility for some fact which is independently and indisputably obtaining.

The idea of a hinge epistemology could be fruitfully understood as emerging at this juncture. As I will understand it, a hinge epistemology is an epistemology which tries to do some anti-sceptical work by showing that some propositions – those hinges whose truth is challenged by the relevant sceptic – have a special role that protects them from the sceptical attack. Here is in very general terms how they enter the previous dialectic. These hinges will be shown to be propositions to which we are somehow committed when we engage in certain cognitive activities. Now, as Stroud's discussion of modest transcendental arguments makes clear, from the fact that we are committed to them, nothing immediately follows about their truth. Yet, the hinge epistemologist wants to show that something follows about their *epistemic* status, and this consequence will be enough to do the required anti-sceptical work. As we will see, hinge epistemologists disagree on several points: on the relevant practice of which their hinges are constitutive commitments; on what it means for them to be constitutive commitments; and, particularly, on what follows from their role as constitutive commitments with respect to their epistemic status (do they possess a special epistemic status? Or are they rather special precisely because they elude the very question of justification?). These differences arise at different steps of the transcendental constitutivist strategy, of which hinge epistemology is a particular instantiation that focuses on alethic commitments, rather than normative commitments. At the constitutivity step, the hinge epistemologists select some relevant practice or activity and individuate its hinges (its constitutive alethic commitments); at the transcendental step, they refrain from being ambitious but disagree as to how better being modest, thus, they select different

conclusions concerning the particular epistemic status, if any, enjoyed by hinges; finally, at the explanatory step, they explain why hinges are hinges, and they appeal to different explanatory sources, as we will see.

As you might have noticed, I haven't mentioned the way in which hinge epistemologies behave at the inescapability step. That is because, as I will argue, hinge epistemologies fail to deliver a credible story, or to deliver a story at all, at that step. My aim in what follows is essentially to show that there are two significantly different kinds of hinges: *local* hinges and *transcendental* ones. Local hinges are propositions to which we are committed when we engage in those cognitive activities which are not dialectically inescapable; transcendental hinges are those propositions to which we are committed when we engage in a dialectically inescapable cognitive activity, that is, they are some of the constitutive alethic commitments of cognition.   I will start by discussing some contemporary hinge epistemologies, mostly focusing on the debate about the existence of the external world, in order to raise a problem for any anti-sceptical hinge epistemology which relies on local hinges: they fail to silence the sceptic, since the activity of which the empirical hinge is constitutive is not the very activity which is needed in order to raise the sceptical challenge.

§12.2   *Empirical hinges and the sceptical challenge*

I will first present the outline of the objection to hinge epistemologies that rely on the empirical hinges having to do with the existence of the external world, and then I will show how the objection applies to some particular instances of empirical hinges in some particular contemporary theories.

Here is the argument. Suppose that the candidate hinge is constitutive of a cognitive activity which is not dialectically inescapable. If the activity is not dialectically inescapable, then it means that in order to evaluate the commitments of that very activity I need not engage in that very particular cognitive activity. In order to evaluate the commitments of that practice I need to engage in cognition, but not in that particular cognitive activity. Cognition has a superior legislation over any other particular local applications of cognition, for local applications are not dialectically inescapable, whereas cognition is dialectically inescapable. If the candidate hinge is not constitutive of cognition, then the hinge can be coherently put into doubt, for by putting it into doubt I am not already committing myself to the truth of the relevant local hinge. Since there is this

perspective from which a doubt could be raised as to the truth of the relevant local hinge, then there is a place that the sceptic can occupy to doubt the relevant hinge. As a consequence, the hinge-based strategy hasn't succeeded to silence the sceptic. The result is that *in so far as* we are engaged in some dialectically escapable activity – like offering and asking reasons for forming opinions about external reality – then we might in fact be committed to the truth of some propositions – namely the empirical hinges, like the proposition that there is an external world, and that our senses work properly most of the time. But as soon as we move to the different activity which is dialectically inescapable and which is the one we should use in order to evaluate whether empirical hinges are really true or not, then within that practice the empirical hinge is no longer something to which we are committed, and as a result we are at the mercy of our sceptical anxiety.

The previous argument suggests a condition of adequacy for any hinge-based epistemology which purports to answer the sceptic: the relevant hinge should be constitutive of a dialectically inescapable practice. Another important piece of the argument is that there is an activity, the only one which is dialectically inescapable, which has a superior legislation than any other more local cognitive practices. To see the point, let me offer a couple of examples of hinges epistemologies which focus on hinges that are empirical and thus can be put into question by a cognitive activity which has a superior legislation than the activity of which the hinge is constitutive (I will assume the claim that is virtually made at the constitutivist step of the following constitutivist strategies). As it will emerge, in order to silence the objection I am presenting to anti-sceptical strategies appealing to empirical hinges, sometimes it is argued that the relevant hinge is a commitment of cognition in general (namely the activity of questioning and judging on the basis of alethic grounds), for only by so doing it is effectively possible to silence the sceptic. In a sense, then, we might see the objection I raise against these hinge epistemologies as consisting in the following dilemma: on the one hand, in order to make a plausible constitutivist claim, they must claim that there relevant hinge under sceptical threat is constitutive of a local cognitive practice that is not dialectically inescapable, but then the problem is that the sceptical challenge can be raised by cognition in general, which is an activity with a superior legislation than the local one; on the other hand, in order to answer to problem faced by the first horn, hinge epistemologists try to claim that the relevant hinge is constitutive of cognition in general, but in that case the hinges they choose fail to be so constitutive. In order to pursue the latter horn, they would have to identify what I call transcendental hinges, but then the problem – if one takes it to be one

– is that some sceptics – like the external world sceptic – can't be silenced by appealing to transcendental hinges.

Hume. To begin with, consider a reading of Hume, due to Strawson (1985), that understands Hume's answer to scepticism as offering a modest transcendental argument to silence the sceptic. According to this reading, Hume is claiming that we are *incapable* of doubting the validity of the principle of induction and the proposition that the external world exists. Moreover, as it turns out, the sceptic is right that we can't be certain of them. For, we rather believe them just because Nature and Habits make us believe them, in fact they make them unavoidable commitments for our Reason.

"Thus the sceptic still continues to reason and believe, even tho' he asserts, that he cannot defend his reason by reason; and by the same rule he must assent to the principle concerning the existence of body, tho' he cannot pretend to any argument of philosophy to maintain its veracity. Nature has not left this to his choice, and has doubtless esteem'd it an affair of too great importance to be trusted on our uncertain reasonings and speculations. We may well ask, *What causes induce us to believe in the existence of body?* but 'tis vain to as ask, *Whether there be body or not?* That is a point, which we must take for granted in all our reasoning". Hume 1979, p. 187.

Thus, even though it is conceded to the sceptic that we have no certainty-conferring grounds for judging that there is an external world (this is why the reply is not ambitious), and, indeed, even though it is conceded that it is not on the basis of grounds that we believe in the existence of the external world, still Nature is such as to make it impossible for us to doubt the existence of the external world - "we must take [it] for granted in all our reasoning" - and this makes the proposition that there is an external world special in a way that allows us to silence the sceptic – for the sceptic is trying to raise a doubt with respect to a proposition that our natural constitution makes us incapable of doubting. Hume's strategy can be summarised as follows:

Constitutivity step: Nature made it impossible for us to doubt the existence of the external world, and it must be taken for granted in all our reasonings.
Inescapability step: It is safe to assume, for the argument's sake, that Hume's regards the impossibility to doubt the external world as general, as being an impossibility for Reason as

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such, hence for an activity which is dialectically inescapable.

Transcendental step: We do not possess positive conclusive evidence for the existence of the external world. Yet, it is beyond sceptical challenge because we can't doubt it.

Explanatory step: Nature made our Reason such that the external world is immune from doubt.

The sort of objection I want to press now concerns the constitutivity step. It is false that we can't doubt the existence of the external world. In order to clarify my objection, we should distinguish between some senses in which one can claim that some doubt is impossible:

> (1) It is impossible to have evidence for the falsity of a given proposition
>
> (2) It is impossible to have evidence for judging that a given proposition might be false
>
> (3) It is impossible to actually judge that a given proposition is false;
>
> (4) It is impossible to entertain a doubt (understood as a closed question) as to whether *p* is false or not.

The relevant sense of doubt we need in order to raise the objection to Hume's anti-sceptical strategy is the fourth one. In that sense of doubt – and I will assume that doubt is understood according to (4) in what follows, as I did in the rest of the Dissertation, and as I explained in Chapter V –, Hume's claim that it is impossible to doubt that there is an external world is false. It does in fact seem entirely possible to raise a meaningful question as to whether the external world really exist or not. This possibility is compatible with the fact that *most of the time* if not all of the time we proceed under the assumption that there is indeed an external world. Also, the possibility of doubting that there is an external world is compatible with the point that there couldn't be any positive evidence to think that there actually is none (case (1)), as well as it is compatible with the fact that we are not in a position to judge that there is no external world (case (3))[329]; yet, the possibility of doubting that *p* commits one to the possession of grounds for taking it that *p* might be false (see Chapter V for a vindication of this claim), even though it is not required, in order to raise a doubt about the existence of the external world, to explicitly judge that there is evidence for thinking that it might be false – of course, all this is compatible with the fact that if one considers the question whether there is evidence to think that the external world might not

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[329]In fact, I think that a necessary condition for something to be a proposition is that it can be the object of a judgment and of a question, not only a content that can be merely entertained. However, I don't want to insist too much on this point, for focusing on doubt will be sufficient to make my point.

exist one will be in a position to judge that in fact there is such evidence.

If it is possible to doubt the existence of the external world, then how is it that the sceptical challenge is silenced, however modestly? In order to save the anti-sceptical power of the strategy it is not enough to say that believing in the existence of the external world is necessary whenever we engage in *empirical* reasoning, for then the reply is simply that there is an activity – what I have called cognition – within which we can raise the challenge, and that this activity has a superior legislation over empirical reasoning. The reason why cognition has a superior legislation over empirical reasoning is that the latter is dialectically escapable, whereas the former is not. When I wonder whether there is an external world, all I need to do is to ask a question; whereas empirical reasoning is not the minimal activity of raising a question but the much more complex activity of raising questions about the truth value of particular empirical propositions (how many chairs are there in the room?) and to raise these particular empirical questions in a context where one is taking for granted that there is an external world. But this activity is not dialectically inescapable: that is, when we wonder whether the presuppositions of empirical reasoning are true, we need not presuppose them[330][331].

Wittgenstein. In order to further our appreciation of anti-sceptical strategies that appeal to empirical hinges, consider now the position Wittgenstein held in *On Certainty*[332]. According to Wittgenstein there are some propositions[333] which have a peculiar role in our epistemic practices: namely, they are propositions that are not actually doubted in our

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330 An objector might argue that when we doubt the existence of the external world, we are engaged in empirical reasoning. After all, it is not logic or mathematics we are concerned with, but precisely the external world. This objection doesn't sort out activities in the relevant way, I would argue. But even if we concede the point of the classification, then my claim is that the existence of the external world is not even an hinge of the (local) activity of thinking about the external world.

331 A Humean hinge epistemologist might reply that as a matter of fact all the arguments provided against the existence of the external world – and hence all the evidence that sustains the intelligibility of a doubt as to whether there really is an external world – are arguments that presuppose its existence. Yet, this has to be shown, and on the face of it, it is unclear what such an argument will look like. Descartes's dream argument, to name just one, clearly doesn't need that presupposition.

332 There is a considerable exegetical debate about the view, if any, that Wittgenstein is defending in the remarks contained in *On Certainty*. I won't enter this complex discussion here, but will rather content myself with one fairly minimal understanding of the kind of view that Wittgenstein was after in *On Certainty*. Our purposes here is not exegetical accuracy, but rather an appreciation of the difference between empirical and transcendental hinges. I leave it open whether there is an interpretation of Wittgenstein's remarks that responds to my objections in a satisfactory fashion.

333 I put on a side interpretations of Wittgenstein's remarks that understand hinges as non-propositional. There surely are passages in *On Certainty* that suggests that interpretation (OC205, OC110). See Pritchard (2016) for a non-propositional reading of hinges. I have two objections to this proposal: theoretically speaking, the main objection to such a picture is that the typical examples of hinges – like the existence of the external world, or the fact that man never went on the moon – seem to be paradigmatically propositions that can be entertained, judged as true, and also be the content of questions; exegetically speaking, since for Wittgenstein hinges are fluid because there is no clear cut separation between hinges and empirical propositions and because hinges might become empirical propositions and *vice versa*, we must suppose that hinges can be entertained – and thus can be normal propositional contents.

inquiries, and their being free from doubt is what makes it possible for our epistemic practices to work in the way they do. To exemplify, the fact that when I ask how many people there are in the room to count them and answer on the basis of the quick calculation is taken as appropriate has to be explained by the fact that we take it as being free from doubt the fact that there is an external world, that our perceptual experience is working properly most of the time, that we are capable of counting, that people are embodied beings, so that there is no search for spiritual beings that is pertinent in order to answer the relevant question, and so on and so forth. These presuppositions, or a suitably individuated sub-class of them, are what Wittgenstein calls hinges.

Crucially, for our purposes, these hinges also have the following important features: 1) there is no ground for taking them to be true; 2) thus, even if it might make some sense to say that they enjoy some kind of justification[334], their justification is different from the one enjoyed by the other propositions the justification of which is made possible by the existence of these very special hinges; 3) not only they are not doubted, but they are also in some sense beyond reasonable doubt[335]; 4) they are fluid, that is, they might change both synchronically (different cultures might have different hinges), and diachronically (hinges might change within the same culture)[336].

Now, if we force our reading of Wittgenstein's remarks in order to fit them in a modest transcendental argument put forth by a hinge epistemologist that endorses a transcendental constitutivist strategy, we might summarise Wittgenstein's strategy as follows.

Constitutivity step: taking some propositions as free from doubt is constitutive of our ordinary epistemic practice of asking and giving grounds for judging and doubting.

Inescapability step: it is unclear what he would say at this step – more on this below.

334According to Wright (2004)'s reading of Wittgenstein's appeal to hinges, hinges (or cornerstones, as he calls them) enjoy some positive epistemic status, what he calls *entitlement,* which different from other kinds of warrants because it is not evidentially grounded. These are Wright's favourite hinges: "that there is a material world, broadly in keeping with the way in which sense experience represents it; that other people have minds, whose states are broadly in keeping with the way they behave; that the world has an ancient history, broadly in keeping with presently available traces and apparent memories; that there are laws of nature, broadly manifest in finitely observable regularities." p. 173.

335It seems that Wittgenstein never explicitly argues for the strong claim that there are proposition that is strictly speaking impossible to doubt – in the sense that it is impossible to raise a question as to whether they are true (the only possible exception being, maybe, OC222). He surely makes the claim that some doubt is possible only if something is not doubted (OC354) and the consequential claim that it is impossible to doubt everything (OC115). When he says that some particular doubts – for instance doubts about hinges or about propositions that are typically taken as true *given* the hinges of our form of life – he makes the point by saying that it would be crazy or a sign of madness to doubt them, or simply a sign that we have met a person that lives another life (OC214, 217, 219, 220, 223, 238, 254, 257).

336See OC96, 97, 98, 210, 211, 256.

Transcendental step: in so far as we engage in the relevant practice for which the hinges are hinges, they are special in that they can't be targeted by a sceptical challenge, and their specialness can then be captured by saying either that they possess a special kind of justification (like an entitlement) or by saying that somehow they entirely elude the question of justification.

Explanatory step: education and socialization more generally seem to explain why some propositions gain and loose the status of hinges.

Given our present concerns, the most important objection against this sort of view is that the relevant hinge that we wanted to protect from sceptical attack is a local hinge, namely a constitutive alethic commitment of a local activity. So, here the problem is different from the one encountered in Hume. Hume failed at the constitutivity step, whereas Wittgenstein, so interpreted, fails at the inescapability step. Even though there surely are some activities such that it is constitutive of them that the relevant hinges are not doubted, there is an activity, namely cognition itself, such that it is not constitutive of that activity that the sorts of hinges that Wittgenstein (and its contemporary followers) are focusing on are exempt from doubt. I *can* doubt, for instance, whether I have ever been to the moon, and I can doubt whether there is an external world, in the sense that I can raise a question about the issue. This claim is in fact recognized by Wittgenstein himself[337], since he claims that hinges are fluid, in that they can change from time to time and from culture to culture. This makes room for the possibility that what is right now ordinarily not put into doubt can be put into doubt if one engages in another practice – or if one is living another form of life. Thus, to put the point in terms of the steps of the transcendental constitutivist strategy, Wittgenstein's view has not the resources to claim that the relevant practice he is talking about is dialectically inescapable (in fact, by his own admission of the possibility of different practices with different hinges, the relevant practices *are* dialectically escapable). As a result, he doesn't have the resources to build an anti-sceptical modest transcendental arguments. There is an activity, cognition, from which we can raise the relevant sceptical challenge about the truth of the empirical hinges.

    Strawson. The same points can be noticed in connection to a contemporary use of Hume's and Wittgenstein's ideas made by Strawson (1985). Again, it is useful and instructive to present his view as an instance of transcendental constitutivist strategy. At the constitutivity step he seems to be arguing that in so far as we engage in some activities like "self-conscious thought and experience", we must believe some propositions to be

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337At least according to a certain reading of Wittgenstein's remarks. See previous footnote.

true. These beliefs need not be explicitly present in one's mind whenever one engage in self-conscious thought and experience. Yet, we are somehow committed to them. Here is a passage in which he makes this constitutivity claim:

"in order for intelligible formulation of skeptical doubts to be possible or, more generally, in order for self-conscious thought and experience to be possible, we must take it, or *believe*, that we have knowledge of external physical objects or other minds". p. 23[338].

With respect to the inescapability step, Strawson's view is not explicit. But given the examples of constitutive claims that Strawson makes at the constitutivity step, it seems that he was concerned with dialectically inescapable activities, in fact with cognition itself, since the examples he makes concern what is constitutive of "self-conscious thought or experience" which I take to amount pretty much to what I have called cognition throughout the Dissertation (namely the activity of asking questions and answering them in the form of judgment based on alethic grounds, where grounds can also be experiences).

At the transcendental step Strawson goes modest. He says that he is only interested in internal connections, no external conclusion. Thus, he wants to make claims about our conceptual scheme, that is, claims about what we must take for granted given that in engaging in self-conscious thought we deploy our conceptual scheme[339].

338He also mentions many other instances of candidate hinges: "self-ascription implies the capacity of other-ascription" p. 24-25; "Typically, a transcendental argument, as now construed, claims that one type of exercise of conceptual capacity is a necessary condition of another (e.g., that taking some experiences to consists in awareness of objects in physical space is a necessary condition of the self-ascription of subjective states as ordered in time or that being equipped to identify some states of mind in others is a necessary condition of being able to ascribe any states of mind to ourselves)". p. 24; "the commitment to belief in the reality and determinateness of the past". p. 29
  Notice that Strawson is very clear in saying that he hasn't provided any argument to the effect that the various constitutivity claims he makes are indeed true. As he says, commenting on arguments purported to establish what I call constitutivity claims, "I am not now concerned with the question of the validity of such arguments but with the general character of the criticisms to which they are typically subject".

339What does explain the fact that constitutive claims are true? What does Strawson say at the explanatory step? He is not very clear, at least not in this context. He often speaks about concepts and conceptual capacities. Here, just to give you an impression of the sort of question that Strawson would have to answer at this step, one question is: does the fact that other-ascriptions is required for self-ascriptions hold *because of our concepts of self and other*? Are these concepts *contingent* – such that they might have been otherwise? Here Strawson might be understood as answering in a Humean and Wittgensteinian fashion. Hume speaks of Nature, Wittgenstein speaks of the language-games we learn from childhood. Drawing from both sources, he says that we should call his view a form of "'social naturalism'". p. 25. In the last section of his 'Scepticism, Naturalism, and Transcendental Arguments' Strawson considers issues that directly concerns the explanatory question. One explanatory view about hinges sees them as historically bounded presuppositions. Like propositions that are presupposed at a certain time. (see his reference here to Collingwood). This view is again open to another sort of sceptical challenge: were our history (or society) different, we would have a different conceptual scheme, hence different hinges. As a result, we can't be certain that these hinges are true, nor that the practices that rely on them are truth-conducive.

Strawson takes something from Hume's naturalism and something from Wittgenstein's remarks in *On Certainty*. From Wittgenstein he takes the idea that both sceptical arguments *and* anti-sceptical arguments are "idle" in that they both involve

"a misunderstanding of the role in our lives, the place in our intellectual economy, of those propositions or crypto-propositions which the skeptic seeks to place in doubt and his opponent in argument seeks to establish". p. 22-23.

Both standpoints (those of the sceptic and its opponent) are wrong because they fail to take notice of the fact that some propositions are accepted or rejected regardless of whether we have positive reasons for them, or reasons to take them as false. This is Wittgenstein's view that there are groundless convictions, the hinges, that do not take part to the game of providing grounds for believing. Strawson doesn't take from Wittgenstein the idea that these hinges are fluid and changeable. With respect to the stability of these hinges he is more in line with Hume, in that they both think that some propositions – like, Hume's examples, the uniformity of nature and the existence of the external world – are such that we are unavoidably committed to take them as true. Wittgenstein endorses fluidity, Hume does not. Wittgenstein endorses the claim that hinges are exempt from the game of reasons, Hume seems to be endorsing the claim as well.

Now, whereas Wittgenstein's anti-sceptical modest strategy doesn't work because he focuses on an activity which is not dialectically inescapable, Strawson's strategy doesn't work because, like Hume's, even though he focuses on a dialectically inescapable practice, the hinges he considers are not constitutive of that practice, namely of cognition as such. Thus, to take the example quoted before, it is not constitutive of cognition to believe that the external world exist. When I reason about logic, I don't need to assume that there is an external world. More generally, when I raise a doubt, I do not need to assume that the external world exists. There might be some practices for which these hinges are constitutive. But these practices are not dialectically inescapable, and thus they can't silence the sceptic.

Coliva. In a recent book Coliva has offered a hinge epistemology which she calls "the extended rationality view". She extends this view to cover several hinges[340], but here I

340In Chapter 5 of her book she extends her view to several hinges. These hinges include the principle of uniformity of nature, the existence of the past, the existence of other minds, the usual reliability of informants, and basic rules of inference like modus ponens. The points made here about the hinge 'there is an external world' can be extended *mutatis mutandis* to the other hinges she considers, with the possible exception of basic rules of inference which do represent good candidate for being transcendental hinges, as I briefly and tentatively suggested in Chapter VI.

will focus on the hinge 'there is an external world', in order to show that, again, this hinge is not a transcendental one and therefore has not the features that allow us to silence the corresponding sceptic about the existence of the external world. Again, it is useful to present Coliva's view by seeing what she claims at the four steps of the constitutivist strategy.

At the constitutivist step she seems to be making two claims: 1) to assume that there is an external world is constitutive of our ordinary practice of forming beliefs about the external world on the basis of perceptual experience – call this practice *empirical practice* or *empirical cognition*; 2) to assume that there is an external world is constitutive of our having warrants or justifications for our ordinary empirical beliefs. Though she doesn't explicitly distinguish between these two senses, it is important for our purposes to clearly distinguish them. The first sense concerns the *psychology* of empirical cognition for it claims that assuming that there is an external world is constitutive of our actual practice of belief-formation about the empirical world. Here the idea is that whenever we form beliefs about our environment on the basis of perceptual experience we are assuming, however implicitly and unconsciously, that there is an external world. Here is a passage that expresses this constitutivity claim:

"the kind of assumptions I talk about … are very general and fundamental ones that, as I claim, are operative in the *basic* epistemic practice [or "belief-forming method", as she specifies in a footnote] of gathering perceptual warrants for ordinary empirical propositions, which is itself constitutive of epistemic rationality. Such a practice, I take it, is at the core of *all* human life given the kind of creatures we are". p. 128

The second sense doesn't concern our cognitive life, but rather the *epistemic status* possessed by our empirical cognitive life: assuming that there is an external world is constitutive of our having a right or a justification to form beliefs about the environment on the basis of perceptual experience.

"The key idea … is that such an assumption needs to be in place for us to be within our epistemic rights in taking our current sense experience to bear on a world of mind-independent entities". p. 33

Here the claim is significantly different from the previous one: the claim is that assuming

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that there is an external world is a necessary condition for our perceptual beliefs counting as warranted or justified. In principle, the existence of the external world might be constitutive in this epistemic sense without being constitutive in the previous psychological sense, because this sense is entirely compatible with the fact that when we form beliefs about the environment we actually don't assume that there is an external world. Of course, however, it is natural and reasonable to say that the psychological version of the claim is true if the epistemic version of the claim is taken to be true, and in fact Coliva seems to endorse both claims[341].

At the transcendental step Coliva claims that while the hinge can't enjoy any positive warrant, it is neither irrational nor a-rational to assume it. Rather, and this is the core of her 'extended rationality view', since the presence of this hinge is a condition of possibility of what she calls epistemic rationality – roughly the capacity of having warrants for our empirical beliefs – this hinge is rational. Accordingly, this is how she conceives of 'epistemic rationality':

"it is epistemically rational to believe evidentially warranted propositions and to accept those unwarrantable assumptions [the hinges] that make the acquisition of perceptual warrants possible in the first place and are therefore constitutive of ordinary evidential warrants". p. 129

This is where her overall strategy exhibits the structure of a modest transcendental argument whose conclusion is that the assumption in the existence of the external world has some special status, in her view the status of being rational even if it is not evidentially warranted.

Now, what is the anti-sceptical power of this view? Even if it grants, like other hinge epistemologies, that we don't possess evidential justification for believing that there is an external world, the view has it that we are rational in so assuming. Moreover, "and this is the crucial point", Coliva also suggests that,

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341 In fact Coliva makes clear that this epistemic version of the constitutivity claim should itself be unpacked into two distinct yet connected claims that parallels the distinction between doxastic and propositional justification: "Therefore, there are in fact two, equally legitimate, senses in which we can say that the assumption that there is an external world is one of the constitutive ingredients of our perceptual warrants. The first sense may be called propositional and means simply that the proposition that there is an external world does figure as an ingredient of perceptual warrants in the abstract space of reasons. … The second, call it the doxastic, sense has it, instead, that such a proposition should actually be entertained by subjects endowed with the relevant conceptual repertoire and be part of what they would offer were they requested to make explicit their own warrants for holding that there is, say, a red table in front of them". pp. 34-5.

"both skeptics and non-skeptics alike are *required* by the lights of epistemic rationality itself to assume that there is an external world. Hence they are equally *mandated* by a shared notion of epistemic rationality to assume it". p. 129.

This point assumes that even the skeptics take part to the same practice of which assuming the existence of the external world is (psychologically) constitutive[342]. Now, a first point to be made at this point is this: maybe it is true that as a matter of fact actual skeptics – that is, as I understand them, people who at least offer arguments for scepticism, and perhaps even believe the skeptical conclusion of their arguments – do engage in ordinary empirical practices which do proceed under the assumption that there is an external world. However, the important question is whether so assuming is constitutive of the practice of offering an argument for doubting the existence of the external world and therefore for doubting our possession of justification for taking the external world to exist. Since in order to raise these doubts the skeptic needs not to assume the existence of the external world, the anti-sceptical strategy as it stands doesn't work. The assumption that there is an external world is constitutive of the practice of forming beliefs about the external world on the basis of perceptual experience, but this practice is not the one we engage in when we raise the sceptical challenge. And this is the point about escapability: if the relevant hinge is constitutive of an escapable practice, then the hinge looses its anti-sceptical power. Thus, Coliva needs to show that the relevant hinge is constitutive of a practice which is genuinely inescapable. This is the inescapability step which we miss in her constitutivist strategy.

Coliva is aware of a challenge that looks like the one I am raising, and tries to answer to it. Drawing from Enoch (2006)'s objections to constitutivist attempts to ground the validity of norms, she forms against her view a challenge which she calls "the Oblomovian challenge" (145-7). The challenge is this: even if we grant that assuming the existence of the external world is constitutive of our ordinary practices and of epistemic rationality, still one might opt out and decide not to play the game of our ordinary epistemic practices – that is, one might decide to stop assuming that there is an external world, and therefore to stop taking part to all the practices that depend, for their existence and for their rationality, on the presence of this assumption.

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342 Here Coliva cannot say (though sometimes she seems to say so, see p. 130, for instance) that the skeptics share with non-skeptics the same *notion* of epistemic rationality, for the presuppositions embedded in the ordinary non-skeptical notion of epistemic rationality is exactly those that the skeptic is denying. This is why Coliva should say that skeptics share with non-skeptics not so much the same notion of epistemic rationality, but rather the same *practices* of gathering evidence from the senses in order to form judgments about the environment. Thus, the relevant constitutivity claim that Coliva really needs in order to show that skeptics and non-skeptics alike are committed to take the external world as existing, is the psychological version of the claim.

In reply, Coliva grants the possibility to opt out from our ordinary empirical practice, but she urges that the cost in so doing will be to high, and that therefore we have practical reasons not to opt out that game. Moreover, she adds that even if we can opt out from that game, this doesn't entail that the relevant assumption isn't rational. So, she doesn't see how the objection could remove the anti-sceptical power of her extended rationality view.

Even if we agree with Coliva's points in reply to the Oblomoviam's challenge, and even if we grant her the correctness of the extended rationality view, still there is an objection, which is the one I am raising, and which is a form of Oblomoviam's challenge different from the one Coliva considers, which remains unanswered and shows that her view doesn't have the required anti-sceptical power. The objection is, to repeat, the following. Even if we grant the constitutivity claim that in order to form (justified) beliefs about the environment we need to assume that there is an external world, still we should insist that there is an activity, which I have called cognition, which doesn't function under the assumption that there is an external world. And when we raise the sceptical challenge and doubt the existence of the external world and our justification to take it as existing, we are engaging in cognition, and not in *empirical* cognition, namely a cognitive activity which consists in forming beliefs about the empirical world on the basis of perceptual experience. Thus, even if we grant the point that when we engage in empirical cognition we are proceeding under the (rational) assumption that there is an external world, the assumption can be intelligibly put into question when we engage in cognition. Thus, Coliva's hinge epistemology fails to silence the sceptic because she fails at the inescapability step, since she doesn't individuate a hinge which is constitutive of a *suitably* inescapable activity[343].

To sum up, the discussion so far highlights a dilemma for anti-sceptical strategies that appeal to empirical hinges in order to silence an external world scepticism: either they make plausible constitutive claims, but then the problem is that they concern dialectically escapable activities; or they concern dialectically inescapable activities, but then they make implausible constitutive claims.

§12.3   *Only transcendental hinges can silence the sceptic*

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[343] As I have defined cognition, cognition is the activity of asking questions and answering them in the form of judgment based on alethic grounds. Coliva and other hinge epistemologists (like Wright) might argue that hinges are not the contents of judgments, but rather the contents of sui generis mental states of assumption, acceptance, or trust. Yet, hinge epistemologists need to show that these mental states are not only present when we engage in local cognitive activities, but are rather present whenever we engage in cognition. So far I am aware of no convincing argument to this effect.

I want now to argue more directly for a general desideratum for any version of hinge epistemology with anti-sceptical aspirations: the desideratum is that the hinge be a constitutive commitment of cognition itself, namely the sole dialectically inescapable activity.

Consider some candidate hinge propositions. Either one has conclusive grounds for them or not. Suppose one does. If one does, then it is unclear *why* they should be thought of as hinges. Hinges are meant to be either not in need of justification (though one might request justification for them), or simply outside the game of justification, or as possessing some special kind of non-evidential justification (like Wright's entitlement). But if one does have conclusive grounds for them, then it is unclear why one should keep thinking that they are hinges in the intended sense that should vindicate an appeal to their specialness in a *modest* transcendental argument. If we have conclusive grounds for them we don't need to be modest[344].

If, however, one doesn't have conclusive grounds for them, then it seems that it is entirely possible to raise a question as to whether they are true (the assumption being that a doubt as whether *p* is true is possible for any proposition *p* so long as *p* is not found certain). In this case, the hinge epistemologist has two options: (1) she should show that whenever we raise a doubt as to whether a candidate hinge is true, we are committing ourselves to that hinge being true, and on this ground offer a modest reply to the sceptic; (2) she should show that an hinge is not the sort of thing that can be doubted (thereby criticising the claim that for *any p*, if *p* is not certain, it can be doubted).

Way out 1. This is exactly the right view, I think, namely the right way to preserve a transcendental constitutivist strategy that modestly aims at silencing the sceptic. Yet, this strategy works only if the relevant hinges are constitutive commitment of cognition, that is, they are hinges such that we are committed to their truth for the simple fact of being doubting them. This poses a severe constraint on hinge epistemology: the hinges should be transcendental, not just local, but then local hinges can't be appealed to in order to silence the corresponding sceptic (as many post-Wittgensteinian hinge epistemologies attempted to do)[345].

344Notice, however, that there might be alethic commitments that are supported by certainty-conferring grounds and are *also* constitutive alethic commitments of cognition. The two things are compatible. A candidate example of such hinge is the proposition that there is at least one truth, or the proposition that it is possible to know something with certainty. The point I make in the main text is simply that *within* the dialectical context in which hinge epistemology à la Wittgenstein are defended the thought that there can't be grounds for judging the hinges is an important motivation for understanding them as hinges.

345Again, in this Chapter I haven't discussed all contemporary epistemologists that rely on a Wittgensteinian appeal to hinges. Yet I think that it is possible to show that most of them focus on local hinges that, as

Way out 2. There are two ways of relating to it with the aim of showing that this way out is impassable. Either to consider on a piecemeal basis candidate special hinges that are supposed to be exempt from doubt even if they can be entertained and are uncertain; or, to offer a direct argument to the effect that if a proposition can be entertained and is uncertain then it can be doubted. With respect to the first move, if we think of the typical hinges that are mentioned in these debates (like the proposition that there is an external world, or that the past is real, or that there are other minds), they can be easily shown to be dubitable and hence constitutive of an activity that is not dialectically inescapable. With respect to the second move, here are some thoughts that support it.

Prima facie, it seems that if *something can be thought* – which I take it to be a minimal condition for something to be a proposition in the intended sense relevant here – it can also be the content of a question as to whether it is true or not. On the face of it it seems constitutive of a thought or proposition that it can be entertained, judged as true, and also be the content of a question, hence of a doubt as to whether it is true or not.

This claim doesn't entail that there aren't particular propositions doubt about which is particularly self-destructive. In fact, these self-destructive doubts are discovered as being such precisely because it is possible to doubt these particular propositions and then *realise* that by doubting them one is kind of defeating one's own pretension to doubt them. Here are some illustration. The proposition that *I am having a doubt*, when doubted, is self-verified – that is, by doubting it one is making it *true* – and if a subject understands that by doubting it one is making it true, then the doubt defeats itself, as it were, and the dubitative state is lost and replaced by a judgment in the moment in which the subject understands that by doubting it one is making it true. The same phenomenon occurs with all those propositions that are self-verified when doubted (e.g., there is experience going on, there is a distinction between the true and the false, I exist, I can think, there exists something, there is the experience of time, and many others). Yet, all this is compatible with the possibility of doubting that proposition. In fact, this phenomenon actually requires that it is possible to doubt them – it is precisely because one can doubt them that there is the phenomenon of self-defeating doubts which involved propositions that are self-verified when doubted.

Wittgenstein suggested in *On certainty* that (at least some) doubts are kind of impossible[346]. One family of such doubts are semantic doubts, that is doubts about the

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such, don't have the resources to silence the sceptic.

346OC 126: "I am not more certain of the meaning of my words than I am of certain judgments. Can I doubt that this colour is called 'blue'?" This passage might be read as suggesting that it is impossible to have these semantic doubts.

meaning of words, or, if we move at the level of thought, doubts about what one is thinking when one thinks. Again, maybe these are good examples of particular self-destructive doubts. That is, by doubting whether I know what 'blue' means, I might then realise, while doubting it, that I understand what it means, because by raising a doubt about its meaning I enter in some mental state which makes it manifest to me what I mean by 'blue'. But this is again a case in which doubt *is* possible. The only peculiarity of such cases, assuming that it is real, is that it is easy to shut these doubts down for by having them we also immediately see the evidence that resolves them[347].

       Another possible counterexample to my claim might come from a thought very nicely expressed in this passage.

"When I see a tomato there is much that I can doubt. I can doubt whether it is a tomato that I am seeing, and not a cleverly painted piece of wax. I can doubt whether there is any material thing there at all. . . . One thing however I cannot doubt: that there exists a red patch of a round and somewhat bulgy shape, standing out from a background of other colour-patches, and having a certain visual depth, and that this whole field of colour is directly present to my consciousness. . . . [By this] I mean that my consciousness of it is not reached by inference, nor by any other intellectual process . . . nor by any passage from sign to significate". (Price 1932: 3)

Surely, once one raises the question as to whether there really exists a red patch now that one is looking at a red apple, and one properly understands what it means for there to be a red patch, and so understands that all it is required for there to be one is for there to be the present experience, then one will be in a position to answer one's doubt. But this just

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OC 247: "What would it be like to doubt now whether I have two hands? ... So far I have no system at all within which this doubt might exist". This impossibility to doubt is relativised to a context. Since the context (our ordinary practice) is not dialectically inescapable, this is not a counterexample.

OC 273-274, experience "does not teach us [propositions] in isolation: rather, it teaches us a host of interdependent propositions. If they were isolated I might perhaps doubt them... ". Again, this might be taken as suggesting that some doubt is impossible.

I actually think that Wittgenstein never thought that there are propositions that can't be doubted, but for the argument's sake I consider a couple of Wittgenstein(ian) arguments to this effect.

347 Wittgenstein also seems to suggest in the *Tractatus* that the sceptical claim can't even be doubted.

TLP. 6.51 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.

Yet, this claim (and the theory that supports it) obviously runs afoul of the simple phenomenological consideration that so long as we can make up a sceptical proposition – that we don't know with certainty whether there is an external world – we are ipso facto in a position to judge it, entertain it, and, where the situations such as to make it relevant, to raise a question about its truth value and about the truth value that is incompatible with the sceptical proposition. Here, I take it, that Wittgenstein is meaning something different from the claim that it is impossible to raise a question and provide an answer. He is rather making a claim about the *nature* of the question and the *nature* of the answer.

means that this is the sort of doubt that targets a proposition that can be known with absolute certainty. It doesn't falsify the claim that a proposition, so long as it can be entertained, and so long as one is not *already* absolutely certain of, is a proposition that can be entertained in a question, or a doubt.

This much proves, I think, that the only sort of hinge that can be appealed to in order to perform some modest anti-sceptical work is what I call a transcendental hinge, that is some proposition to which we are committed even if we doubt it, or more generally when we engage in cognition.

§12.4 *Doubt as a transcendental bedrock*

There is a further important point about the nature of doubt and cognition more generally. The idea is that the *ultimate* court in front of which we should confront ourselves when we wonder about what to believe is doubt. Doubt is the ultimate court because any judged proposition can be doubted, and unless a proposition passes the test of doubt by being proved to be certain, the proposition is always hostage to a possible doubt, and if it is doubted then the judgment in its truth is lost.

The idea that doubt is the ultimate court, or the ultimate source of legislation, is not the idea that a proposition can be adopted only if proven true in the very act of doubt. That is, one can pass the test of doubt in many ways, it need not be the case that the test is passed if by trying to pass it – by being doubted – a proposition shows itself to be true. This is a particular way of passing the test. Nor is the point that a proposition can be adopted only if it is first doubted – for of course we come to judge many propositions without first doubting them. The point here is that *if* a proposition hasn't passed the test of doubt by being shown to be absolutely certain, then the proposition can be doubted. And if it is doubted then when it is doubted the judgment is lost.

A further consequence of this important feature of the interplay between judgment and doubt is that there is no possible judgment that can make a doubt illegitimate on a given occasion, unless that very judgment is itself certain. For, if it is uncertain, then it can be doubted. Doubt is the transcendental bedrock in this sense: there is no act of cognition that can be used in order to downplay its role in reasoning and reflection, unless this act of cognition has itself been checked by a doubt and has been proven to be absolutely certain.

§12.5 *Transcendental circularity*

From the fact that we are unavoidably committed to transcendental hinges, nothing follows about their truth value. Is it possible to provide positive evidence, in particular certainty-conferring evidence, for thinking that they are true? I think it is possible, but here I just want to present a problem that we have when thinking about how we could possibly gain positive evidence for thinking that they are true. The problem, in a nutshell, is that if transcendental hinges are propositions to which we are committed whenever we engage in cognition, since we need to engage in cognition in order to discover whether they are true, it seems that somehow we should already presuppose their truth whenever we attempt to discover them. In order to clarify this feature of transcendental hinges, it is important to distinguish several kinds of circularities.

There are several ways in which an argument[348] might be circular. One way is by being *premise-circular*, that is, the argument starts from premises that include the very conclusion of the argument. Some, but not all, premise-circular arguments are *transcendentally premise-circular* in that the premise they start with is a constitutive alethic commitment of cognition – namely a transcendental hinge. I think it is clear that there can't be any premise-circular argument that can be effective in closing a doubt as to whether *p* is the case. The reason is that the nature of doubt itself makes it impossible to use such an argument: since *p* is the proposition that one is putting into doubt, it is simply impossible to actually rely on it in order to come to the conclusion that *p* is true.

Another way in which an argument might be circular is by being *rule-circular*, that is, one puts forth an argument which relies on the rule of inference whose validity the argument is meant to establish. Again, some, but not all, rule-circular arguments are *transcendentally rule-circular*, that is, arguments whose rule of inference that is relied on is one which is constitutive of cognition (then there are different kinds of circularity depending on whether the relevant rule is strongly or weakly constitutive, in the ways described in Chapter VI). Of course some argument might be rule-circular by relying on a rule of inference which is not constitutive of cognition. It is a further independent question whether these constitutive rules of inference are also *valid* rules of inference.

There is another kind of circularity that is exhibited by arguments in favour of transcendental hinges, a circularity I will call transcendental. A transcendentally circular argument is one whose conclusion is a proposition to which one is committed *not* because of the *particular contents* that feature among the grounds, but rather because of the mere fact

348Since I am here concerned with the phenomenology of reasoning, by 'argument' I primarily refer to the acts of drawing an inference.

that in order to reach the conclusion one is relying on cognition. Here is an example. If I try to argue in favour of the claim that there are good grounds for judging, by inferring I am taking some consideration as a ground for judging and by so doing I am committing myself to the existence of good grounds for judging. Notice that this commitment isn't merely triggered if one relies on inferential sources, for even if one comes to judge that *p* non-inferentially, that is on the basis of a non-doxastic ground, one is thereby committed to there being good grounds for judging. These two cases should be distinguished from other similar cases which feature commitments that arise not so much because one is engaging in cognition in general, but because one is relying on *particular* cognitive acts. Thus, by judging that *p* on some inferential grounds I am committed to there being good grounds for *p*. But there being good grounds for *p* is not the same as there being good grounds for judging *at all*. The difference is that the former is a constitutive commitment of a particular activity – the one involving *p* – whereas the latter is constitutive of cognition *as such*[349].

Here is an attempt to characterise the phenomenon of transcendentally circular arguments[350]: these are arguments such that, if one were to doubt the conclusion, then one would not be capable of relying on a given premise (or ground) in order to then come on this basis to judge the conclusion – and the impossibility is due to the fact that the very act of relying on a giving premise or ground will trigger the commitment to accept the conclusion as true. To illustrate: if I doubt whether it is true that there is at least one truth, then, if I consider a proposition *p* to use in order to judge that there is at least one truth, then, by relying on *p* I judge it, and I am committed to there being at least one truth, but in so doing, if I understand what is going on, then the judgment in *p* will immediately be lost, and hence the very ground to judge that there is at least one truth is lost as well. Or, if I doubt whether there are good grounds for judging, I can't appeal to any ground for judging, for by so doing I am taking it to there being some good grounds for judging.

Crucially, however, the inescapability of transcendental hinges is such that there

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349 Notice a very important distinction that might exist within the category of transcendental hinges. Some of them might be propositions whose truth must be presupposed in order to make sense of the possibility of discovering the truth; but not all of them must be of this kind. It might be that by simply engaging in cognition I am, say, valuing humanity as such (that might be the claim of some constitutivism in moral theory like Korsgaard), but to value humanity as such is not a precondition, or so it seems, for making sense of our claim to be capable of discovering the truth. In the main text I will proceed under the assumption that transcendental hinges all have to do with claims whose truth must be presupposed in order to make sense of the possibility to discover the truth.

350 It would be important to compare this form of circularity with other circularities and existing accounts of the phenomenon of circular arguments. I will have to leave this work for another occasion. See Pryor (2004) Sgaravatti (2013) for some useful discussion of the phenomenon, and see the literature referred to therein for further works on the issue.

can't be any convincing argument against them either. For any argument against a transcendental hinge will be committed to its truth. *If* we take it that transcendental hinges can't be known with certainty for any possible source of certainty will be available by making a move within cognition and so by presupposing the truth of the transcendental hinge, then we find ourselves in the following condition. On the one hand, transcendental hinges can be doubted, where by this we simply mean that it is possible to raise a question as to whether they are really true. Yet, transcendental hinges can't be *stably* doubted for by doubting them one is making a commitment to their truth. On the other hand, it seems that I can'rely on an inferential or non-inferential source in order to judge a transcendental hinge, for by so relying on grounds I am in a sense taking it for granted what the appeal to these grounds is meant to prove.

This is our condition if the circularity is vicious and there is no way of showing how to know transcendental hinges despite the circularity apparently involved in any attempt to do so. More work should be done in order to understand how to know whether transcendental hinges possess any positive epistemic status.

§12.6 *Explanatory step and concluding remarks*

In this concluding paragraph I would like to briefly discuss the fourth step of transcendental constitutivism, namely what I have called the explanatory step. At this step, the constitutivist or hinge epistemologist offers an *explanation* of why the claims made at the constitutivity step are true. At this step it is explained what is the source of the constitutive norms and alethic commitments. In order to explain the importance of this step, let me briefly recap what are the main claims that I have made at each step of the transcendental constitutivist strategy in this Dissertation.

Constitutivism about alethic normativity
Constitutivity step:

> *Truth is the constitutive aim of cognition*. Minimalist account: a) it is a constitutive feature of judgment the fact that to judge that *p* is to present *p* as true in the particular way in which judging presents its content as true; b) to ask a question is to posit a true judgment as the form of its satisfaction.
> *Evidence*: gathered through eidetic variation.

Inescapability step: cognition is dialectically inescapable.

<u>Transcendental step</u>:

Truth-norm. Ambitious transcendental argument. I have derived the validity of the truth-norm on the basis of the facts mentioned by the minimalist account.

<u>Explanatory step</u>:

Negative claims: a) the truth of the minimalist account can't be explained by a conceptualist view according to which it holds in virtue of our concept of judgment; b) nor can a conceptualist view account for the validity of the truth-norm, which is rather grounded on the minimalist account.

Positive claim: ???

Constitutivism about epistemic normativity:

<u>Constitutivity step</u>:

Exclusivity: it is constitutive of judgment that only alethic considerations can count as grounds.

Evidence. Gathered through eidetic variation. It is impossible to judge on the basis of non-alethic considerations.

Grounds commitment for judgment: it is constitutive of judgment that to judge that *p* is to be committed to there being grounds for so judging.

Evidence. Gathered through eidetic variation: it is impossible to judge that p while one is comprehendingly judging that there are no grounds for *p* (or while one is comprehendingly open minded as to whether there are grounds for *p*.

Certainty commitment for judgment: it is constitutive of judgment that to judge that *p* is to be committed to *p*'s being certain.

Evidence. Gathered through eidetic variation: it is impossible to judge that *p* while one is comprehendingly judging that *p* is not certain (or while one is comprehendingly open minded as to whether *p* is certain).

Certainty commitment for doubt: it is constitutive of doubt that to doubt whether *p* is true is to posit an absolutely certain judgment as its form of satisfaction.

<u>Inescapability step</u>: cognition is dialectically inescapable.

<u>Transcendental step</u>:

Ground Norm. Ambitions transcendental argument for a strongly constitutive norm. A judgment that *p* is epistemically correct only if it is grounded on alethic grounds. This norm is based on both exclusivity the fact that to judge commits one to there being alethic grounds for so judging.

Certainty Norm. Ambitious transcendental argument for a weakly constitutive norm. A judgment that p is epistemically correct only if it is absolutely certain. This norm is based on both the fact that to judge that p commits one to p's being certain and on the fact that to doubt whether p is true is to desire for certainty.

<u>Explanatory step:</u>

Negative claim: conceptualism can't explain why the facts about constitutive commitments are true.

Positive claims: ???

Transcendental hinge epistemology

<u>Constitutivity step:</u>

Grounds commitment for judgment: it is constitutive of judgment that to judge that p is to be committed to there being grounds for so judging.

Certainty commitment for judgment: it is constitutive of judgment that to judge that p is to be committed to p's being certain.

Commitments for doubt: a) it is constitutive of doubt that to doubt whether p is true is to be committed to there being some truth; b) it is constitutive of doubt that to doubt whether p is true is to be committed to p's being uncertain; c) …

<u>Inescapability step:</u> cognition is dialectically inescapable.

<u>Transcendental step:</u>

No ambitious transcendental strategy. E.g., from the fact that we are inescapably committed to take it that some hinge is true, it doesn't follow that the hinge is true.

Modest transcendental strategy? If any attempt to justify a transcendental hinge involves a vicious transcendental circularity, then what does it follow about the status, epistemic or otherwise of the hinges? Hinges are however somewhat special because they can't be coherently doubted: to doubt them is to be committed to their being true.

<u>Explanatory step:</u> ???

What should we positively say at the explanatory step of each of the previous positions? This is a complicated question that deserves an independent discussion. But here I want to briefly indicate why this step is so important. The debate between transcendental idealism and naturalism is arguably to be decided at this step. Here is why.

Since the claims made at the constitutivity step are claims about the essential

features of phenomenology, the explanatory question ask why we have the phenomenology that we happen to have. Why we have a phenomenology such that judging aims at truth? Why we have a phenomenology such that we need grounds for judging? Why we have a phenomenology such that in doubting we are seeking for certainty? It seems conceivable to think that it might have been otherwise. If the constitutive claims are true, it is not conceivable that the phenomena of judging and questioning themselves could have been otherwise in their constitutive features: there can't be a judgment and a question that don't aim at truth. Yet, it seems conceivable that we could have had an altogether different phenomenology with no judgments to be grounded in order to answer our questions.

In fact, the most important question for us is not so much whether we could have had a different phenomenology, but rather whether there could be a different phenomenology which is truth-conducive whereas our phenomenology is not. We might reason as follow: what if our mind is simply unsuited to discover the truth? What if it is structured in such a way that it makes us think that we can have an access to the way things are, whereas in fact we can't? These questions are pressing because we seem to be in a position to conceive of the existence of some other mind whose phenomenological features are different from those of our mind. Since other minds seem intelligible, we also seem to be in a position to intelligibly doubt whether our cognition is the truth-conducive one.

One way to block this apparently sceptical worry is by defending a thought which amounts to some form of transcendental idealism because it asserts that the question of knowledge and truth are questions that can be posed and solved only by a mind like ours. The sceptical worry invites us to suppose that there could be a different mind which gets access to the truth, whereas our don't. But can we really make sense of some mind as being a mind which is capable of having an access to the truth without coming to that access through questioning and judgment? Minimally, this mind should be capable of making a commitment as to how things are. But can we make sense of such a commitment without thinking of it as a form of judgment, issued on the basis of grounds for taking things be in a certain way?

This form of transcendental idealism can be defended, I think. One might also put forth an argument to the effect that to think that the form of knowledge might be different from ours is an unintelligible supposition. The argument relies on dialectical inescapability. Since the sceptical worry is inviting us to consider the possibility that our

mind is so structured that it is unsuited to access the way things are, the sceptical worry is in fact asking us to raise a question and to judge that we might not have an access to the truth. But this is to engage in cognition. And such engagement is constitutively committed to the possibility of having an access to the way things are, and more generally it is constitutively committed to take as legitimate the most basic operations of cognition itself. So, this sceptical worry represents a way of arguing in favour of a global scepticism – though here the global scepticism doesn't rely on the poverty of our grounds for judging but on the contention that the very acts of questioning and judging on the basis of grounds are acts which don't give us an access to the way things are –, and the reply is the one we have discussed in Chapter VII, namely that global scepticism is self-stultifying.

So far, I have argued that we don't seem to be in a position to downplay the pretension to truth-conduciveness of our cognition if we try to do so by appealing to the apparent conceivability of different minds. Yet, even if we say that our cognition is suited to discover the truth – because of the transcendental idealism that connects the problem of discovering the truth with the structure of our cognition – we haven't explained why our cognition is as it is. Before saying anything positive about what explains our current phenomenology, we can extract from the previous discussion a minimal condition of adequacy for any candidate explanation: the explanation should not relativise our phenomenology in such a fashion that it entails the intelligibility of a global sceptical challenge about our pretension to know the truth. If the explanation is such as to make it intelligible for us to take it that we might right now systematically fail to track the way things are, then the explanation is self-stultifying, like any other arguments or views which entail a global scepticism. This condition of adequacy poses very serious questions and constraints, and in particular can be used in order to put pressure to any genealogical explanation of our phenomenology that relativises the phenomenology to contingent features. We might call views that offer such genealogical explanations forms of naturalism. In order to further illustrate this constraint, I will offer two very general arguments against any naturalist view of this kind.

Argument from certainty I

P1a) A judgment that p is reflexively stable only if p is known with certainty

P2) Naturalism is incompatible with the possession of absolutely certain knowledge

C1) The judgment that naturalism is true is reflexively unstable

Argument from certainty II

P1b) We do possess absolutely certain knowledge

P2) Naturalism is incompatible with the possession of absolutely certain knowledge

C2) Naturalism is false

The argument for P1a hinges on the nature of doubt. A doubt about the truth of a proposition *p* is possible so long as one is not absolutely certainty of the truth of *p*, for if I am not absolutely certain that *p* is true, then from my perspective it is (epistemically) possible that *p* is false, and so it is intelligible and possible to raise a genuine doubt as to whether *p* is true. If P1a is true, and if naturalism is indeed incompatible with the possession of absolutely certain beliefs, then the very belief in the truth of naturalism is hostage to a doubt about its truth. Hence, as the first argument purports to show, the very belief in naturalism is by the naturalist own lights susceptible of being doubted. And that is another way of presenting the argument against global scepticism. If a view entails some form of global scepticism, then the view is untenable because by its own lights the view can't be stably endorsed since it can be doubted (see Chapter VII and Chapter VIII).

P1b is vindicated by the minimal contention that we do at least possess absolute certainty for propositions like *I exist* (the sum), *I am thinking* (the cogito), *there is something rather than nothing*. If naturalism is incompatible with the existence of such absolute certainties, then naturalism is false.

Now, of course, the most important and controversial premise is P2. Here is an argument in favour of P2.

The argument from contingency

A1) If naturalism is true, then the structure of cognition depends on contingent factors (e.g., evolution, education, history, forms of life, sociological factors, power, and so on); (I take this to be a definitional feature of naturalism as understood here).

A2) If these contingent factors were different, then the structure of cognition would be different as well;

A3) It is impossible to argue in a non-circular and non-question begging way that our *actual* form of cognition is the truth-conducive one, namely the one that leads to a true representation of the way things are; the reason is that any such argument will rely on our actual cognition, thereby implicitly take it as truth-conducive.

A4) We can't have absolute certainty if we can't conclusively exclude the possibility that our

actual form of cognition is not the truth-conducive one.

P2) Therefore, naturalism is committed to the impossibility of absolute certainty[351].

Since we are inescapably committed to the possibility of achieving certain knowledge, and since we also do possess absolutely certain knowledge, naturalism, as understood in the argument from contingency, turns out to be untenable and false. This is one way of putting pressure on particular attempts to explain why we have the phenomenology that we happen to have. These two arguments against naturalistic explanations, and in particular the argument for the claim that naturalism is incompatible with the existence of absolute certainties, need of course to be further explored. But I wanted to present them in this broad outline in order to make it vivid why the explanatory step is of fundamental importance for a transcendental constitutivist and more generally for any critical (in the Kantian sense) reflection about the possibility of knowledge.

Even if we assume that the arguments against naturalist explanations are sound, still we don't know why we have the phenomenology that we happen to have. One option is to say that there can't be any explanation because the structure of cognition is a primitive fact. This option will isolate experience from the natural order, for if we think of consciousness as dependent, in some way or another, on the natural order, then we can't think of its features as being as they are for no explanation – the history of nature explains why it ended up being as it is. This is why to take this option is to move towards the direction of some form of transcendental idealism which understands consciousness itself as somehow "outside" from the natural order (I am thinking here of Husserl's transcendental idealism in particular). Another option is to leave the question unanswered

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351This argument focuses on the *form of cognition*, namely the fundamental acts of cognition, that is, questioning and judging on the basis of grounds. Yet, a parallel argument for the same conclusion can be offered by focusing on the *contents* of our cognition, while keeping fixed the form cognition. In fact this parallel arguments is arguably the one that most people have in mind when they worry about the relativistic consequences that a naturalist view about the nature of our mind might have. Here is the argument when we focus on the contents of our cognition.
A1) If naturalism is true, then the contents of our experiences, of our judgments and questions depend on contingent factors (e.g., evolution, education, history, forms of life, sociological factors, power, and so on);
A2) If these contingent factors were different, then we would have different experiences, and judgments and questions with different contents. As a result, we would end up having a representation of the way things are that is different from the one we now have.
A3) It is impossible to judge in a non-circular and non-question begging way whether our *actual* judgments are the true ones. To the extent that we can make sense of the idea that different conceptual scheme lead to incompatible representations of the way things are, we can't argue in a non-circular and non-question begging way that our current conceptual scheme is the truth-conducive one.
A5) We can't have absolute certainty if we can't exclude the possibility that our judgments systematically depend on factors that might not be truth-conducive.
P2) Naturalism is committed to the impossibility of absolute certainty.

and to stress the following point. If the transcendental idealism that connects truth with our cognition is correct – namely the idea that it is not intelligible to think of something like an access to the truth that isn't shaped like our way of accessing the truth – then one might simply insist that the explanatory question doesn't put any pressure against the pretension of our mind to know the truth. For even if there could be different phenomenologies, still the present one is the only one which gives rise to the problem of discovering the truth and which has the means to represent the way things are and thus to solve its own problem.

In so far as we ask questions, we are condemned to take ourselves to be in a position to discover the truth, and this fact puts constraints on the way in which we can understand our mind and our human adventure. Moreover, the fact that we are absolutely certain of some truths (like our existence) constraints us to think that our mind can indeed have an absolutely certain access to the way things are. What view can provide an explanation of the existence of our cognition that is not in contradiction with our capacity to have such knowledge?

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