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THE MOMENT OF TRUTH

AN ESSAY ON THE ETHICS OF PHILOSOPHICAL BELIEFS

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I had a strange dream, or half-waking vision, not long ago. I found myself at the top of a mountain in the mist, feeling very pleased with myself, not just for having climbed the mountain, but for having achieved my life's ambition, to find a way of answering moral questions rationally. But as I was preening myself on this achievement, the mist began to clear, and I saw that I was surrounded on the mountain top by the graves of all those other philosophers, great and small, who had had the same ambition, and thought they had achieved it. And I have come to see, reflecting on my dream, that, ever since, the hard-working philosophical worms had been nibbling away at their systems and showing that the achievement was an illusion. (Hare 2002, 269)

INTRODUCTION

All areas of philosophy are characterized by dissent. Philosophers disagree among themselves in innumerable ways, and this pervasive and permanent dissensus is a sign of their inability to solve philosophical problems and present well-established philosophical truths. Every philosopher who has not buried his head in the sand knows or at least suspects this.

The saddest aspect of this failure is that philosophers have been unable to solve philosophical problems which deeply affect all of us existentially — problems whose stakes were the highest out of all theoretical problems. What I have in mind are questions like “Is there a God?”; “What is the relationship between mind and body?”; “Do we have free will and moral responsibility?”. Philosophers have also been unable to solve those big philosophical problems whose existential weight cannot be compared to the above three, but whose theoretical significance is unquestionable. These include, for example, questions such as “What is the distinguishing mark of mental phenomena?”; “Do we have direct access to a mind-independent reality in veridical perception?”; “Do physical objects have spatiotemporal parts?”. And philosophers have not managed to solve those philosophical problems that have no particular existential weight or even theoretical significance, either. Some examples are questions (concocted in philosophical laboratories, so to speak) such as “What kind of entities are holes?”; “Are disjunctive properties genuine properties?”; “Can one unintentionally produce abstract artifacts?”.

I’m not claiming that the community of philosophers has no philosophical knowledge at all. All I’m saying is this: if we collected all consensually (or at least near-consensually) accepted philosophical truths, the result would be painfully modest — especially in light of the big questions that have been left unanswered.

For what would this collection include? On the one hand, it would have trifles like “Nobody can know false propositions”; “Our dream experiences fail to provide adequate justification of our beliefs about the external world”. On the other hand, it would include some “If...then...” type statements such as “If the intentional properties of our mental states supervene on the phenomenal properties of those states, then intentional contents cannot be Russellian propositions”; “If proper names are rigid designators, then there is a posteriori necessity”. Moreover, it would include some assertions about the virtues and difficulties of various

philosophical theories, such as “Presentism has the virtue of being consistent with the phenomenology of time, but it has a hard time finding adequate truth-makers for true propositions about the past”; “Class nominalism has the virtue of not being committed to the existence of multilocal entities, but has a hard time reducing necessarily coextensive properties.” Apart from these, the collection would include some conceptual distinctions like “*De dicto* modalities must be distinguished from *de re* ones”, or “Determinism must be distinguished from fatalism”. Finally, it might include negative substantive truths such as “The Leibnizian thesis that »All true propositions are analytic« is false”; “The thesis that »all mental states are behavioral dispositions« is false”. And that’s all — I believe I have just listed all kinds of consensually accepted philosophical truths.

Now, if you reflect on the facts that (1) during the 2500 year-old history of philosophy, philosophers most certainly did not want to come up with merely these kinds of truths, as they had “a somewhat” more ambitious dream, namely to come up with *substantive* and *positive* truths, and that (2) pervasive and permanent dissensus about philosophical problems is a clear sign of the philosophers’ failed attempts in this regard, and their failure to fulfil their commitments no matter how hard they try, then you will be hard pressed to conclude that philosophy is a *failed epistemic enterprise*. Now, if philosophy is a failed epistemic enterprise, then we, philosophers are members of a failed epistemic enterprise, and our philosophical beliefs are beliefs held by the participants of a failed epistemic enterprise.

This is not a heartwarming thought, so much so that in my opinion, we are epistemically and morally obliged to face philosophy’s epistemic failure, to react to the fact that the community of philosophers (to which we belong) does not know substantive and positive philosophical truths, and to try to account for the epistemic status of our own substantive and positive philosophical beliefs in light of the foregoing. For without doing this, we cannot take epistemic responsibility for our substantive philosophical beliefs — we cannot seriously and sincerely believe in their truth.

It is wrong for us to act as if everything were in perfect order. It is wrong for us to deny philosophy’s epistemic failure (for example, by saying that “Doing philosophy has nothing on earth to do with seeking truths — philosophers misinterpret their own intentions when they think they are making attempts to solve philosophical problems”). And it is wrong for us to play down philosophy’s epistemic failure (for example, by saying that “There is nothing bad

in philosophy's not having the final answers — our life would be bleak indeed if we could announce winners in philosophy and thereby make all philosophers regurgitate these winners' theses all the time"). These, I believe, are unworthy and unscrupulous reactions.

* * *

Apart from unworthy and unscrupulous reactions, in light of philosophy's epistemic failure, philosophers have four ways to think about the epistemic status of their substantive philosophical beliefs.

Some philosophers think that they have succeeded in supporting their substantive philosophical beliefs with compelling arguments and urge others to formulate such knock-down arguments. They think that the only way for us to rationally stick to our substantive philosophical beliefs in light of the pervasive and permanent dissensus in philosophy is to be able to compellingly justify them. For if we have compelling arguments for p , then it is irrelevant that others think that p is false.

I cannot identify with this proposal. For one thing, I cannot seriously and sincerely believe that *it is precisely me* who has managed to formulate knock-down philosophical arguments for my substantive philosophical beliefs. For another thing, the philosophers who are absolutely convinced that they have knock-down arguments thereby vindicate an epistemically privileged position to themselves, but they cannot appropriately (non-circularly) justify this privilege or superiority in any way. No to mention that they must consider their interlocutors to be their epistemic inferiors, as they are unable to see the compelling nature of their arguments. And I feel that this is not the right attitude — to me, it is not an example to be followed.

Other philosophers believe that the pervasive and permanent dissensus in philosophy is a clear proof of the inadequacy and unsuitability of philosophy's truth-seeking and justificatory tools for establishing substantive philosophical truths, so our philosophical beliefs are inappropriately justified. But if they are inappropriately justified, then we cannot rationally stick to them and have to suspend all of them, however difficult and painful this may be.

I cannot identify with this reaction, either. I have several reasons, but now I will mention just

the three most evident ones. First, I don't think that anyone could argue for this skeptical (or rather, *meta*-skeptical) view in a non-self-defeating way. Second, I think that the only way for me to actually and absolutely suspend all of my substantive and positive philosophical beliefs is to sink into intellectual apathy, and I would not like that to happen. Third, concerning our moral beliefs, I feel that I would be wrong to try to suspend them because if I did so, then I would have to toss a coin (or choose something similar) to decide what to do in difficult situations.

Yet other philosophers think that we can rationally stick to our beliefs even if we are unable to justify them compellingly. We do the right thing if we develop a philosophical theory that is in harmony with our fundamental pre-philosophical convictions and defend it from possible objections by showing that none of those are compelling. Once we have successfully accomplished these two tasks, we can rationally believe in our substantive philosophical theses, as we have no reason to suspend them.

I can't identify with this approach, either. It says that my fundamental pre-philosophical convictions are epistemically unjustified; they are at most practically justified, which means no more than I couldn't suspend them without damaging my personal integrity and my cognitive household. Thus, this approach boils down to the following: "I can rationally believe that *p* is true because (1) I can show that no compelling argument can be made against *p* and (2) *p* is in harmony with my fundamental pre-philosophical convictions that I cannot suspend". Now, I think that this kind of justification for *p* doesn't entitle me to seriously and sincerely believe that *p* is *true* — to believe that *p* really describes things as they are. It merely entitles me to say "I think that *p* is true" — and this is clearly not enough for my taking epistemic responsibility for the truth of *p*.

Finally, some philosophers think that all philosophical problems are meaningless, and so are all of our philosophical beliefs, consequently we cannot rationally stick to any of them.

I can't identify with this standpoint, either. For one thing, I think that all arguments are bad (and may be self-defeating) whose intended conclusion is that some appearance-creating mechanism is responsible for the existence of each philosophical problem — that the surface grammar and the pictoriality of language systematically mislead me. For another thing, in my opinion, all therapeutic exercises are ineffective if they are aimed at curing me of my

engagement with philosophical questions so they stop troubling me unnecessarily.

So where does all this lead? As far as I can see, these four reactions (or metaphilosophical visions outlined in a nutshell) make up the logical space, *and yet* I cannot commit myself to any of them with a clear intellectual and moral conscience. Unfortunately, it means that I cannot reassuringly account for the epistemic status of my philosophical beliefs. I can't stick to them in cognitive peace, with epistemic responsibility and without self-deception, and I can't abandon them in cognitive peace, either, with epistemic responsibility and without self-deception.

Of course, you may say that I am the only one to blame for my “writhing” and “impotence”, as I want to account for the epistemic status of my philosophical *beliefs*. Well, yes. If I were able to do philosophy in the spirit of “I don't believe that *p* (I don't hold *p* to be true), I only *accept p* as a working hypothesis” — that is to say, if my commitment to *p* were of no significance and consequence to me —, then everything would be in perfect order. In this case, I'd really be able to do philosophy without any cognitive uncertainties, because I could remain personally uncommitted while arguing for or against any philosophical theory.

I'm ambivalent about this strategy. On the one hand, I'm a little bit envious of those philosophers who don't have any definite philosophical beliefs (or have no philosophical beliefs at all), and so, after all, it makes no difference to them which philosophical theory they develop. Thus, they are able to serve philosophy's “great” and “noble” goal of populating the logical space more and more densely with well-constructed and consistent philosophical theories with a clear conscience. On the other hand, this is not an option for me, because I *do have* some substantive philosophical beliefs, and they are not arbitrary. For example, I don't merely accept the philosophical thesis that we are morally responsible for certain acts of ours, and the falsity of physicalism is not a mere working hypothesis to me, because I *believe* that we are morally responsible for certain acts of ours and I also *believe* that physicalism is false — and these beliefs are significant to me, as I have a personal stake in them.

To make a long story short, I do have some substantive philosophical beliefs, so I cannot ignore these while doing philosophy. At the same time, it seems to me that there is no such metaphilosophical vision that I could commit myself to in order to reassuringly account for my substantive philosophical beliefs with a clear conscience. Since, in my opinion, most

philosophers resemble me in that they, too, have some substantive philosophical beliefs, and since — dare I say — my misgivings about the above four metaphilosophical visions are not entirely groundless and idiosyncratic, it may seem to others that we come up against an *aporia* in trying to account for the epistemic status of our substantive philosophical beliefs. In short, we find ourselves in a situation with seemingly no way out.

* * *

I will try to raise the issue differently, with the emphasis laid elsewhere. I assume that you already have some substantive philosophical beliefs — that you hold certain substantive philosophical theses to be true. I also assume that you have philosophical justification for your beliefs — you can underpin their truth with philosophical arguments. And I also assume that you are able to respond to objections to your philosophical beliefs — you can put a finger on some or other weak spots in them. In short, I assume that you have done your best to be able to assert your philosophical views in a form which is as strong and immune to objections as possible.

Nevertheless, even if all the above is correct, you may be faced with three quite nagging questions:

(1) Can you seriously and sincerely believe in the truth of your philosophical theses, and take epistemic responsibility for the truth of your philosophical beliefs in light of the fact that there probably are some philosophers whom you consider your epistemic peers and who, holding opposing philosophical views, do not share your philosophical beliefs? This question is nagging because the fact that your epistemic peers do not share your philosophical beliefs may seem to you to be just as strong evidence for thinking that your philosophical beliefs are false as the evidence based on which you have committed yourself to their truth.

(2) Can you seriously and sincerely believe in the truth of your philosophical theses, and take epistemic responsibility for the truth of your philosophical beliefs in light of the fact that you have good reason to think that they are shaped and determined by factors (upbringing, socialization, personality traits, epistemic character etc.) which are not under your control and have nothing to do with their truth or falsity? This question is

nagging because if your philosophical beliefs are really determined by such factors (for example, you believe that p is true because you wish that p be true, or you believe that p is true because you were socialized to hold p true), then it may seem to you that your philosophical beliefs are irrational.

(3) Can you seriously and sincerely believe in the truth of your philosophical theses, and take epistemic responsibility for the truth of your philosophical beliefs in light of the fact that philosophy as an epistemic enterprise has failed — philosophers have been unable to solve philosophical problems and come up with compellingly justified substantive philosophical theses? This question is nagging because it may seem to you that the best explanation of philosophy's epistemic failure is that its truth-seeking and justificatory tools are inadequate and unsuitable for establishing substantive philosophical truths — and if this is the case, then your substantive philosophical beliefs are inappropriately justified, and consequently you cannot rationally stick to them.

What is common to these questions or challenges is that none of them concerns the propositional content of your philosophical beliefs — they do not bring out the special internal difficulties of your philosophical views. Neither do they concern whether you were maximally circumspect when making sure that you have true rather than false beliefs. Each of these challenges arises “*beyond*” the point where you have already carefully underpinned your philosophical views with arguments.

And yet, you cannot wave them aside. *You would not be right* to say: “As I have done my best to underpin my philosophical beliefs with the strongest arguments possible, I do not have to address these challenges — I can safely dismiss them”. In short, you have an epistemic and at once moral duty to face these *further* (meta-level) challenges, *too, regardless* of *what* philosophical beliefs you have and *how* good your arguments underpinning these are.

Of course, these questions or challenges can be given stock answers aimed at reassuring you. For example, you may reply to question (1) that “It is indeed reasonable that I am to some extent egocentrically biased concerning my philosophical beliefs, because the evidence based on which I committed myself to the truth of p has more weight than the fact that others think p to be false”. A possible reply to question (2) could be that “Doxastic determinism is false, I freely decide to believe in the truth of such and such philosophical theses; moreover, even if

doxastic determinism were true, it would still not follow that my philosophical beliefs cannot be rational”. You may address question (3) by saying either that “Philosophy’s epistemic failure is not a challenge for me, because I have compelling arguments for my philosophical beliefs”, or that “I do not need any compelling arguments to be able to rationally stick to my philosophical views that elaborate my fundamental pre-philosophical convictions, as I can show that no objection of compelling force could be made against them”.

In my book, I deal with the third of these challenges — I only tangentially discuss the first, and almost not at all the second. The reason why I focus on the third one is that in my opinion, out of the three, this challenge is the greatest one that we as philosophers must face. I also focus on it because facing this challenge offers me the most convenient conceptual framework to show that however we want to, we cannot reassuringly account for the epistemic status of our substantive philosophical beliefs — we cannot take epistemic responsibility for their truth.

To sum up, I will not argue that we must suspend our substantive philosophical beliefs. Rather, I will try to show that we cannot commit ourselves in cognitive peace, with epistemic responsibility and without self-deception to any of the above reactions (as metaphilosophical visions) to philosophy’s epistemic failure. If I were to name the view I side with, I would call it “*meta-meta-skepticism*” for lack of a better name, immediately adding that instead of attempting to develop a stable metaphilosophical conception, I offer a dialectical path, which — inevitably, I think — leads to intellectual breakdown.

PART ONE

CHAPTER ONE

PHILOSOPHY AS AN EPISTEMIC ENTERPRISE

Philosophy is a heterogeneous formation, which involves quite a wide variety of activities. That is why I'm not even trying to define it. But despite its heterogeneity, there is a (more or less uniform) philosophical tradition, whereby the main purpose of doing philosophy is to assert *substantive truths* about the nature of reality, knowledge, the right action, and to justify the asserted propositions with a claim to truth *compellingly*. In other words, to provide reassuring answers to a variety of metaphysical, epistemological and ethical questions — to solve philosophical problems. I will refer to this tradition as the *epistemic or truth-seeking tradition of philosophy*.

The philosophers of this tradition do not set themselves the less modest goal of exploring logically possible (i.e. consistent) stances on philosophical problems. They do not consider making types of propositions such as “If you claim that mental content is broadly individualized, you must deny a priori self-knowledge” or “If you claim that meanings are in the head, you must deny that meaning determines reference”. The epistemic tradition of philosophy is not content with such non-substantive truths. It does not seek to show which propositions *can be true at the same time*, but to show which propositions *are true simpliciter*. Seen from the epistemic tradition of philosophy, this more modest goal is at most preparatory work, since the main purpose of philosophy is to establish the truth — to choose the true set of propositions from the various consistent sets of propositions.

I don't claim that all great dead philosophers belonged to the epistemic tradition of philosophy. But I do claim that *most* great dead philosophers were followers of this tradition. They pursued philosophy in the spirit of this tradition and interpreted their own activities in the same spirit. Anyone who denies that most of the great dead philosophers intended to assert compellingly justified substantive truths doesn't have acquaintance of the history of philosophy. Nor do I claim that the trust in the success of philosophy as an epistemic enterprise today is as unbroken as, say, at the dawn of the modern era. But I do claim that this tradition *is alive today*. Anyone who considers this tradition to be a thing of the past doesn't have acquaintance of contemporary philosophy. And anyone who simply denies the existence of this philosophical tradition doesn't have acquaintance of philosophy itself, or (worse but

more likely) misinterprets the intention of most philosophers, either deliberately or due to some bias.

Of course, one could argue whether or not a philosopher is a follower of the epistemic tradition. Obviously, there are clear and less evident cases. Parmenides, (middle and late) Plato, Aristotle, Saint Thomas Aquinas, Descartes, Malebranche, Spinoza, Leibniz, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Marx and Husserl certainly pursued philosophy in the spirit of this tradition, Jacques Derrida, Pierre Hadot and Richard Rorty certainly didn't, and although I would classify Saint Augustine, Hegel, Kierkegaard or Heidegger, for example, as followers of the epistemic tradition, the jury is still out on them. In short, all I am saying is that there was and still exists a truth-seeking philosophical tradition, not as a small minority, but — at least until the 20th century — as a prevailing trend, and it is not on display in the wax museum of the history of ideas but is a living tradition.

In this chapter I characterize the epistemic tradition of philosophy by outlining its defining features. I just want to say some platitudes or commonplaces about it. Of course, this is not an easy task. The epistemic tradition itself is also a heterogeneous and very old (2500 years) formation, so my characterization will inevitably be simplistic and sketchy, and will surely contain minor or major distortions and anachronistic wording. In other words, everything is much more complex, complicated and colorful than I will describe it — my characterization would require deeper analysis and further refinement at every point.

If the main aim of doing philosophy is the assertion of substantive truths (justified true propositions) — as the members of epistemic tradition of philosophy claim it to be —, then *the only* epistemic value of philosophy on its own right is *knowledge*. So, in characterizing this tradition, I need to clarify two key concepts. On the one hand, the concept of *truth* or true propositions, since the followers of this tradition want to assert truths. On the other hand, the notion of philosophical *justification*, because the members in this tradition try to justify (moreover, compellingly justify) their philosophical beliefs.

1 Truth

Many truisms have been mentioned about the concept of truth (see Lynch 2009, 7–13; Wright 1998, 60). Now, I will only pick out the three most innocent of them to characterize those truths that philosophers intend to assert. In what follows, I will use the term “proposition” to refer to truth-bearers — in my intention, in a neutral sense, without any metaphysical commitment. Here they are:

- (1) A proposition is true if things are as it says they are.
- (2) Two contradictory propositions cannot both be true.
- (3) Truth does not admit of degrees.

Truism (1) tells us just that: the truth of a proposition depends on how things are (whatever they may be and however they may be), and not on how we would like them to be. It says what Aristotle did: “[T]o say of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not, is true” (*Metaphysics* 1011b25).

In my opinion, (1) is indeed an innocent truism, without any substantive commitment to the nature of truth. By asserting (1) I do not commit myself to the correspondence theory of truth, according to which a proposition p has the property of being true if and only if p is in the appropriate correspondence relation to the world that exists independently of p . (1) says nothing about correspondence relations or the mind-, language- or proposition-independent world — it says nothing about what kind of special relationship there is between the truth-bearer and the world described and represented by it, or about what kind of entities (facts, events, objects, properties etc.) the world must contain in order for the truth-bearers to be in the appropriate correspondence relation to the world.

What truism (1) says is this: when we claim about a proposition that it is true (e.g. it is a true proposition that “All ravens are black”), what we claim is that things *are in a certain way* — things are (the world is) in a way that all ravens are black. We can have a more formal expression of this by using the so-called (T)-schema:

(T) The proposition that p is true if and only if p .

Whatever meaningful sentence we replace “ p ” with, we will get a true biconditional, and every appropriately replaced instance of (T) is necessarily true and can be known a priori. Thus (T), says the same as (1), which everyone accepts, independently of the ways in which they attempt to define truth more accurately or informatively. Debates about theories of truth among correspondists, coherentists, pragmaticists, verificationists, pluralists, primitivists and deflationists are almost exclusively about the epistemic status of (T)-biconditionals. In other words, they are about whether the (T)-biconditional is sufficient in itself to clarify the concept of truth, or if it is not, how it should be amended in a way that complies with the next schema, i.e. what we should put in the place of “F” in the formula (T+) below.

(T+) The proposition that p is true if and only if p is F.

(T+) actually says more than (1) and there is no agreement among theorists of truth about what “F” should be replaced with in it. I, however, don’t have to deal with this problem, as my asserting (1) commits me only to (T), but not to (T+).

Truism (2) is the principle of non-contradiction, according to which either p is true or not- p is true, but they cannot both be true. No one thinks that the propositions “There are immortal souls” and “There are no immortal souls” are both true. No one thinks that the propositions “Every event has a cause” and “Not every event has a cause” are both true. No one thinks that the propositions “All of our ideas are innate” and “Not all of our ideas are innate” are both true.

There are kinds of logic that reject the principle of non-contradiction (see e.g. Priest – Beall – Armour-Garb 2004). This is undoubtedly an interesting thing, but I don’t have to deal with it now. For philosophers of the epistemic tradition certainly do not want to commit themselves to inconsistent propositions, whatever they think about paraconsistent logic.

Truism (3) says that if a proposition is true, then it is not a little bit, somewhat or very but *completely* true. (If you think this claim is false because there are “half-truths”, complex propositions that can be part true and part false, e. g. “Napoleon was born in Corsica and died in Paris”, consider a simple subject-predicate proposition). As opposed to the justification of

our beliefs which can have degrees, truth or falsehood cannot. As Frege puts it: “Truth cannot tolerate a more or less” (Frege 1918/1956, 291). Just think about it. If there was a truth which was only partially true, then that would mean that it would be partially false. Or, if there was a falsehood which was only partially false, then that would mean it is partially true. To be honest, I don’t think anyone could take the dispute of Theists and an Atheists seriously if they concluded that the proposition “There is a God” is very true, but a little bit false, and the proposition “There is no God” is very false but is a little bit true.

Some philosophers dispute (3). In their view, truths have degrees indeed (see e.g. Sainsbury 2009, 56-63). But I don’t have to deal with this possibility now, because the members of the epistemic tradition certainly do not want to assert half or so-so true, but only completely true propositions.

In the light of these three (I think genuinely innocent) truisms, I claim the following platitude or commonplace. The followers of the epistemic tradition want to assert truths, not falsehoods. They want to assert propositions that describe things as they really are; in doing so, they do not want to describe things as they rather are, but completely as they are; and they try to be consistent when developing their philosophical theories, that is, they are careful not to endorse contradictory propositions as both true. For example, when Berkeley argues that there is no mind-independent existence, he tries to assert something true and not false. When he says *esse est percipi*, he asserts that things are the way the proposition “*esse est percipi*” describes them. He does not claim that idealism is rather the truth than materialism, or that materialism is less true than idealism, but that idealism is completely true and materialism is completely false. And he does everything so that his view can be consistent — for example, he denies that it is meaningful to distinguish primary and secondary qualities.

But there is something else here that is perhaps worth clarifying — beyond the truisms about the concept of truth. Some may think (and some *actually* think) that I can only claim that the epistemic tradition of philosophy is aimed at asserting substantive truths if I also commit myself to metaphysical realism — the thesis that reality (at least its non-mental and non-linguistic part) is mind- and language-independent, which means that the entities whose existence we posit are what they are, independently of any kind of representation, i.e. the way we get to know them does not affect their nature in any way. And some may also think, in connection with this (and some people *actually* think) that I can say that the epistemic

tradition of philosophy is aimed at asserting substantive truths only if I hold the task of philosophy (or at least metaphysics) to consist in revealing reality's fundamental structure. That is, if it should carve, using Plato's phrase, "nature at its joints" (*Phaedrus* 265e), to find "perfectly natural properties" (Lewis 1986, 61), since "only an elite minority are carved at the joints, so that their boundaries are established by objective sameness and difference in nature" (Lewis 1984, 227).

All this is false. It is false because from the fact that someone rejects metaphysical realism and advocates antirealism (also known as deflationary metametaphysics) it follows that they are still doing metaphysics. As Theodore Sider puts it: "There is no ametaphysical Archimedean point from which to advance deflationary metametaphysics, since any such metametaphysics is committed to at least this much substantive metaphysics: reality lacks a certain sort of structure" (Sider 2013, vii). If antirealists commit themselves to the image of reality as an "amorphous lump" (Dummett 1981, 577), in which, to use Putnam's metaphor, we need to use a "cookie-cutter" (Putnam 1987, 35) to experience the world in order, then they hold a substantive metaphysical view. And since they do, the question of truth or falsehood obviously arises about their thesis. Let's take this well-known passage:

Now as we thus make constellations by picking out and putting together certain stars rather than others, so we make stars by drawing certain boundaries rather than others. Nothing dictates whether the sky shall be market off into constellations or other objects. We have to make what we find, be it the Great Dipper, Sirius, food, fuel or a stereo system. (Goodman 1984, 158)

It is evident that Goodman wants to assert a substantive philosophical truth with the above, namely that in contrast to metaphysical realism, things are in a certain way *only to us*, and they are not in any way in themselves. If someone thinks that Goodman's statement does not have a claim to truth and cannot be true or false, they are probably not aware of the meaning of the words "true" and "false".

2 Justification

The members of the epistemic tradition of philosophy do not merely wish to declare their philosophical theses, nor do they only hope that they are the lucky ones whose theses are true, but also try to justify the truth of their theses in a compelling manner.

Candidates for compelling philosophical justifications almost always take the form of some philosophical *argument* — the majority of the followers of this tradition want to make compelling argument(s) in support of their theses. That is to say:

[A]rguments [...] are the best when they are *knockdown*, the arguments *force* you to a conclusion, if you believe the premises you *have* or *must* believe the conclusion, some arguments don't carry much *punch*, and so forth. A philosophical argument is an attempt to get someone to believe something, or they want to believe it or not. A successful philosophical argument, a strong argument, *forces* someone to a belief. (Nozick 1981, 4, italics in original [What Nozick claims here is some other philosophers' view, not his own; he himself doesn't believe in the possibility of knock-down philosophical arguments.])

However, some philosophers (typically, phenomenologists) do not attempt to use arguments in support of the truth of their philosophical theses — *they want to point to* certain truths *directly*. They suggest a procedure in which certain truths are “revealed” or “uncovered” to us — these truths “step out from hiding into the open”.

2.1 Compelling justification — knock-down philosophical arguments

A compelling argument can only be one that has (or can be transformed into) a deductive form. The conclusion of a deductive argument necessarily (apodictically) follows from the premise(s). It is such an argument that *if* its conclusions follow from its premises and *if* its premises are true, *then* it is impossible for its conclusion to be false. (For a stripped down, deductive-formal formulation of famous philosophical arguments, see Bruce – Barbone 2011.)

The usual definition (obviously in need of fine-tuning) of a compelling argument is as follows:

Argument A (deductive form) is compelling if and only if (1) a person who sufficiently understands *A*'s premises and the epistemic reasons for them can only irrationally deny the truth of the premises, and (2) a person who recognizes that *A*'s conclusion follows by the laws of logic from *A*'s premises can only irrationally deny *A*'s conclusion.

In philosophy, there are three kinds of arguments intended to be compelling. I briefly introduce them below.

2.1.1 Infallible arguments

According to a great number of philosophers belonging to the epistemic tradition, a logically valid deductive argument is a compelling one if and only if its premises are *infallibly* justified, and consequently the justification of the premises *guarantees* their truth and, indirectly, the truth of the argument's conclusion.

It is easy to see why these philosophers try to find arguments with infallibly justified premises. The reason is that if their arguments are good, then their conclusions cannot under any circumstances be false — they are necessarily true. Thus, these philosophers will not have to worry about someone refuting their arguments in the future.

Candidates for compelling infallible arguments must contain premises that are justified *directly*, that is, *noninferentially* — otherwise there will be either infinite regress or circular reasoning. As far as I can see, *three* different types of propositions have been proposed as non-inferred and infallibly justifiable.

The first type includes propositions beginning with the words “it seems to me...”. For example, “It seems to me that there is a red spot with a visual depth before me.” This proposition is infallibly justified because I experience it so, and how I experience something (how it seems to me) cannot be mistaken. In other words, the first type of infallibly justified

propositions is made up of certain subjective truths justified by our phenomenological-introspective insights.

The second kind involves necessary conceptual truths. According to some philosophers, for example, it is a necessary conceptual truth that “God is an infinitely perfect being”; “Where there is a mistake, there must also be truth”; “If F is not an essential property of x , then x can exist without F .” In their view, these propositions are infallibly justified because if we understand the concepts contained in these propositions, we will see with a single intuitive “glimpse” that these propositions are necessarily true.

The third kind includes such propositions as “Every event has a cause”; “There are entities that are self-caused”; “There are indivisible entities (atoms)”; “Physical space is Euclidean”; “Physical objects have essential properties”; “There are things that exist in themselves and there are things that need something else to exist”; “What has happened cannot be undone or changed”. These propositions are not mere conceptual truths. Each one “goes beyond” our concepts and is *about reality* itself. Many in the epistemic tradition think that there may be some infallibly justified propositions about reality itself — we are able to “glimpse” into the necessary structure of reality.

I’m not sure if the reason for introducing this third category is clear to everyone, but I have to introduce it to avoid painting a misleading picture of the epistemic tradition by merely saying that in this tradition the set of infallibly justified propositions includes only credible phenomenological-introspective accounts and analytical truths in the Humean sense. It seems to me that philosophers before Hume did not make a sharp distinction between necessary conceptual truths (i.e. analytical truths) and necessary truths that go *beyond* our concepts (i.e. non-analytical necessities) — in my division the second and third kinds of infallibly justified propositions, which correspond to a priori analytic and a priori synthetic true propositions in Kant’s division. It was Hume who narrowed down the range of necessary truths to analytic truths, and now, I will introduce this third category to indicate that the philosophers of the epistemic tradition have also considered many propositions as infallibly justified necessary truths that are neither describe some phenomenological fact nor are merely true by virtue of the meaning of the terms they contain.

This is what I refer to with the metaphor of “intuitive glimpse into the necessary structure of reality”. Because of the possibility of this “glimpse”, many have long believed that, for example, not only the analytical proposition that “Every effect has a cause” but also the non-analytical proposition that “Every event has a cause” is infallibly justified.

Let me show two well-known candidates for compelling arguments that contain infallibly justified premises. One is the Cartesian argument for the real distinction between body and soul. Here is a possible reconstruction of it, brought to a deductive form:

(1) I can conceive clearly and distinctly that I can exist only with the property of thinking and without the property of extension, and I can conceive clearly and distinctly that my body can exist only with the property of extension and without the property of thinking.

(2) If I can conceive clearly and distinctly that thing x can exist only with property F and without property G (where F is not identical with G), and I can conceive clearly and distinctly that thing y can exist only with property G and without property F (where G is not identical with F), then x can exist without y and y can exist without x .

(3) If x can exist without property G , then G is not an essential property of x and if y can exist without property F , then F is not an essential property of y .

Therefore:

(C1) It is not my essential property that I have a body.

Furthermore:

(4) If it is not my essential property that I have a body, then I really differ from my body.

Therefore [from (C1) and (4)]:

(C2) I really differ from my body.

Why do some people think that the premises are infallibly justified? About (1) because propositions beginning with “I conceive clearly and distinctly that...” function like those that begin with “it seems to me...”, and as such are justified by our phenomenological-introspective insights. (3) and (4) express necessary conceptual relations the truth of which is directly seen. I’m uncertain about (2). You may think of (2) that its truth is directly apparent from the concept of property and the meaning of modal terms. In this case, (2), like (3) and (4), is a necessary conceptual truth. But you may also think that (2), as opposed to (3) and (4), is not a mere conceptual truth but rather the result of an intuitive “glimpse” into the necessary structure of reality.

Let me also present a contemporary philosophical argument (also intended to be infallibly justified) before you would think that only the great dead philosophers attempted to do produce such things. Here is a received reconstruction of David Chalmers’ conceivability argument:

(1) Zombies (creatures that are identical with us in physical, functional and intentional properties, but lacking phenomenal ones) are consistently conceivable.

(2) Everything that is consistently conceivable is metaphysically possible.

Therefore:

(C1) Zombies are metaphysically possible.

Furthermore:

(3) If zombies are metaphysically possible, then physicalism is false.

Therefore [from (C1) and (3)]:

(C2) Physicalism is false.

Why do some people think that the premises are infallibly justified? The case of premise (1) and (3) is relatively clear. In the case of (1), we intuitively see that the concept of “a being

with such and such physical, functional and intentional properties” does not include the concept of phenomenal property. Premise (3) is a conceptual truth derived from the definition of physicalism and that of zombies. Here is the conceptual relation: according to physicalism, physical properties necessarily determine mental properties. If, however, zombies are metaphysically possible, then it is not true that all mental properties necessarily supervene on physical properties — for zombies are beings that have exactly the same physical properties as us, yet do not possess phenomenal properties. There is disagreement about the status of premise (2). I tend to think that those who hold (2) true, consider (2) to be a necessary conceptual truth — even if some “training” or “support” is needed to recognize this conceptual truth, such as the introduction of two-dimensional semantics which “performs” the necessary conceptual clarifications (see Chalmers 2002; 2004).

Many philosophers of the epistemic tradition deny that infallible philosophical arguments are possible or, if they don’t deny that, then they think that there can be compelling philosophical arguments *other* than infallible ones. They think that the fact that a philosophical argument contains a fallibly justified premise does not entail that it cannot be compelling. Thus, these philosophers allow in their arguments intended to be compelling some premises that are not infallibly justified — which in principle may turn out to be false. At the same time, they think that the truth of these premises can only be irrationally denied by anyone who sufficiently understands them and the epistemic reasons behind them.

There are two kinds of philosophical arguments intended to be compelling with fallibly justified premises. One category includes so-called modest transcendental arguments. The other includes arguments that contain an empirically justified premise.

2.1.2 Modest transcendental arguments

Modest transcendental arguments must be distinguished from strong transcendental arguments. The latter are intended to be *infallible* arguments — their structure looks like this:

(1) p .

(2) If p , then q . (Since p is a condition of possibility of q .)

Therefore:

(C) q .

For example:

(1) I think.

(2) If I think, (then) I exist.

Therefore:

(C) I exist.

Contrary to strong transcendental arguments, modest transcendental arguments are *fallible*. They contain a proposition p (premise p) that can be false. At the same time — and that is the crucial point! — even if p is false, we cannot rationally reject p . The structure of modest transcendental arguments looks like this:

(1) p . (Meaning that even if we do not know that p , we cannot rationally reject p .)

(2) If p , then q .

Therefore:

(C) q . (Meaning that even if we do not know q , we cannot rationally reject q .)

What is interesting to us now is premise (1) of this argument, which the proponent of the argument always supports in this way: we could only rationally reject p if p were true, and so we cannot rationally reject p under any circumstances. At first glance, this type of justification may seem strange — let me explain. Let's look at the following modest transcendental argument, which I borrow from Robert Lockie, who takes it from Epicurus (see Lockie 2018):

(1) We have epistemic duties. (Meaning that even if we do not know that we have epistemic duties, we cannot rationally deny the existence of our epistemic duties.)

(2) If we have epistemic duties, then determinism is false.

Therefore:

(C) Determinism is false. (Meaning that even if we do not know that determinism is false, we cannot rationally reject that determinism is false).

Here is the thing. Our epistemic duties (in the deontic sense) are about what to believe in certain situations. For example, if, after a thorough investigation, a detective sees that all evidence is in favor of *X*'s guiltiness, then he has a duty to believe that *X* must be prosecuted. This would be so even if *X* happened to be the victim of a global and inscrutable conspiracy, whose members deliberately arranged the circumstances so that all available evidence pointed to *X*'s guiltiness, for the detective — due to his epistemic limitations — cannot rationally think that *X* is a victim of a global and inscrutable conspiracy.

The situation is similar with the premise (1) of the above argument. According to this, we cannot get into an epistemic situation in which we must rationally conclude that we have to abandon our belief in our epistemic duties. The reason why we cannot is that even if all the evidence pointed to the non-existence of our epistemic duties, it still would not be rational to reject our belief in them. It would not be rational because, if we did not have any epistemic duties, then in light of the evidences, we *would not have to* endorse or reject *any* of our beliefs. Now, if we recognize all this, then we must also recognize that, even if we do not have any epistemic duties, it is not rational to reject our belief in them.

Turning to premise (2) and (C): if we also have good reasons to believe that we can have epistemic duties only if determinism is false (otherwise, our epistemic duties may require us to do things that we cannot do due to deterministic laws of nature), then we also have good reasons to believe the conclusion of the argument, which says that we cannot rationally reject that determinism is false. And if we cannot rationally reject that determinism is false, then we must accept that determinism is false.

Of course, this last step is debatable. The fact that we cannot rationally reject p does not logically entail that p . However, if we think we cannot rationally reject p , then it seems that we also must think that p .

Whatever the truth about this may be, one thing is certain: if modest transcendental arguments work, they compel us in a peculiar way. They compel us to consider p rationally irrefutable, and then show us that recognizing the rational irrefutability of p entails that we must hold p true, and thus we must indirectly hold the conclusion of the argument true, even though we have no proof (infallible justification) of p 's truth and so we cannot consider the conclusion of the argument to be infallibly justified.

Let me give another example borrowed from Guy Kahane (see Kahane 2017):

(1) There are differences in values between actions and beliefs. (Meaning that even if we do not know that there are differences in value between them, we cannot rationally deny the existence of differences in value between them.)

(2) If there are differences in values between actions and beliefs, then there are values.

Therefore:

(C) There are values. (Meaning that even if we do not know that there are values, we cannot rationally reject the existence of values.)

Premise (1) can be false: in principle, it is possible that nihilism is true and everything is equally worthless. In this case, however, *it would make no difference* what we do or believe, because one act or belief is no better than another. Thus, *it would also make no difference* whether we believe (in this case, correctly) that there are no values or we believe in something else. Thus, if nihilism were true, we could not rationally think that — from any point of view, even from an epistemic one — it is good to believe in nihilism. But if, even from an epistemic point of view, it was not good for us to believe in nihilism (even if nihilism were true), then we would have no rational basis to believe in nihilism. This is because, from an epistemic point of view, it can only be good to believe in anything or reject any belief if nihilism is false and maintaining certain beliefs is epistemically better than maintaining other

beliefs. Now, if we realize all of this, then we cannot rationally reject that nihilism is false and there are differences in value among actions, beliefs and things.

Turning to premise (2) and (C): if there are differences in value, then there must be values. The modest transcendental argument above, at least according to its proponents, shows that we cannot rationally reject the existence of values. And if we cannot rationally reject that there are values, then we must commit ourselves to the existence of values.

2.1.3 Compelling philosophical arguments with empirically justified premises

How can any philosophical argument intended to be compelling contain an empirically justified premise at all? Here is the thing. According to some philosophers, the natural sciences deliver some compellingly justified theses whose truth is rationally unquestionable for those who sufficiently understand these theses and the evidence adduced for them — even if they are not infallibly justified. Peter van Inwagen, for example, puts it this way: “[A]nyone who does not agree that continents are in motion either does not fully appreciate the data and argument a geologist could put forward in support of the thesis that continents are in motion, or else is intellectually perverse” (van Inwagen 2009, 21). Now, if, like van Inwagen, a philosopher thinks that certain scientific theses are indeed compellingly justified (i.e. their truth can be denied only irrationally [or by perversion]), and he includes them as the premises of philosophical arguments, then he may hope that he will soon end up having many compelling philosophical arguments.

Nathan Ballantyne argues just this way (see Ballantyne 2014). He tries to show that if one thinks that there are compelling (knock-down) arguments in the natural sciences, then one must think that there are such arguments in philosophy as well. Here is one of his examples:

(1) It is an established (compellingly justified) astronomical thesis that the Earth is in motion.

(2) The proposition “The Earth is in motion” entails the proposition “There is motion”.

Therefore:

(C) (Contrary to Zeno's teaching) There is motion.

Another example, in the spirit of Ballantyne, could be as follows:

(1) It is an established (compellingly justified) geological thesis that there are continents.

(2) The proposition that "There are continents" entails the proposition that "Existence monism is false".

Therefore:

(C) (Contrary to Spinoza's teaching) Existence monism is false.

According to Ballantyne, these arguments must be considered as compelling philosophical arguments by anyone who thinks that the scientific arguments in favor of the propositions "The Earth is in motion" and "There are continents" are compelling. This is because if certain scientific theses are compellingly justified, then their compellingly justified status is *transferred* to the corresponding philosophical theses. In other words, if p is a compellingly justified scientific thesis, and p implies q (where q is a philosophical thesis), then q will also be a compellingly justified thesis, i.e. a compellingly justified philosophical thesis. Simply put, q as a philosophical thesis *inherits* the compellingly justified status of p as a scientific thesis.

I'm quite sure that most figures in the epistemic tradition would not endorse the above two arguments as compelling. Let's take the scientific theses "The Earth is in motion" and "There are continents". To be able to consider them as compellingly justified, you must hold that the thesis "Perception is reliable" is compellingly justified, too — for the justification of the theses "The Earth is in motion" and "There are continents" certainly requires perceptual experiences. But, the thesis that "Perception is reliable" can only be justified *in a philosophical way* — for example, one must refute the skeptical hypothesis known as "Brains in a vat".

Now, based on the above, one could argue in the following two ways for the claim that compelling philosophical arguments cannot contain empirical premises. One option is to say that the justification of the scientific hypotheses “The Earth is in motion” and “There are continents” *presupposes* the justification of the philosophical thesis “Perception is reliable”—one could compellingly justify the former only if the latter is already compellingly justified. This would mean that scientific theses cannot be compellingly justified without philosophical grounding, consequently the philosophical theses corresponding to them cannot inherit their allegedly “compellingly justified” feature. The other option (and this point is perhaps even more important) is to say that there can be no empirical premises in compelling philosophical arguments because *the standards* which determine what counts as a compelling argument in the natural sciences are *different* from the standards which determine what counts as a compelling argument in philosophy. Even if *p* counts as compellingly justified in the natural sciences, and even if *p* implies *q*, this kind of justification of *q* does not meet the standards of philosophical justification, for these are significantly stricter than the standards of scientific justification.

At the same time, we must also see that in the eyes of some philosophers of the epistemic tradition, the above two arguments are compelling. Here is the most important consideration in favor of it. We must start by assuming that science is the *only* truly successful epistemic enterprise of mankind. Now, if we assume that (i) the best scientific theories are the *best* theories *simpliciter*, (ii) scientific theories are literally about reality, and (iii) after careful consideration of all evidence available to us, it is irrational to deny the truth of the propositions “The Earth is in motion” and “There are continents”, then the above two arguments are compelling indeed. Philosophical knowledge is far behind the natural sciences in terms of reliability, so it is downright *displeasing* for philosophers to appeal to higher standards of justification.

There is disagreement among philosophers concerning the validity of philosophical arguments containing empirically justified premises, and this disagreement brings out well an important and “chronic” *fault line* in the epistemic tradition. The question is: “What should the relationship be between the epistemic tradition of philosophy and the natural sciences?”. The fronts are clear.

One may think this:

The natural sciences are the *sole custodians* of the knowledge of reality. Consequently, we must give up (whether we like it or not) theses based on purely philosophical speculations that run counter to the theses of the natural sciences. Furthermore, since certain scientific theses can only be irrationally denied, those philosophical arguments whose premises include these scientific theses can also be compelling.

But one might also think this:

Philosophy has stricter standards of justification than the natural sciences. There may be compelling scientific arguments for the claim that contemporary astronomy and contemporary geology are the best *scientific* theories, but there can be no compelling scientific arguments for the claim that astronomy and geology are the best theories *simpliciter*. This is because the latter is *par excellence* a philosophical and not a scientific question. So, there can be no scientifically justified premises in compelling philosophical arguments.

All in all, the crucial question is this: “Is it true that scientific theories are the best theories *simpliciter* of reality?” A philosopher’s answer to this question determines on which side of the fault line he stands. If he answers yes to it, then he thinks he can include scientific theses among the premises of compelling philosophical arguments. If he answers no to it, then he thinks he cannot include such theses.

2.1.4 Two more brief clarifying remarks

The first one: all philosophical arguments intended to be compelling are *a priori*. This assertion is relatively easy to misunderstand — I will try to make it clear.

By *a priori* justification we mean justification that does not rely on experience. But this does not mean that there is no need for experience in any sense to justify a proposition *a priori*. In order to *understand* proposition *p* that you want to justify, that is, to *master* the concepts included in *p*, you need experience. The justification of the proposition “Everything that is red is colored” is *a priori*, but understanding the concepts “red” and “colored” is impossible

without perceptual experience. This means that the justification of proposition p is a priori because if you understand p , then you need *no further* experience in order to see the truth of p .

Let's move on. The assertion that all philosophical arguments intended to be compelling are a priori does not mean that all their premises are a priori justified. If this assertion were true, then those that contain empirically justified premises would be excluded *ab ovo* from among them. Rather, it means that once *you have already* accepted their premises as justified, you *no longer* need experience to see the truth of their conclusions. In other words, the a priori justification of philosophical arguments amounts to the following: by *already* accepting propositions p_1 , p_2 , p_3 as justified, you *combine* p_1 , p_2 , and p_3 into a logically valid deductive argument. That is, *once* you have the (not necessarily a priori) justified premises at your disposal, you don't have to move out of your armchair; and the a priori work phase of making philosophical arguments is what you do in the armchair.

Some think that there are two philosophical arguments intended to be compelling which do not rely on experience at all. One is the ontological argument for the existence of God. According to this, the concept of God (as an infinitely perfect being) cannot be consistently conceived without considering God as existing, therefore there is a God. The other is that the concept of God (as an infinitely perfect being) cannot be conceived consistently, and therefore there is not God. Apart from these two, all philosophical arguments intended to be compelling require experience for their justification to a greater or lesser extent — but they are a priori arguments all the same.

The second clarifying remark: all philosophical arguments intended to be compelling are justified in an *internalist* way. I will explain this briefly as well.

According to justification internalism, our beliefs can be justified only by factors to which we have access in our first-person perspective, that is, “from within.” One of the most convincing arguments in favor of internalism starts from the deontological concept of justification. This argument says that if our belief in the truth of proposition p is justified, then we must be able to say why we believe in the truth of p . If we cannot say why, then our belief is not rational, and so we cannot take *epistemic responsibility* for it. Now, we can only take epistemic responsibility for those beliefs whose justifying factors are accessible in our first-person perspective. In other words, we can only claim p *responsibly* if we are not only justified in

believing that p is true, but we are also justified in believing that we are justified in believing that p is true.

Justification externalism claims that our belief p is justified if p is in a proper relationship with the truth at issue; if our belief p is caused, in an appropriate way, by a fact or state of affairs that makes p true; if our belief p is produced by a reliable (truth-conducive) belief-producing process. Now, since, according to externalism, the justified status of our beliefs is partly dependent on external factors that can be inaccessible to our subjective perspective, our access to all justifying factors from a (“internal”) first-person perspective is not a *necessary condition* of the justified status of our beliefs.

Why is it that internalist justification is the only game in town when it comes to philosophical arguments intended to be compelling? The reason is that we believe p to be justified *because of our philosophical arguments*, and so we obviously have access from a first-person perspective to the factors that justify p — the premises of our own arguments and our own inference. And this is true even if we happen to argue for justification or knowledge externalism. As Alvin Goldman puts it: “I think my analysis shows that the question of whether someone knows a certain proposition is, in part, a causal question, although, *of course*, the question of what the correct analysis is of » S knows that p « is *not* a causal question” (Goldman 1967, 372, italics mine).

In other words, the epistemic tradition of philosophy seeks to answer the question: “The truth of which propositions should we believe in?”. It seems obvious that if we want to answer this question, we *need to* have access to the reasons for deciding what to believe — and this access is not provided by externalism. In brief, on the basis of the justification externalism, we can only say that *once we already* believe in the truth of p , and we have no internalist justification of p , this does not in itself entail that p is not justified. However, if we have a purely externalist justification for p , we cannot know on the basis of it whether we should believe in the truth of p or not.

2.2 Compelling justification — without philosophical arguments

Most philosophers in the epistemic tradition seek to justify their theses with compelling philosophical arguments. However, there is another type of procedure designed to “force truth into the open”, namely the phenomenological method.

In the eyes of certain philosophers, the phenomenological method is doomed to failure. David Bell, for example, says that “There is something dismal and dogmatic about a philosophy whose utility, cogency and plausibility depend essentially, not on objective arguments, rational analysis, or the critical consideration of evidence available to all, but rather on the individual philosopher’s having undergone some esoteric experience” (Bell 1991, 162). In this section, I attempt to show how phenomenologists try to arrive at truths with the use of the phenomenological method, and how they try to provide compelling justifications for their theses.

To do this, I need to answer three questions. Firstly, what is the goal of phenomenology and what does the phenomenological method look like? Secondly, why do phenomenologists think that by using the phenomenological method they can arrive at compellingly justified philosophical truths? Thirdly, why do phenomenologists think that compelling phenomenological justification is not an argumentative activity that eliminates all inference?

Ad one: The goal of phenomenology is to systematically analyze conscious experiences from the first-person perspective — to explore and plausibly and exhaustively describe how things seem *to* the subject, from the subject’s *point of view*.

Phenomenology has strict methodological rules. One is that we have to take extra care not to let commonsense and scientific convictions affect our investigation. They have to be bracketed, so to speak, during the course of our phenomenological investigations. This is the only way for us to focus on the *intrinsic* characteristics of the subject’s conscious experiences — those characteristics which the subject’s conscious experience has from his own perspective. This methodological principle is called the “phenomenological reduction”. As Husserl puts it:

[According to phenomenological reduction]: every transcendent (that which is not given

to me immanently) is to be assigned the index of zero, that is, its existence, its validity is not to be assumed as such, except as at most the *phenomenon of a claim to validity*. I am to treat all sciences only as phenomena, hence not as systems of valid truths, not as premises, not even as hypotheses for me to reach truth with. This applies to the whole of psychology and the whole of the natural sciences. (Husserl 1907/1990, 4, italics in original)

The other rule is that phenomenology should not describe particular experiences from a subjective point of view, but the nature of *types* of experience. This is what distinguishes phenomenology from pure introspection. For example, in describing visual experience, phenomenologists are not supposed to say that “This red mailbox appears to me in such and such a way and that yellow tram appears so and so”, but they are to reveal the essential phenomenological characteristics of visual experience itself. They should undertake to describe those phenomenological characteristics that are *common* to all visual experience and which distinguish visual experience from all other types of experience. In a word, they are supposed to reveal the *inherent and distinctive* features of visual experience. This methodological principle is called “eidetic reduction”. In Husserl’s words:

Phenomenological psychology in this manner undoubtedly must be established as an “eidetic phenomenology”; it is then exclusively directed toward the invariant essential forms. For instance, the phenomenology of perception of bodies will not be (simply) a report on the factually occurring perceptions or those to be expected; rather it will be the presentation of invariant structural systems without which perception of a body and a synthetically concordant multiplicity of perceptions of one and the same body as such would be unthinkable. (Husserl 1927/1971, 81)

Let me quote Husserl again to recapitulate these two methodological principles of phenomenology:

If the phenomenological reduction contrived a means of access to the phenomenon of real and also potential inner experience, the method founded in it of “eidetic reduction” provides the means of access to the invariant essential structures of the total sphere of pure psychological process. (Husserl 1927/1971, 81)

Ad two: According to Husserl, the right application of the phenomenological method provides infallible (apodictic) justification. As he puts it:

At every point this analysis is an analysis of essences and investigation of the general states of affairs which are to be built up in immediate intuition. Thus, the whole investigation is an *a priori* one, though, of course, it is not *a priori* in the sense of mathematical deductions. What distinguishes it from the “objectivizing” *a priori* sciences is its methods and its goal. *Phenomenology proceeds by “seeing”, clarifying, and determining meaning, and by distinguishing meanings.* [...] It does not theorize or carry out mathematical operations; that is to say, it carries through no explanations in the sense of deductive theory. (Husserl 1907/1990, 46, italics in original)

Or:

It is the spirit of [phenomenology] to count nothing as really scientific which cannot be fully justified by the evidence. In other words, [phenomenology] demands proof *by reference to the things and facts themselves, as these are given in actual experience and intuition.* Thus guided, we, the beginning philosophers, make it a rule to judge only by the evidence. Also, the evidence itself must be subject to critical verification, and that on the basis, of course, of further available evidence. (Husserl 1929/1998, 6, italics in original)

And here is perhaps the most elucidating passage:

Thus as little interpretation as possible, but as pure an intuition as possible [...]. In fact, we will hark back to the speech of the mystics when they describe the intellectual seeing which is supposed not to be a discursive knowledge. And the whole trick consists in this — to give free rein to the seeing eye and to bracket the references which go beyond the “seeing” and are entangled with seeing, along with the entities which are supposedly given and thought along with the “seeing”, and, finally, to bracket what is read into them through the accompanying reflections. The crucial question is: Is the supposed object given in the proper sense? Is it, in the strictest sense, “seen” and grasped, or does the intention go beyond that? (Husserl 1907/1990, 50–51)

I will not leave Husserl alone with what he has just said — I will try to say more clearly what he claims. Phenomenology undertakes to describe conscious experiences from the first-person perspective. Now, the description and systematic categorization of conscious experience is, according to Husserl, apodictic (and thus compellingly justified) because the characteristics of our conscious experience are given to us directly, intuitively (*anschaulich*). And there can be no meaningful doubt about the proper phenomenological description of conscious experience because, in this case, the distinction between appearance and reality is meaningless. Doubts such as the following are meaningless: “For me, this and that conscious experiences appear in this and that way, but is it not possible that they actually appear differently?”. Or, “For me this and that conscious experiences *appear as F*, but is it not possible that they actually appear *not as-F* but *as-G*?”.

Ad three: Why does Husserl think he can manage without arguments? It is quite common for philosophical arguments to contain premises whose justification is based on some phenomenological insight. For example, arguments in favor of the sense-datum theory often have the premise that the objects of our perceptual experiences are given to us in a different way than, say, the objects of our thought acts or beliefs. However, Husserl does not treat these types of phenomenological insights as the premises of some arguments — in his view, we cannot leave the sphere or space of our conscious experience achieved through reductions. We have to stay *within* it. Thus, we do not rely on inferences to provide us with insights about more and more truths, but, as the passages quoted above say, we obtain these insights in such a way that each of them is accompanied by intuitive (*anschaulich*) evidence. Conversely, according to Husserl, a philosopher begins to argue and infer when he has already *fallen out of* the space of conscious experience. That is, for lack of a better method.

Husserl gives the example of Descartes. He sees it this way: Descartes reached a truly apodictic (phenomenological) evidence with the “ego cogito”. And thus, says Husserl, for the first time in the history of philosophy, “[He] uncovered for us [...] through the apodictic *I am* a new kind and an endless sphere of being” (Husserl 1929/1998, 11). But at the same time, he made a fatal mistake: “[He used] the *ego cogito* merely as an apodictic proposition and as an absolute primitive premise” (Husserl 1929/1998, 11). In other words, he began to reason, argue, infer, speculate — instead of remaining in the space of conscious experience he had “opened” with the “ego cogito”. Had he stayed in it, he would have been able to build all his philosophical insights on such an intuitive-apodictic evidence as the initial “ego cogito”. Here

is his critique:

To make all this intelligible it is first necessary to do what was neglected by Descartes, namely, to describe the endless field of the ego's transcendental experience itself. His own experience, as it well known, and especially when he judged it to be apodictic, plays a role in the philosophy of Descartes. But he neglected to describe the ego in the full concretion of its transcendental being and life, nor did he regard it as an unlimited workproject to be pursued systematically. (Husserl 1929/1998, 12)

Thus, Descartes has fallen out of the endless field of the ego's transcendental self-experience. But what do those who do not fall out do?

To be a meditating philosopher who, through the meditations, has himself become a transcendental ego, and who constantly reflects about himself, means to enter upon of ten endless transcendental experience. It means to refuse to be satisfied with a vague *ego cogito* and instead pursue the steady flux of the *cogito* toward being and life. It means to see all that which is to be seen, to explain it and penetrate it, to encompass it descriptively by concepts and judgements. But these latter must only be terms which have been derived without alteration from their perceptual source. (Husserl 1929/1998, 13–14)

Or:

[Contrary to Descartes] we remain true to radicalism in our self-examination and with it to the principle of pure intuition. We must regard nothing as veridical except the pure immediacy and givenness in the field of the *ego cogito* which the *epoche* has opened up to us. In other words, we must not make assertions about that which we do not ourselves *see*. (Husserl 1929/1998, 9, italics in original)

Let me summarize. Phenomenology (at least the Husserl-initiated version) intends to assert exhaustive philosophical truths about the nature and phenomenological characteristics of conscious experience. It intends to justify these true propositions infallibly — it tries to trace them all back to an “intuitive fulfillment” (*anschauliche Erfüllung*). Since its justification is always based on intuitive fulfillment, phenomenological justification is inherently internalist.

The phenomenologist does not seek to come up with deductive arguments, nor does he intend his phenomenological insights to be taken as premises of philosophical arguments. He tries to stay in the field of experience gained through the two reductions all along, and sees its systematic exploration as the job of his philosophy. Thus, phenomenology is that part of the epistemic tradition of philosophy which breaks with this tradition in that it abandons philosophical arguments, but does so in order to achieve the ultimate goal of this tradition of making philosophy a successful epistemic enterprise, in Husserl's words, "rigorous science".

3 Finishing touches

The epistemic tradition of philosophy cannot be characterized in a completely unbiased manner. Obviously, my characterization also has some debatable elements — its focal points can be especially controversial. For example, you can easily think that I have unnecessarily discussed the phenomenological method in detail, because phenomenologists (even if they deny it) argue just as much as other philosophers do, except that they "rename" the consequence relation as intuitive fulfillment.

But there are two more things I need to talk about. One is that you can say that the epistemic value of philosophy as an epistemic enterprise is not only knowledge, but also *understanding*. Not only do we want to know how things are, but we also want to understand them.

I acknowledge that the goal of the epistemic tradition can be articulated in the terminology of "understanding", too — although "understanding" is a more nebulous concept than "knowledge". Be that as it may, I have to make three short stipulations.

(1) Philosophical understanding concerns either the question "Why is it true?" or the question "How do the pieces fit together?". As for the question "Why is it true?": someone understands proposition p if they can give reasons for why p is true. And as for the question "How do the pieces fit together?": someone understands proposition p if they are able to see the exact place of p in a broader context, namely a larger coherent system of propositions.

(2) Philosophical understanding must be factive. In relation to the question "Why is it true?" it means that one cannot understand why p is true if p is false, and in relation to the question

“How do the pieces fit together?” it means that the broader conceptual framework in which one sees the place of *p* cannot be inconsistent and must not contain false propositions that are relevant to the truth of *p*.

(3) One cannot understand *p* if one does not know that *p*. That is, knowledge is the fundamental and, in its own right, the only epistemic value of doing philosophy — understanding, although important, is of secondary importance as it has no epistemic value independently of knowledge (compellingly justified true philosophical belief). (Some argue that special cases are conceivable when someone understands *p* but does not know that *p* [see Pritchard 2009], but this doesn’t apply to philosophical understanding.)

Considering these stipulations, here is what I can say: according to the epistemic tradition, the task of philosophy is to give a *correct* (reason-based) *explanation of why* things (whatever they may be) are the way they are and to provide a *veridical view* of how things relate to each other. As far as I can tell, philosophers of the epistemic tradition could content themselves with this description.

The other thing is that you can also say that my characterization owes an explanation of what secures the continuity of the epistemic tradition. What is it that determines the persistence of this tradition?

I think the continuity of the epistemic tradition is based on the continuity of the *philosophical problems* discussed. That is, the followers of this tradition have been discussing *more or less similar* philosophical problems. Neither extreme is right. Nor is the idea of *philosophia perennis*, which says that the historical context of philosophical problems is completely irrelevant, and that *in abstracto* there is a defined set of philosophical problems carved in stone once and for all. Nor is the idea that philosophers respond exclusively to the philosophical challenges of their own times, and consequently philosophical problems cannot be separated at all from the historical context in which they were articulated.

In a word, my proposal is to steer a middle course. The historical context of philosophical problems is sometimes (quite) relevant and sometimes (quite) not. Sometimes it can be ignored (without loss), sometimes we have to take it seriously into consideration. The significance of the historical context of philosophical problems comes in degrees.

I don't think it is possible to deny with an impartial mind that for example, Anselm of Canterbury (in his *Proslogion*) or, Thomas Aquinas (in his *Quinque viae*) attempts to do the same (or at least something very similar) as Richard Swinburne did centuries later (see Swinburne 1990), namely to present philosophical arguments for the existence of God as an infinitely perfect, personal, compassionate and providential being. The difference in their historical contexts — that atheism did not exist in Anselm's and Aquinas' time, while it does in Swinburne's — does not affect their common goal. Neither does the fact that Anselm and Aquinas intended their arguments to be taken as infallible justifications, whereas Swinburne only as a probabilistic (abductive) inference.

I think it is also impossible to deny impartially that Descartes' demon hypothesis and Hilary Putnam's "Brains in a vat" scenario 350 years later *are similar in a relevant way*. They both are based on the conceivability of situations in which the external world does not exist, but these scenarios are subjectively indistinguishable from the one in which it does exist. Descartes and Putnam both aim to show that these skeptical scenarios do not or cannot occur. The two scenarios are different in their rhetoric, the arguments are also different, and the skeptical challenge has a different role to play in Descartes's than in Putnam's work. However, they both attempt to refute skepticism — they share their intended conclusion that the mind- and experience-independent world exists.

I don't dispute that the historical context can indeed be important in certain cases. Let's take Plato's theory of forms, which contemporary philosophers take to be a suggested solution to the problem of universals. Plato says: "[T]here are certain forms from which these other things, by getting a share of them, derive their names — as, for instance, they come to be like by getting a share of likeness, large by getting a share of largeness, and just and beautiful by getting a share of justice and beauty" (*Parmenides*, 130e–131a). Most contemporary metaphysicians read this passage to mean that if a number of distinct particulars share a property, then they get a share in the same form, i.e. they instantiate the same universal.

However, someone could object that the context of Plato's theory of forms is so different from the contemporary one that it makes no historical sense to place it among contemporary metaphysical theories. For example, as opposed to contemporary Platonist realists, Plato's commitment to the existence of forms is conceptually connected to his conviction that the

object of knowledge is unchanging (see *Republic* 477a–480a) and, also in opposition to contemporary realists, Plato probably limits his thesis to a certain class of entities by aesthetic-moral considerations, saying that, for example, there are no forms for mud and “anything else totally undignified and worthless” (*Parmenides* 130c–d).

To this I can only reply that just because the original context of the Theory of Forms is indeed relevantly different from the context of contemporary philosophy, Plato is still a realist. Just because his motivations are different, he still asserts that the type identity of distinct particulars (or at least some of them) is explained by the numerical identity of the appropriate form. The objection is simply based on an exaggeration because, on the appropriate level of abstraction, Plato’s solution *is* a solution to the problem of universals. In addition, his view is constantly present in the contest of rival theories.

Another thing about Plato is that it can be seen without any kind of abstraction that what Kebes was eager to find out about by Socrates’ deathbed is *exactly the same* question (see *Phaidon* 102b–107b) as you would be after 2500 years later if, God forbid, you were standing by your beloved teacher’s death bed — namely, whether the soul of this adored being will go on to live after the death of his body, or everything will become grey and eventually, darkness will take place. If someone keeps on saying that the two historical contexts are different, and so Kebes is interested in something *completely different* than we would be today, they only confirm that they are living in a prison of their own hermeneutic prejudice.

I don’t just want to dwell on examples, however. There is a rather negative consequence of the view which denies that philosophers have been dealing with more or less the same problems since the dawn of philosophy — even if there have been new problems born or gone. If there is no continuity in posing philosophical questions but rather, philosophers in every era look for answers to different and unrelated philosophical problems that are completely inseparable from the historical context of their formulation, then what could be the rationale for the history of philosophy? Generally speaking, we have only one reason to engage with the writings of classical authors in the hope of gaining true philosophical benefits instead of pure interest in the history of ideas, namely that we trust that our great ancestors were largely occupied with questions similar to our own.

Overall, then, I think that the *broadly construed* condition of identity (or rather the condition

of persistence) of the epistemic tradition is secured by the *broadly construed* identity (more precisely, persistence) of philosophical questions and philosophical problems passed down from generation to generation. I cannot adduce compelling arguments for this thesis, but I think it is the natural and the least biased view.

CHAPTER TWO

PHILOSOPHY AS A FAILED EPISTEMIC ENTERPRISE

The epistemic failure of philosophy lies in the fact that followers of the epistemic tradition of philosophy have been unable to solve philosophical problems. They could not present substantive philosophical truths. They could not compellingly justify their views. But they set out to do these things. And since they undertook this task, and since their aspirations were not crowned with success, it is no exaggeration to say that their activities have failed.

The obvious and indisputable proof of this failure is the permanent disagreement that spreads to all areas of philosophy. For if there is no consensus among the competent stakeholders in solving philosophical problems, then philosophical problems have not been solved. There are few more self-evident conceptual connections than this. Here is a parallel case:

When, at the point in the TV crime drama where the detective gathers her team in the incident room and asks “What do we know?”; she is asking for a pooling of resources: her aim is to compile a list of (purported) facts about suspect that can be used as a basis for further investigation. That list will generally consist of individuals’ items of knowledge, of course, but it would be of no help at all to investigation if it were to turn out that different team members’ item of knowledge only *counted* as knowledge in the absence of salient alternatives, or from their own “cognitive-value perspective”. Were PC Smith to convey her (purported) knowledge — based on excellent evidence — by saying “The suspect lives in her mother’s house”, and PC Jones to convey *her* (purported) knowledge — equally well grounded in a different set of evidence — by saying “The suspect shares a flat with her sister”, the detective would quite rightly conclude that the team collectively does not know what the suspect’s living arrangements are. (Beebee 2018, 10–11, italics in original)

Despite the fact that the conceptual connection between the “lack of consensus among philosophers”, the “lack of compelling philosophical justification” and the “lack of solutions to philosophical problems” is clear, let me add a few remarks to these.

Firstly, we could legitimately say that philosophers solved a philosophical problem only if

there was a broad consensus among them about the solution to the problem at issue. No sane person would call it a reassuring solution to a philosophical problem if a group of philosophers said that p was true, another group said that q was true, a third group said that v was true, and a fourth group said that z was true whilst p , q , v and z are mutually incompatible propositions. In short, the existence of a broad consensus is a necessary condition of considering a philosophical problem solved and of the community of philosophers knowing the truth corresponding to it.

Secondly, there must have been (and must be) philosophers who have held the right view on a philosophical problem. Since we can formulate every problem of philosophy as a yes-or-no question, and since there were both philosophers who said “yes” and who said “no”, there were clearly some philosophers who were right. If we take the philosophical question “Do immortal souls exist?”, then either those who thought “Yes, they do” or those who thought “No, they do not” were right. Now, the fact that some philosophers took the right view on certain issues, yet they could not convince their opponents of the truth of their views shows that their arguments were not compelling — they could not compellingly justify their correct view.

Third, the pervasive and permanent dissensus in philosophy indicates that there has never been a compelling justification in its history for any substantive philosophical theory, view, or thesis.

Someone could, of course, say that the existence of pervasive and permanent philosophical disagreements *does not entail* that some philosophers do not (could not) have a compelling justification for their view. It may easily be the case that certain “true believer philosophers” have compelling arguments, but the “false-believers” do not understand them, and thus are unable to see that they are compelling.

I cannot rule out this possibility, but I find this to be a highly implausible supposition. It seems to me that philosophers in dispute with each other understand each other’s arguments quite well, they just think that these arguments are bad. In other words, the fact that philosophers have not been able to come up with philosophical arguments in which no points could be disputed by other philosophers must be interpreted as meaning that philosophers have not produced any compelling arguments and not as meaning that “false-believers” have

been unable to recognize the compelling status of compelling philosophical arguments.

Fourthly, even if there had already been some compelling philosophical arguments around, we would not be in a better position — we would just reiterate the disagreements. We should not say that philosophers fail to agree about the solutions of philosophical problems, but that they fail to agree on who do and who do not have compelling arguments. Now, whether or not there are compelling philosophical arguments that philosophers do not recognize as such, the pervasive and permanent disagreement in philosophy clearly and certainly shows that philosophers have failed to solve philosophical problems. Either because there are no compelling philosophical arguments, or because philosophers do not recognize that there are some and which ones they are.

In this chapter, I attempt to give a big picture of the failure of the epistemic tradition. Firstly, I illustrate the serious extent of dissensus in philosophy — on virtually any substantive question. In what follows, I discuss whether there has been progress in philosophy, and if so, in which sense of the term — what are the things that we now know but earlier didn't.

Like in the previous chapter, here too, I would only like to assert some platitudes. And it is not easy to do that, just like in the previous chapter. While discussing philosophy's epistemic failure, it is not easy to avoid exaggerations and keep the discussion balanced. Nevertheless, I will try my best to achieve that.

1 A catalogue of problems

Let me start with metaphysics, one of the most important areas of philosophy. Firstly, philosophers disagree about *what kind of things there are*. Some philosophers hold that immanent universals exist; entities which can be wholly present at different locations at the same time and more of them can be present at one time in one location in space. Other philosophers deny this — they do not agree that multi-local entities exist. Some philosophers think that we need to introduce abstract entities into our ontology — things that exist outside of spacetime. Others deny this — they do not think we should introduce these. Some philosophers think we should commit ourselves to the existence of possible worlds, while others are anti-realist on this issue. And so on and so forth. If you take the entities posited by

philosophers (universals, abstract objects, agents that are not subject to the laws of physics, possible worlds, Cartesian minds [which have no physical properties], tropes, gluons, scattered objects, multi-local particulars, bare dispositions, spatio-temporal parts, arbitrary undetached parts, gunks etc.), there is not one of these the existence of which is unanimously agreed on by philosophers. And, vice versa, just think of the kinds of entities which play fundamental roles in our everyday ontology, such as familiar physical objects (desks, chairs, ashtrays) or mental states (beliefs, thoughts, desires) — there is no complete consensus about their existence among philosophers, either. Mereological nihilists deny the existence of the former, while eliminativists deny the existence of the latter.

Secondly, there is disagreement about *what the nature* of the things we consider to exist *consists in*. Let me just give one example. Some philosophers think that physical objects are bundles of universals. Others think they are bundles of tropes, and yet others think that physical objects are not just bundles of properties but also have an additional and separate metaphysical constituent, the substrate. Yet again, others think that physical objects are instances of natural kind universals. There are some who think that the discovery of the nature of physical objects is not the task of metaphysics but of the natural sciences. However, as I mentioned above, there are also quite a few philosophers who deny the existence of familiar physical objects and only commit themselves to that of elemental particles. They think that desks do not exist, only molecules do which are arranged desk-wise.

Thirdly, there is disagreement about *how* the posited kinds of entities (or ontological categories) *are connected to one another*. In other words, there is no agreement even about which other types of entities we must commit ourselves to in consequence of our ontological commitment to a certain type of entity. For example, certain nominalists think that nominalism can only be defended against the counter-argument from coextensive properties if one accepts Lewis' genuine modal realism; that is, one may only assert that "There are only particulars and properties do not exist on their own right" if one also asserts that "There are countless other worlds besides our actual world which are categorically identical to this one". Other nominalists do not wish to commit themselves to the plurality of worlds; they think it is too big a price to pay. They think that endorsing nominalism is conceptually independent of endorsing genuine modal realism.

Fourthly, there is also disagreement about *the nature of ontological debates*; there is no

consensus among philosophers in meta-ontology either. Some meta-ontologists think that the majority of their ontological debates is verbal — everything depends on how we interpret the existential quantifier. Antirealists accept the thesis of quantifier variance and think that the word “exist” has a number of possible meanings which all play the role of the existential quantifier through certain inferential role properties. In contrast to this, ontological realists claim that although there is a number of possible meanings of the word “exist”, it is always interpreted as the so-called “ontologese” language quantifier in ontological debates.

Let’s take *epistemology*. Epistemologists disagree about whether in justifying our beliefs about the external world, we should have first-person access to the factors that justify our beliefs or not. Epistemological internalists think that we should, but externalists think that we should not. There is also disagreement about whether there are propositions the truth of which is a priori knowable, and if so, whether this can be explained by reference to a semantic fact or a kind of rational intuition. There is no consensus among philosophers about what to do with skeptical arguments concerning the existence of the external world. Should we deny the *KK* thesis? Or the deductive closure principle? Should we redefine the concept of knowledge perhaps? *Horribile dictu*, shall we concede that skepticism is the right view and admit that we do not have knowledge of the external world?

Consider the *philosophy of language*. Philosophers of language disagree about whether proper names refer via descriptions or without them, directly. The first view is held by those who endorse the description theory of proper names, the second is by those who endorse the direct reference theory. There is no consensus in the fundamental question of whether external factors constitute the meaning of our words and sentences. Semantic internalists think they do not, but semantic externalists think the opposite. Moreover, philosophers of language do not agree about the connection between thought and language either. Some think that language is more basic, others think that thought is more basic, and yet others think that neither have priority.

Let’s take the *philosophy of mind*. Philosophers of mind do not agree about whether the existence of conscious experience can be explained within an exclusively physicalist ontology or not. Physicalists disagree about what type of relationship there is between mental and physical properties. Is it identity? Realisation? Local supervenience? Global supervenience? Necessary supervenience? Superdupervenience? Constitution? There is also no consensus

about what kind of relationship there is between the intentional and the phenomenal properties of conscious experience. Are they independent of each other? This is what separatists think. Or one is more fundamental and the other supervenes on it? This is what prioritists think. But which is more fundamental? According to representationalists, phenomenal properties supervene on intentional properties. Advocates of the theory of phenomenal intentionality have the opposite view, i.e. that it is the intentional properties that supervene on phenomenal ones. Or, perhaps, neither of the above views is correct because these two properties are inextricably bound up. As Colin McGinn puts it: “experiences are Janus-faced: they point outward to the external world but they also present a subjective face to their subject: they are of something other than the subject and they are like something for the subject. But these two faces do not wear different expressions: for what the experience is like is a function of what it is of, and what it is of is a function of what it is like”. (McGinn 1991, 29–30)

Or take *moral philosophy*. Moral philosophers disagree about whether we should define the concept of a morally right action in terms of duties or in terms of consequences. They also disagree about whether the “could have done otherwise” condition is necessary for free will and hence for moral responsibility, or we should assign responsibility even in cases where the person could not have done otherwise. There is disagreement about the extent to which we are (if at all) responsible for our emotions, personality and beliefs. Moreover, moral philosophers do not even agree about which property renders an act morally evaluable, i.e. what the difference between morally neutral and non-neutral acts consists in.

Let’s turn to *political philosophy*. Political philosophers disagree about why we have political obligations or to put it differently: where does the sovereign’s power come from to exercise sanctions on those who fail to fulfil their obligations? Does it come from divine authority? Or from natural superiority? Or is it derived from greater knowledge or expertise? Or, if we skip these old explanations: do we have political obligations because we choose the rules in our “original position” ourselves and accept them as binding? (This is the principle of consent.) Or is it because if the state provides education, healthcare and public utilities, then we have to reciprocate? (This is the principle of reciprocity.) Political philosophers fail to agree about the extent of the role the state needs to assume in order to relieve inequalities. Some think they do not have to assume any such role, while others think that the role of the state is significant. Those who think it has a significant role disagree about what kind of equality we should

establish. That of resources? Opportunities? Capabilities?

Now, let's look at the *philosophy of science*. It is worth dividing the philosophical problems of science into two groups: general and special. As for the former: there is no consensus among philosophers of science about what the correct answer to the problem of induction is, nor about what the correct interpretation of the term "law of nature" is, nor about what the scientific explanation of a phenomenon looks like at all. Or consider the problem of the metaphysical status of unobservable entities (quarks, strings, black matter, etc.). According to realists, observable entities provide sufficient indirect evidence for the existence of unobservable entities, and consequently, scientific theories should be seen as describing this "unobservable world". By contrast, anti-realists (or instrumentalists) say we have no good reason to commit ourselves to the existence of unobservable entities, and consequently, scientific theories are merely useful tools (useful fictions). As for the special problems: there is no consensus among philosophers of physics about whether a determinist or indeterminist interpretation of quantum mechanics is the correct one, nor about whether space-time points exist and whether a wave function collapse exists. But to mention other areas than the philosophy of physics: there is disagreement among philosophers of biology as to what the basic unit of natural selection is. Some say it is the gene, others say it is the cell, yet others say it is the organism, and, according to others, it is the group.

Or consider the *philosophy of art*. Philosophers of art disagree about whether the concept of a work of art can be defined, i.e. if necessary and sufficient conditions can be given of something being a work of art. They also disagree about the property which makes something a work of art. Moreover, they hold different views about the metaphysical status of works of art. Are they universals? Physical particulars? Mental particulars? Events? Or perhaps do some artworks belong to one category and other artworks to others? They fail to agree on whether, while interpreting a work of art, we should take into consideration the author's intentions and if so, to what extent. Not to mention some minor issues such as: "Does the consumption of works of art contribute to the development of our self-knowledge?"; "Is there a difference between popular and high art?".

And the list is not finished. The most peculiar fact is that there is no consensus within *phenomenology*, that is, about establishing phenomenological facts. The reason why this fact is so peculiar is that because one has first-person access to the phenomenal characteristics of

conscious experience, you might think there can be no differences among different phenomenologists' reports — but there are. On the one hand, Berkeley describes the phenomenology of auditory experience as follows:

For instance, when I hear a coach drive along to streets, immediately I perceive only the sound; but from the experience I have had that such a sound is connected with a coach, I am said to hear the coach. It is nevertheless evident, that in truth and strictness, nothing can be *heard* but *sound*: and the coach is not then properly perceived by sense, but only suggested from experience. (Berkeley 1713/1998, 194, italics in original)

Heidegger on the other hand says:

What we “first” hear is never noises or complexes of sounds, but the creaking wagon, the motor-cycle. We hear the column on the march, the north wind, the woodpecker tapping, the fire crackling. It requires a very artificial and complicated frame of mind to “hear” a “pure noise”. The fact that motor-cycles and wagons are we proximally hear is the phenomenal evidence that in every case Dasein, as Being-in-the-world, already dwells *alongside* what is ready-to-hand within-the-world; in certainly does not dwell proximally alongside “sensation”; nor would it first have to give shape to swirl of sensation to provide the springboard from which the subject leaps off and finally arrives at a “world”. (Heidegger 1927/1962, 207, italics in original)

Do I need to comment? I don't think so. Let's look at anxiety. Most certainly, there is something that it is like to be anxious (anxiety has a phenomenal character), which is why you might think there can be no differences among the phenomenological descriptions of anxiety — but there are. Searle for one sees it in the following way: “Beliefs, fears, hopes, and desires are Intentional; but there are forms of nervousness, elation, and undirected anxiety that are not Intentional” (Searle 1983, 1). Tim Crane, however, says:

The cases Searle mentions are not cases where one is anxious for another: otherwise it would be directed anxiety. So the intentionalist will say that these are cases where one is anxious for oneself — so in these cases, one's anxiety is directed upon oneself. Being anxious in this way is a matter of having a certain attitude to oneself and one's position in the world: it is to regard the world, for example, as a potentially disturbing place for

oneself. This is one way in which anxiety exhibits directedness. And it is an alternative to seeing Searle's cases as examples of mental states which are directed on nothing, as Searle does. (Crane 1998, 241–242)

And here is what Heidegger says about the same subject:

That anxiety reveals the nothing man himself immediately demonstrates when anxiety has dissolved. In the lucid vision sustained by fresh remembrance we must say that that in the face of which and for which we were anxious was “really” — nothing. Indeed: the nothing itself — as such — was there. [...] The nothing reveals itself in anxiety — but not as a being. Just as little is it given as an object. Anxiety is no kind of grasping of the nothing. All the same, the nothing reveals itself in and through anxiety, although, to repeat, not in such a way that the nothing becomes manifest in our malaise quite apart from beings as a whole. Rather we said that in anxiety the nothing is encountered at one with beings as a whole. (Heidegger 1929/1993, 101–102)

I think that this obscure passage says that the intentional object of anxiety is the nothing (or nothingness), if what we mean by intentional object is “something” which appears or is manifested to us from the first-person perspective. But even if it says something else (and that is a possibility), it definitely says something different to Searle and Crane, as, in contrast to them, he connects the phenomenology of anxiety to the concept of nothingness.

Or, let's turn to the question of whether cognitive phenomenology exists. Those who think it does say that “there is something it is like to think a conscious thought” (Pitt 2004, 2), and this means that “what it is like to think a conscious thought is distinct from what it is like to be in any other kind of conscious mental state, that what it is like to think the conscious thought that *p* is distinct from what it is like to think any other conscious thought” (Pitt 2004, 2). Those who think there is no cognitive phenomenology believe that there is nothing it is like to think a conscious thought. If we experience something during an act of thinking, then it is not the act itself that has what-it-is-likeness but the connected emotions and other *par excellence* phenomenally conscious states.

Let me spend more time on this phenomenological problem. Even the fact itself is peculiar that there are differences in views in phenomenology, but this case — if possible — is even

more curious. The question here is not *what kind of* phenomenological marks a conscious mental act has, but simply whether a conscious mental act has *any kind of* phenomenal character or what-it-is-likeness. If we agree on anything, this should be it. We might think that the answer to this question must be either “Yes, *trivially* there is cognitive phenomenology”, or “No, *trivially*, there is no cognitive phenomenology” — yet there is dissensus about it.

Some philosophers try to argue that there is cognitive phenomenology by pointing out the inherent phenomenal properties of acts of thinking. They provide a strange sentence that one cannot understand at first reading (or hearing), and then ask the reader (or listener) to make an effort to understand it. Once that happens, they say: “WHAT you experienced when you understood the sentence after making a small effort *is* the phenomenal character of thinking the thought at issue”. In brief, they identify the phenomenology of thinking the thought expressed by the sentence with the experience of understanding the sentence.

Terence Horgan and John Tienson (Horgan-Tienson 2002) present such an argument. Let’s take the sentence: “Dogs dogs dog dog dogs”. Native English speakers cannot understand this at first sight. In order to understand it, they have to be asked to take one token of the word “dog” as a verb. If they do so, they will understand the sentence, and so will experience the inherent phenomenal character of thinking the thought expressed by it, according to Horgan and Tienson. Their argument is this: since one reads the same sentence several times in a row, only the inherent phenomenal features of an act of understanding a thought can distinguish between the cases of non-understanding and understanding — thus, cognitive phenomenology exists.

However, a possible objection can go along these lines: the rhythm or the prosody of the sentence could contribute to the experience of understanding the above sentence. So, it is better for the advocates of cognitive phenomenology to bring up rabbit/duck type grammatical ambiguities. For example, they could say “Hunting lions can be dangerous”. This is an ambiguous sentence. It could either mean “If you hunt lions, they can attack you”, or “If hunting lions attack you, you could be in trouble”. This rabbit/duck sentence has the same rhythm and prosody when uttered, yet it will have different phenomenal characters depending on what one means by it.

I used the above example to demonstrate that even where you would *most* expect consensus

among philosophers (about whether a mental event has phenomenology or not), they have failed to produce one. Needless to say, many philosophers do not accept Horgan and Tienson's argument — what is more, they think that arguments that employ such ostensive definitions are fundamentally flawed and cannot be taken seriously.

And finally (the icing on the cake), there is a disagreement between philosophers about the *epistemology of disagreement* — including disagreements among philosophers themselves. This question No. $n + 1$ sounds like this: “Can I rationally stick to the truth of proposition p if (1) I know that there are people who think p is false; if (2) in my view, these people are my epistemic peers; and if (3) despite the recognized disagreement, it still seems to me that p is true?”.

There are two opposing camps on this issue. Proponents of conciliationism claim that I should suspend my belief in the truth of p , or at least reassess the epistemic status of my belief in the truth of p (see e.g. Christensen 2007; Elga 2007; Feldman 2006). In a nutshell, the basic consideration is this: the fact that someone who I recognize as my epistemic peer disagrees with me about the truth of p *has just as much weight as evidence* for me to think that I myself am wrong as the evidence (or set of evidences) on which I originally committed myself to the truth of p . By contrast, proponents of the steadfast view claim that I should not suspend my belief in the truth of p — I can still rationally stick to the truth of p (see e.g. Huemer 2011; Wedgwood 2010; Schafer 2015). In a nutshell, the most obvious consideration for it is the following: the fact that someone disagrees with me about the truth of p (even if I recognize this person as my epistemic peer) *is not such a great deal* as the evidence on which I originally committed myself to the truth of p — the original evidence (or set of evidences) *has more epistemic weight* than what my opponent believes.

This philosophical question No. $n + 1$ is inherently related to other questions as well. For example, to the question “Can there be only one rational doxastic attitude belonging to evidential base E , or can there be more than one such attitudes?” There is no consensus among philosophers about the answer to the latter question either. According to uniuquists, there can be only one (see e.g. Greco – Hedden 2016; Matheson 2011; White 2013), whereas according to permissivists there can be several (see e.g. Ballantyne – Coffman 2011; Frances 2014; Kelly 2010). It is easy to see that commitment to uniuquism goes hand in hand with conciliationism, whereas commitment to permissivism with the steadfast view. Here is why:

if, as a uniquist, I take it for granted that (1) only one rational doxastic attitude can belong to a set of evidences *E* (or to the total body of evidence), and (2) *E* is for the truth of *p* and for the truth of not-*p* to the same degree, then I must suspend my belief in the truth of *p*, because the total body of evidence is, in the final analysis, not in favor of *either* option. By contrast, if, as a permissivist, I take it for granted that more than one rational doxastic attitudes can belong to a set of evidences *E* (or the total body of evidence), then I can rationally stick to the truth of *p* — even though I must concede that *others* can rationally stick to the truth of *not-p*.

Again, this philosophical question No. $n + 1$ is inherently related to the question “When can we say truthfully that two or more people are epistemic peers?” If we don’t count as an accurate answer that Hansel and Gretel are epistemic peers if they rely on more or less the same evidential base and have more or less the same argumentative-cognitive skills and have more or less the same resilience to irrational influences, then we cannot speak of consensus about this issue either.

Some may now think that I have used a disproportionate number of examples, and I’m afraid that my catalogue has been boring. Nevertheless, I see it as having a *sobering* effect when we look at the huge number of philosophical problems towering before us — unsolved. The reason why I brought up so many examples is that the abundance of disagreements in philosophy is shocking. This abundance has a *meaning*, just like it has a meaning if someone has just one suit or a whole cupboard full of them.

2 Lessons from an empirical survey

In the early 2010s, David Bourget and David Chalmers conducted a survey, whose questionnaire was filled out by about 2000 (mostly analytic-minded) philosophers who work at the world’s leading philosophy departments. The authors wanted to find out what views philosophers held about certain philosophical problems. Their final conclusion was that “there is no [...] consensus in the answers given to the most important philosophical questions” (Bourget – Chalmers 2013, 31). This result didn’t surprise me at all. The novelty was about the same as if a sociologist who studied tendencies in partner selection in university halls of residence had concluded that the number of couples who lived on the same floor was significantly higher than the number of couples one of which lived on the ground floor and

the other on the 17th.

It was also no surprise to find out that “there was more consensus regarding certain questions than others” (Bourget – Chalmers 2013, 31), nor regarding which philosophical problems there is the greatest consensus. Namely, that the external world exists; that scientific realism is correct; that there is no God, and that we can have a priori knowledge.

Finally, it was definitely no surprise to discover that “The correlations and principal component analysis [...] suggest that philosophical views tend to come in packages” (Bourget – Chalmers 2013, 31). This must be the case, since philosophical problems are conceptually connected and there are coherent suggested solutions and also non-coherent ones. Someone in the armchair could have predicted these bi-constitutional packages. For example, (1) those who think that moral statements have cognitive content are likely to accept moral realism in meta-ethics as well. (2) Those who endorse anti-naturalism in meta-ethics are likely to be anti-physicalist about the mind. (3) Those who endorse the analytic-synthetic distinction are likely to think that a priori knowledge exists. (4) Those who endorse moral realism in meta-ethics are likely to view aesthetic values as objective. (5) Those who are physicalists about the mind are likely to be atheists. Let me know if you are surprised.

There are two reasons, however, why the survey was not a waste of time. Firstly, because it may convince those of the significance of dissensus who tend to ignore the existence of philosophical disagreements. Surely, they wouldn’t use such a bad example of consensus as the following if they cared to read the findings of the survey: “Philosophers have shown, among other things [...], that proper names as they occur in natural language are rigid designators” (see Brock 2017, 120). Considering that Brock *en passant* forgot about Lewis’ view that there is no cross-world identity (every individual is world-bounded) and thus proper names cannot be rigid designators, he should have cared to read the results of the survey: 34% of philosophers is Millian, 29% of them is Fregean, and 37% have a different view on the semantics of proper names.

Secondly, the survey was not a waste of time because it provides a great overview of what philosophers think about one another’s views. This showed that “philosophers hold [...] false beliefs about their colleagues’ views” (Bourget – Chalmers 2013, 29). I’m genuinely pleased that the survey confirmed how mistakenly philosophers assess the views of their colleagues. I

suspected that this is so, and I suspected that this was what led them astray on many occasions. How many times I read an argument in which a philosopher rejects a theory by reference to an alleged philosophical consensus! I read in many places (and textbooks), for example, that the sense-datum theory is untenable because it commits us to the existence of non-physical entities. Here is what the survey says about this: 34.6% of philosophers is a committed physicalist and 21.9% of them is inclined to endorse physicalism, which means that at most 56.5% of philosophers think that the sense-data theory is untenable due to its commitment to the existence of non-physical entities.

3 Progress in philosophy

Speaking about an epistemic enterprise, we can say that it makes progress if the players of the enterprise *did not yet* know that p at t_1 , *but already know* that p at t_2 . Now, if we consider that philosophers belonging to the epistemic tradition undertook to solve philosophical problems and come up with compelling philosophical arguments for their substantive theses, then it is clear that philosophy *has not any made progress* for the last 2500 years. One cannot say that philosophers did not yet know how to solve such-and-such philosophical problem at t_1 but they already know that at t_2 — since they have not solved any substantive philosophical problems, and have not come up with any compellingly justified substantive thesis. In short, the community of philosophers has no substantive knowledge.

As a starting point, let me recall Eric Dietrich's thought experiment. The scenario is the following: Aristotle crops up at a university in the 21st century. He goes to a physics lecture first, where he hears about gravity and about how people went to the Moon, and how planets orbit on an elliptic course. He hears about how the same laws of nature govern the “sublunar” and the “supralunar” world, i.e. throughout the universe. Following this, he goes to a biology lecture. He hears about the theory of evolution, genetics and cells. He hears about inheritance and different biochemical processes, and is shocked by what he hears. He has to admit that the science of this age has long surpassed the science of his. He then goes to a metaphysics and ethics course. Dietrich thinks something like the following happens in there:

Here he hears the professor lecturing about essences, about being qua being, about the most general structures of our thinking about the world. He knows exactly what the

professor is talking about. Aristotle raises his hand to discuss some errors the professor seems to have made, and some important distinctions that he has not drawn. As the discussion proceeds, the metaphysics professor is a bit taken aback but also delighted at this (older) student's acumen and insight. Then Aristotle goes to an ethics class, where he learns of the current importance of what is apparently called "virtue ethics". He recognizes it immediately, but again, the professor seems to have left out some crucial details and failed to see some deeper aspects of the view. Aristotle raises his hand... (Dietrich 2011, 334)

How it is possible that as opposed to physics and biology, Aristotle would be a competent partner in metaphysical and ethical debates? Dietrich thinks it is because of the following:

Only one thing: *Philosophy doesn't progress*. Yes, it morphs and transforms to stay current. Our metaphysics today is not Aristotle's metaphysics. Ours is populated, for example, with *possible worlds*, whose existence is bolstered by a robust and large family of logics that Aristotle couldn't have imagined. Our metaphysics contains ideas like *supervenience*, which is used to explain, among other things, the relationship between mind and brain and the relationship between consciousness and brain. But more important, our metaphysics is for us. It is written in our language *for* us to communicate our twenty-first century ideas in. But that's all; that's the extent of the "progress". The ideas and theories are new or couched in modern language, but no real progress is made, none. (Dietrich 2011, 335–336, italics in original.)

And even more sharply:

Philosophy *does not even stumble forward*. Philosophy *does not move forward at all*. It is the *exactly the same today as it was 3000 years ago*; indeed, as it was from the beginning. What it does do is stay current; philosophers confuse this with advancing, with making progress. Staying current is not moving forward any more that staying up on the latest fashions or music is movement toward greater social justice. (Dietrich 2011, 332, italics mine)

I think Dietrich's view is simplifying, distorting and shows a lack of sensitivity to finer details. Despite the fact that, like him, I find philosophy to be a failed epistemic enterprise, I

don't think that philosophy is treading water and that we know *nothing more* than our predecessors did. This is just as unbelievable and unrealistic as thinking that a philosopher at the height of his career knows *nothing more* than when he first started out.

Put differently, I'm saying that *there are* philosophical propositions which we did not yet know at t_1 , but already know at t_2 . On the one hand, we have come to know many non-trivial and non-substantive philosophical truths, and on the other, we have come to know that certain substantive philosophical theories or theses are false.

3.1 Non-trivial and non-substantive philosophical truths

First of all, we can identify philosophical problems more precisely than our predecessors, which means that we see the structure of philosophical problems more clearly and in a finer-grained way — and we have worked out numerous new suggested solutions to these problems.

Let's take the problem of moral responsibility and free will for example. Here is a possible reconstruction of this problem:

p_1 : All fully developed human beings are morally responsible for their actions in everyday situations.

p_2 : People can have excuses. If someone can prove that their action is a result of (bad) luck or external force, then they cannot be held responsible for their action at issue.

p_3 : Events are either determined or indeterminated, so all actions are also either determined or indeterminated.

p_4 : If an action is indeterminated, it is a matter of luck.

p_5 : If an action is determined, then it was brought about by some external force.

These propositions are jointly inconsistent — I will not show this here, as it is trivial.

Furthermore, I think that all of these propositions are “epistemically attractive” — we would tend to hold each of them to be true, were it not for the fact that they are inconsistent with one another. Furthermore, concerning this problem, I think it would be convenient to categorize different philosophical theories — independent of their finer details — based on which of the above propositions they reject and for what reason they reject them.

P_1 is rejected by two theories: *hard determinism* and *hard incompatibilism*. According to the former view, we are not responsible for our actions because the world is deterministic, and so all actions are brought about by external forces (see e.g. Honderich 1988; Wegner 2002). According to the latter, we are not responsible for anything in the moral sense because if the world is indeterministic, then everything happens by chance, but if it is deterministic, then everything is brought about by external forces (see e.g. Pereboom 2014).

P_2 is rejected by theories that hold that it does not follow from the fact that external forces or chance play a decisive role in all actions that agents could be exempted from responsibility.

One such theory is *semi-compatibilism*. It says that while it is true that all our actions are determined because past events and the laws of nature jointly “make” them happen, it does not mean that the agent always has the same role in executing actions. There are deterministic processes in which agents participate in a morally autonomous manner, even if external forces exclude the possibility that they can act otherwise than they actually do. Thus, semi-compatibilists think that free will (the ability to act otherwise) is not a precondition of moral responsibility. It is enough for moral responsibility if the agent has acted the way he did or refrained from action because of the appropriate (i.e. reason-sensitive) psychological process (see e.g. Mele 1995; Fischer–Ravizza 1998; Fischer 2007); or if the action in question appropriately reflects the morally relevant aspects of the agent’s self (see e.g. Frankfurt 1971; Scanlon 1998, 2008; Smith 2005). Instead of the decisions and actions themselves, the former strategy considers the deliberation leading up to the decision as the main source of moral responsibility, while the latter considers the morally relevant attitudes, dispositions, desires and other mental states as relevant. According to semi-compatibilists then, agents cannot be exempted from responsibility based merely on the deterministic/indeterministic nature of the world because they are definitely responsible for the relevant mental processes and/or states leading up to them (at least, in most cases).

Like semi-compatibilist, consequentialist theories of responsibility (such as revisionism, see e.g. Vargas 2013) also denies that deterministic external forces exempt from responsibility on all occasions. They are convinced that we should hold people morally responsible for their deeds and traits whenever moral blame and praise would produce appropriate good consequences such as positive character-change.

However, p_2 is not only denied by semi-compatibilism and consequentialist approaches but also by *event-libertarianism*. Event-libertarians — as opposed to semi-compatibilists but alike to consequentialists — view decisions and actions as the central objects of moral responsibility. They think that just because actions are indeterministic and their outcomes are chancy in some sense, agents remain responsible for their decisions and the consequences thereof — provided that the chance enters the decision-process “in the right place” (see e.g. Nozick 1981; Kane 1996; Mele 2006; Balaguer 2004; Franklin 2018). Kane, for one, thinks that if the agent would like to carry out two kinds of action in a certain situation, the action can still remain free if it is up to chance which volition takes over the other accidentally (Kane 1996).

P_3 is primarily rejected by *non-causal libertarian* theories. The advocates of these theories think that there are actions without any cause whatsoever. So, we cannot say about any of these actions either that they are the results of indeterministic or deterministic causal processes. (Which is also why these authors use the phrase “undetermined” and not “indetermined” free action). These actions should be explained by reference to reasons instead of causes — in other words, it is not reasons which cause or compel the choice of a rational agent but he chooses in light of reasons, so to speak (see e.g. Ginet 1990; Lowe 2008; Pink 2017). This means that the agent does not cause the decision but rather brings it forth, and the decisions that cannot be explained causally are the sources of free will and responsibility as basic actions.

P_4 is most vehemently denied by *agent-causal libertarianism* (see e.g. Chisholm 1966; O'Connor 2000; Clarke 2003). According to the advocates of this view, freely formed intentions or freely executed actions have no (or only partially have) events as their causes but the agent himself, seen as a substance. As Randolph Clarke puts it: inasmuch as the agent as a substance is the direct cause of the intention or action at issue, then this intention or action can hardly be explained with reference to chance in any sense (Clarke 2005). And this is true even

if the causal action of the agent as a substance has not been determined previously.

P_5 is rejected by *traditional compatibilist* theories. Traditional compatibilist philosophers think that even though free actions are pre-determined, their course is not determined by any external force which would compel it, since agents could have acted otherwise despite determination (see e.g. Moore 1912; Ayer 1954; Huoranszki 2011). As they say, the key to free will and moral responsibility is that the following conditional is true: “Agent S could have acted otherwise, had he decided otherwise”. It is easy to see that this conditional can be true even if our world happens to be ruled by deterministic laws.

As far as I can see, no important theory is left out of this taxonomy and they can all be categorized on the basis of which proposition out of the above five the proponents of a given theory give up and why. Now, since we did not see the structure of the problems this clearly before, and since we did not know so many possible suggested solutions, this is undeniably progress — *we came to know* something at t_2 that we did not know yet at t_1 .

Secondly, Dietrich fails to consider that while we did not know numerous “if....then”-type philosophical propositions at t_1 , we do know these at t_2 , and while we were not aware of the *cost-benefit* equations of the potential suggested solutions of philosophical problems at t_1 , we do know these at t_2 .

Let’s take the mind-body problem as an illustration of this. Similarly to the problem of free will, this problem is also made up of jointly inconsistent (or seemingly inconsistent) propositions. Here is the well-known proposition triad:

p_1 : Conscious experiences are not physical events.

p_2 : Conscious experiences can cause physical events.

p_3 : Every physical event has a sufficient physical cause.

Let me begin with this: while we did not know at t_1 , we do know at t_2 how the inconsistency between the propositions can be dissolved — more precisely how the inconsistency can be shown to be only apparent. For instance, *if* we claim that every single human action is

(redundantly and systematically) overdetermined, i.e. every single human action has a sufficient mental cause and a numerically different sufficient physical cause, *then* p_1 , p_2 and p_3 will not be inconsistent with each other — we can stick to all of them without getting into contradictions. Or, *if* we claim that conscious experiences cause physical events in a different sense than physical events do, meaning that we deny the homogeneity of mental and physical causes, *then* p_1 , p_2 and p_3 will not be inconsistent with each other — we can stick to all of them without running into contradictions (see e.g. Crane 1995 about these “if....then...”-s).

Furthermore, in the case of the mind-body problem, while we did not know at t_1 , we do know at t_2 what kind of benefit and cost it has if we deny one of the three propositions while we stick to the truth of the other two.

I will only mention one possibility for the sake of simplicity. Let's assume that out of the three, we accept p_2 and p_3 and reject p_1 . Let's also assume that we reject p_1 in the spirit of type-identity theory — we claim that types of conscious experience are identical to types of physical events (see e.g. Lewis 1966; Armstrong 1968). If this is what we do, then we have the benefit of being able to explain mental causation — all the way, since our view will definitely not be threatened by the specter of epiphenomenalism. At the same time, if we do this, then it will have the cost of having to respond to hard-core anti-physicalist arguments according to which it is not possible to place conscious experiences within a purely physicalist ontology; we have to come up with a plausible error theory that shows that the “gap” between phenomenal and physical phenomena is purely illusory and we have to say something against the multiple realization thesis — and none of these is an easy task.

Thirdly, Dietrich also ignores the fact that the different philosophical theories have undergone *internal* progress — they were supported by weaker arguments at t_1 and stronger ones at t_2 . I think it's hard to deny that if a philosophical theory put forward by a great dead philosopher has contemporary supporters, then they certainly advocate the theory at issue much more forcefully than its original author did. For example, David Armstrong is a better and more consistent Aristotelian with regard to immanent universals than Aristotle was, and Peter van Inwagen is a better and more consistent Aristotelian than Aristotle was regarding primary substances as described in the *Categories* (see Armstrong 1978, 1997; van Inwagen 1990).

Or, let's take one of the current rival views of the ontological status of physical objects,

substrate theory, according to which physical objects have a further constituent that is fundamentally distinct from their properties, the substrate (which bears the properties). This theory was first put forward by Locke, and his only argument for it was that without appealing to the concept of substrate, it would be impossible to explain the fact that the properties of physical objects are held together (Locke 1689/1996, 2, 23, 1-2). Now, it is easy to see that the argument made by later advocates of substrate theory is much stronger (see e.g. Allaire 1963/1998). For example, they claim that one should commit oneself to the existence of substrates in order to be able to explain the particularity of objects that are type-identical. For if two or more numerically distinct objects have the exact same intrinsic properties, then they cannot (obviously) be individuated by making reference to their properties. Since, however, they have a further metaphysical (distinct) constituent (the substrate), they can be individuated by making reference to their substrates.

All this is undeniable progress. The latter example shows clearly that Locke's arguments for the substrate theory are not the best ones (and also that Berkeley's arguments are not the best ones against it) — and while we did not know this at t_1 , we do at t_2 .

Fourthly, Dietrich also forgets that many conceptual relations were revealed among different philosophical problems as time went by, and while we did not know them at t_1 , we do at t_2 (see Jackson 2017 about this).

Here is one example. While the inherent relationship between the concepts of temporality and modality was not known at t_1 , it became clear at t_2 . I'm thinking of the following. When a genuine modal realist says that every possible world exists in the same way as our actual world, he takes the word "actual" to be an indexical, as it simply picks out our world, but it does not refer to any entities of special ontological status. Now, this is inherently related to the case when the eternalist says that the present, past and the future exist and the word "present" is indexical, as it simply picks out the moment when the speaker is speaking, but does not refer to any entities of special ontological status (see e.g. Lewis 1986). Or, from the other direction: when the actualist (to be more exact, the modal ersatz-realist) says that there are no non-actual worlds, only the actual world exists and so "actual" is not merely indexical, as it refers to the ontologically special actual world, this is inherently related to the case when the presentist says that the past and the future do not exist, only the present does, so "present" is not merely indexical, as it refers to the ontologically special present (see e.g. Crisp 2003; Rea

2003).

It's important to handle these developments in their right place — we must neither underestimate nor overestimate their significance. On the one hand, it would be short-sighted to deny that the community of philosophers have acquired numerous non-trivial and non-substantive philosophical propositions about which they had no idea before — all this put into the terminology of “understanding” instead of “knowing” means that *we understand* philosophical problems and their relation to each other *better* than before. On the other hand, we mustn't overestimate the knowledge of these non-trivial and non-substantive philosophical propositions, and above all we mustn't see in these developments a proof of philosophy's success as an epistemic enterprise — since the community of philosophers have not managed to acquire *substantive* philosophical truths, even though this clearly was the goal of the members of the epistemic tradition.

3.2 Discredited substantive philosophical theories and theses

Peter van Inwagen says that “There are no knock-down arguments or demonstrations or proofs in philosophy — not at any rate of substantive, positive theses” (van Inwagen 2020, 11) and “If there is any philosophical theses that all or most philosophers affirm, it is a negative thesis: that formalism is not the right philosophy of mathematics, for example, or that knowledge is not (simply) justified, true belief” (van Inwagen 2004, 334–335).

Well, indeed, we can list a few substantive philosophical theories and theses the falsity of which were consensually accepted among philosophers at one point. And this is a progress — whereas we did not know at t_1 that not- p , we do know at t_2 that not- p .

As far as I know, many see the discreditation of philosophical theories as real progress in philosophy, since the filtered-out theories are no longer “living” choices, and this filtering out narrows down the range of possible philosophical theories, which counts as progress in any problem-solving process.

Nevertheless, I would warn everyone not to exaggerate the significance of our being able to pick out philosophical theories and theses that are consensually considered false, and not to

see them as discredited once and for all or hail their recognition as a great philosophical insight.

All this can easily lead to bad self-deception. Using rhetoric such as “*We know* that Descartes’ explanation of the mind-body interaction is wrong”; “*We know* that Augustine’s theory of first language learning is wrong”; “*We know* that La Mettrie was wrong when he interpreted humans as mechanical clockworks”; “*We know* that Leibniz’s thesis that »Every true statement is analytic« is wrong”; “*We know* that the classic definition of knowledge is wrong or at least should be amended”; “*We know* that logical behaviorism is an untenable view of the human mind”, etc. we could easily create the impression that philosophers know many things. But this is deceptive, as knowing that something is not in a certain way does not mean knowing how it is — and *solving* a philosophical problem clearly means knowing *how it is* and not how it is not.

I don’t dispute that it would be possible to call the following question a philosophical problem: “Is the argument that »(1) I can doubt that I have a body and (2) I cannot doubt that I have a mind, therefore (C) My body and my mind are really different« conclusive?”. I also don’t dispute that some may proudly add, “Philosophy has solved this problem good and proper and pronounced the final and irrefutable truth on it, »No, this argument is not conclusive«. This, however, implies a great deal of delusion. For whoever tends to match a philosophical problem to *every* single consistently rejected philosophical theory, thesis or argument and say (by making reference to the prevailing consensus) “See, we have solved a philosophical problem once again” acts as the plumber who *expects recognition* for figuring out that *the reason why* the bathroom is flooded *is not* that a fluky maid sneaked in overnight, intentionally ran the bath until it overflowed and then quietly left — while he doesn’t have even the faintest idea *why* the bathroom was actually flooded and *how* he should remedy the situation.

We should not only be careful with the phrasing “There is consensus among philosophers about the falsehood of some theories and theses” because it is self-delusional, but also because these kinds of consensus are much more fragile than we would have first thought.

Imagine the following case. You are appointed as the head of an important and high-quality philosophical journal. Let’s suppose that the journal receives a paper that meets all

professional standards, contains brilliant arguments and has the following line of reasoning. Firstly, the author argues that the key to understanding phylogenesis is to explain collective intentionality. Secondly, he argues that the key to understanding collective intentionality is to have a conception of “theory of mind” which explains well how we acquire knowledge of others’ mental states. Thirdly, he argues that none of the contemporary approaches work (theory-theory, simulation theory, etc.) Fourthly, he argues that the conception of “theory of mind” that best suits the collective intentionality phenomenon is the one according to which, as Ryle puts it, mental states are “multi-track dispositions” and that “The human body is the best picture of the human soul” (Wittgenstein *PI* II., iv). In short, we ought to think that we *quasi-perceive* other people’s mental states.

If you had to decide about the fate of this paper, I think you would be in a pickle. On the one hand, there is massive consensus that logical behaviorism is a bad theory. On the other hand, however, *merely* by appealing to this fact, you could not stand in the way of publishing the paper. There are a number of reasons why, but primarily because you could not exclude the possibility *ab ovo* that the new aspect the paper introduces (collective intentionality which has a central role to play in phylogenesis and the behaviorist view that is alone compatible with it) might *override* the consensus and then logical behaviorism might be *resurrected*. (There are examples of such turn of events in the history of philosophy as well as science.) All this shows that the present consensus about the untenability of logical behaviorism is actually *not rock solid* but rather *weak and fragile*.

Let’s take a more difficult and delicate case. You work as the editor of the same important and high-quality philosophy journal and receive a paper that meets all professional standards and contains brilliant arguments. The author sets out to prove that every girl who has passed her 14th birthday does the morally right thing if she conceals her face. The line of reasoning is by and large as follows: his starting point is that all ethical theories are mistaken that explain moral right and wrong exclusively by reference to an action’s effect on others. For example, it is morally wrong for a fifty-year old father to play, behind tight curtains, a computer game whose aim is to virtually slaughter as many children as possible. The author concludes from this that the concept of morality should primarily be interpreted in terms of character traits and commits himself to virtue ethics. In what follows, he analyses statements such as “Courage is a virtue”; “Temperance is a virtue”; “Telling the truth is a virtue” and says that these are analytic truths. Then he argues that purity is also a virtue and that the sentence

“Purity is a virtue” is also an analytic truth. At the end of his paper, he concludes that for a girl entering puberty, the concealment of her face is an expression of moral purity, as she uses it to express that she does not want to tempt men who have a hard time resisting their sexual desires due to factors not under their control (upbringing, genetics etc.).

To be honest, I have no idea how you should decide. On the one hand, you might rightly think that “It is not a morally virtuous act that young girls conceal their faces — end of story”. However, this would not be enough to reject the paper, as we are also sure (or even surer) that we do not live in a Matrix-like computer-generated simulation, but even this did not stop the editors of *Philosophical Quarterly* from publishing a paper in which the author seriously considers this possibility and does not rule it out (see Bostrom 2003). On the other hand, you might actually think that “Despite the fact that there is broad consensus that girls do not exemplify virtue by concealing their faces, the paper does say something important about the purity of a young girl as a moral virtue”. In short, I think that this example also suggests that the existing consensus among philosophers *is not rock solid*, even if it is general.

Let’s take the following case for the sake of contrast. You are appointed as the head of an important and high-quality physics journal. Let’s assume that you receive a paper in which the author argues that there are different laws of nature at work in the area above the Moon and the area below it. I think you would probably decide not to approve the publishing of this paper even without reading it and looking at the arguments, simply because, in contrast to the above cases, you would find it *completely out of the question* that the arguments in the paper are good or worth considering, and that Aristotle’s cosmological theory could be resurrected. All this shows that even if there are issues about which physicists disagree, where they do have consensus, it is mostly *rock solid and unassailable*.

I presented these thought experiments in order to point out the following: if a view in philosophy goes against the tide (i.e. consensus) and it is not held by anyone, this fact in itself *is not enough* to stop this old or new view (provided it is well-developed and well-argued) from emerging in the market of competing philosophical theories. And the fact that a consensually rejected philosophical theory can emerge in this market is a *clear sign* that the philosophical consensus is weak and fragile. Don’t get me wrong. I’m not saying that every consensually rejected philosophical theory can be resurrected from its ashes. All I’m saying is that we should take our confidence back a notch when we consider consensually rejected

philosophical theories as *ultimately* false and mistaken and so discredit them *once and for all*. I wonder if van Inwagen would really dare bet anything on the view that “Formalism is not the right philosophy of mathematics and it could never be resurrected”.

One more thing. If I think back about how much time I needed to compile the list of consensually rejected philosophical theses (let me tell you, quite much) and if I add that most of the items on this list have been discredited by the community of philosophers on scientific grounds instead of philosophical ones, then I feel that this is another and pretty strong reason to proceed in a much humbler way when we conclude that we have shown the falsity of one or another philosophical thesis *by using the tools of philosophy*.

4 Philosophers’ reactions

To sum up what I have said so far, I see things in the following way. The followers of philosophy’s epistemic tradition have attempted to solve philosophical problems and promised compellingly justified substantive philosophical truths. However, there is disagreement in every area of philosophy among philosophers and this pervasive and permanent dissensus is a proof that their efforts have not been successful and their promises were not kept — philosophers are the actors of an epistemically failed enterprise. Put differently, the community of philosophers (in which we belong) has no substantive and positive philosophical knowledge, and philosophy (which we do) has not made the least bit of progress in the sense that it couldn’t give a reassuring answer to substantive philosophical questions at t_1 , but could do so at t_2 . Progress in philosophy amounts to no more than the fact that the community of philosophers has gained knowledge of non-substantive philosophical truths over time, and discredited a few (let me add: painfully few) philosophical theories or theses.

Thus, if a philosopher has *substantive and positive* philosophical beliefs, then she has to face the epistemic failure of philosophy and has the epistemic and moral duty to try to account for the epistemic status of those beliefs. She does not proceed correctly if she denies or downplays philosophy’s epistemic failure — she would severely deceive herself in both cases.

Now, aware of philosophy’s epistemic failure, a philosopher can think about the epistemic

status of her substantive and positive philosophical beliefs and the closely connected issue of the meaningfulness and goal of doing philosophy in the following four ways.

(1) In contrast with my predecessors and contemporaries, I have succeeded in providing compelling justifications for my substantive philosophical beliefs. I have knock-down arguments for my substantive philosophical theses. The fact of pervasive and permanent philosophical dissensus and the fact that the community of philosophers does not have substantive philosophical knowledge are irrelevant to me. This is because I do have such knowledge. Of course, I am sorry that my philosopher colleagues do not understand my arguments and are unable to see their compelling force. Philosophers must not be discouraged by philosophy's epistemic failure. They must stick to the original goal of the epistemic tradition, so they must keep trying to assert compellingly justified substantive philosophical truths.

(2) I cannot rationally stick to my substantive philosophical beliefs. Philosophy's epistemic failure (the pervasive and permanent dissensus) shows that the truth-seeking and justificatory tools of philosophy are unreliable, and so, my substantive philosophical beliefs are inappropriately justified. Consequently, I have to suspend them. Philosophy's only meaningful tasks are to formulate increasingly stronger (preferably knock-down) arguments for meta-skepticism, and to show that every philosopher has the epistemic duty to suspend their substantive philosophical beliefs.

(3) I do not believe that it is possible to find compelling justifications in philosophy. Consequently, the goals I set for myself must be more modest than that of trying to formulate knock-down arguments for my philosophical beliefs. I must undertake to develop a philosophical theory which is in harmony or in equilibrium with my own fundamental pre-philosophical convictions, and I must defend my theory, elaborated accordingly, against various objections. If I successfully accomplish these two tasks, I can rationally stick to my substantive philosophical beliefs, although I cannot provide compelling justifications for them. It is a mistake to consider philosophy as a failed enterprise. It is alive and kicking without compelling arguments.

(4) My philosophical beliefs are meaningless because philosophical problems are meaningless. Philosophy's only meaningful tasks are to debunk the appearance-creating

mechanism that is responsible for the genesis of philosophical problems, and to work out an effective therapy that cures all persons infected with philosophy of engaging with philosophical problems, so they cause them no more unnecessary worry.

These four reactions nicely delineate an appropriate logical map. The first question is: Are philosophical problems meaningful? They are, according to (1), (2) and (3), but they are not by (4) [I leave out (4) from now on]. The second question is: Can philosophers rationally stick to their substantive philosophical beliefs? They can, according to (1) and (3), but they cannot by (2) [I leave out (2) from now on]. The third question is: Is providing compelling justification the only way for philosophers to rationally stick to their beliefs? It is, according to (1), but it is not by to (3).

In the Second Part of my book, I will deal with these four reactions (as metaphilosophical visions), but not in the above order. Firstly, I will examine the reaction according to which philosophical problems and the philosophers' philosophical beliefs are meaningless, and philosophy's only meaningful goal is therapy. Secondly, I will consider the attitude that allows itself to be summarized this way: "In contrast to others, I have succeeded in providing compelling justifications for my philosophical beliefs". Thirdly, I will analyze the view according to which philosophers can rationally stick to their substantive philosophical beliefs even in the absence of compelling arguments. Fourthly, I will deal with meta-skepticism, which says that in the light of philosophy's epistemic failure, the right thing for us to do is to suspend all our substantive philosophical beliefs.

As I will deal with the question of how we should react to philosophy's epistemic failure and what we should do with our substantive philosophical beliefs in the light of this failure, there will inevitably arise some *ethical* aspects concerning our reaction too, such as *to what extent we can be sincere* about it and *to what extent it is consistent with our insights derived from self-reflection on our philosophical activity*. That is, while considering possible reactions, the question emphatically arises: "Can we be sincere about them with a clear intellectual and moral conscience?". It would be very wrong to react to this failure in a way to which we cannot seriously and sincerely commit ourselves, with hand on our heart. Of course, these "evaluation criteria" can be formulated during the discussion of first-order philosophical problems too, but they have special significance with regard to the question at issue.

PART TWO

CHAPTER THREE

THERAPY FOR PHILOSOPHERS

The concept of therapy is in the focus of two (meta)philosophical conceptions. Eugen Fischer distinguishes and characterizes them as follows:

There are two quite different cases in which a thinker may engage in philosophical reflection in pursuit of such a therapeutic aim. He may wish, first and foremost, to solve emotional and behavioural problems that arise in ordinary life, prior to or independently from philosophical reflection. Let's say that philosophical reflection which primarily addresses such problems is constitutive of *philosophical therapy*. Second, emotions and behaviours constitutive of emotional or behavioural problems may arise in the course of and as a result of philosophical reflection. A philosopher who seeks, first and foremost, to solve such problems engages in what I would like to call "*therapeutic philosophy*". (Fischer 2011, 53, italics in original)

In other words, "the need for therapy may arise both *outside* and *within* philosophy, and [we] can usefully distinguish between »philosophical therapy« which addresses the *extra*-philosophical need, and »therapeutic philosophy« which addresses the *intra*-philosophical need" (Fischer 2011, 50, italics mine).

Philosophical therapy has purely practical goals which fall outside of philosophy. Philosopher-therapists try to help people achieve and preserve a happy life and offer remedy to everyday emotional issues and guide those who wish to follow the path of a virtuous life. At the end of the day, philosopher-therapists are life coaches with a philosophical education who apply philosophical methods in their therapy. You could think of methods such as Sextus Empiricus' proposed suspension of judgment, which yields *ataraxia* (peace of mind), or the exercises and meditational techniques suggested by the philosophers of the late Stoa (Epictetus, Seneca, Marcus Aurelius) that lead to a happy and passionless life. Or you could think of the method of conceptual-linguistic analysis practiced often by contemporary philosopher-therapists, which can help dissolve conflicts that create emotional confusion, by e.g. pointing out that the parties mean different things by expressions such as "faithfulness", "selflessness", "housework", "cheating", etc.

The advocates of therapeutic philosophy (the late Wittgenstein and his followers) also try to remedy emotional problems, but only a special kind thereof — those which arise as a result of dealing with philosophical problems. What these two concepts share is that neither is aimed at solving philosophical problems, and that if they succeed, then their success is primarily therapeutic and not epistemic in kind. But whereas philosophical therapy sits well with the epistemic or truth-seeking tradition of philosophy, therapeutic philosophy is a *reaction* to the epistemic failure of philosophy — according to the late Wittgenstein and his followers, the members of epistemic tradition unnecessarily worry while intending to solve philosophical problems, as philosophical problems are meaningless.

Whether we take philosophical therapy or therapeutic philosophy, the real place of philosophy is not in academia. Seeing it from the perspective of these two therapeutic approaches, philosophy that is done within the academic ghetto has shrunk and become poor (see Hadot 1987/1999, 271). Philosophy affects *everyone* and so “philosophy has to be taken out into the world” (Jonge – Whiteman 2014, 449). Advocates and practitioners of philosophical therapy think so because by its nature, philosophy is an activity we do in communities, while advocates and practitioners of therapeutic philosophy think so because no one is immune to harmful mechanisms generating philosophical problems.

In this chapter I deal with therapeutic philosophy. First, I try to exactly reconstruct the later Wittgenstein’s standpoint, based on ample textual evidence. In what follows, I attempt to show that Wittgenstein’s therapeutic philosophy is a bad reaction to the epistemic failure of philosophy.

1 The therapeutic philosophy of the later Wittgenstein

Wittgenstein thinks that philosophy has no positive task, only negative ones: “All that philosophy can do is to destroy idols. And that means not creating a new one — say in the »absence of an idol«” (BT 413). So, philosophical problems should be eliminated, instead of being solved: “The problems are [...] dissolved like a lump of sugar in water” (BT 421); “the philosophical problems should *completely* disappear” (PI 133, italics in original). He views his own philosophical work as destruction: “it seems [...] to destroy everything interesting,

that is, all that is great and important, [...] [but] what we are destroying is nothing but houses of cards and we are clearing up the ground of language on which they stood” (*PI* 118).

Why is the task of eliminating philosophical problems assigned to philosophy? Because they are meaningless. Meaningful (genuine) problems clearly should not be eliminated but solved. One such meaningful (genuine) problem is “Is Goldbach’s conjecture true?”, but “What does butter do when its price goes up?” (see *PI* 693) is a meaningless (not genuine) question, hence it should be eliminated. “What is the best way to relieve poverty?” is a meaningful (genuine) problem, but the mind-body problem, the problem of universals, other minds, the metaphysical status of physical objects etc., i.e. philosophical problems are meaningless (not genuine).

What makes a question or problem meaningless? That it occurs as a result of some kind of conceptual confusion. Such is the above “What does butter do when its price goes up?” or the question “What kind of an object is the right jab I’m throwing at my opponent?”. This is because butter is not a thing that can act and a right jab is not a physical object that can be moved from one place to another.

Wittgenstein thinks that philosophical questions are *just as* meaningless as the question “What does butter do...?” or “What kind of an object a right jab is...?”, as similarly to these, they arise out of conceptual confusion. The *only* difference is that while we *immediately see* the conceptual/categorical confusion in “What does butter do...?” and “What kind of an object a right jab is...?”, in the case of philosophical questions, *we do not*. So, while “What does butter do...?” or “What kind of an object a right jab is...?” are innocent „grammatical jokes” (*PI* 111), philosophical questions are nothing but symptoms of permanent conceptual confusions we *do not detect*. This is why Wittgenstein also formulates his philosophical aim as follows: “My aim is: to teach you to pass from a piece of disguised nonsense to something that is patent nonsense” (*PI* 464).

How are supposed to imagine this? Let’s assume that two people are arguing about what butter does when its price goes up. One of them says: “Butter has always desired to be valued more and now its dream came true”. The other goes: “Butter didn’t originally wish to be more valued but pork pâté manipulated it, so it finally agreed to having its price increased.” In this case your job is not to assess which theory is more plausible or has greater explanatory force,

which one is free from the faults of the other but simply to show that this question is a result of conceptual confusion. Wittgenstein suggests that we should do *exactly the same* in the case of philosophical problems, since every philosophical debate is *exactly* as meaningless as the above one. The only difference is that in the latter case it will be harder to do that, as it is harder to catch conceptual confusion at work.

When do philosophical problems arise? Wittgenstein thinks it is “when language is like an engine idling, not when it is doing work” (*PI* 132); “when language *goes on holiday*” (*PI* 38, italics in original). Or, to use other quotes: “The results of philosophy are the uncovering of one or another piece of plain nonsense and bumps that the understanding has got by running its head up against the limits of language” (*PI* 119).

Now, if philosophical problems come from the misunderstanding of our language, then it means that misunderstanding of language is a *precondition* of the existence of philosophical problems, which means that there are no genuine philosophical problems. If, having realized the relevant conceptual confusions, we stopped misunderstanding our language, we would also run out of philosophical problems in no time.

1.1 Misunderstanding language and the genesis of philosophical problems

Wittgenstein identifies two specific features of language which are responsible for creating philosophical problems. One cause of linguistic misunderstandings is that we are misled by the surface grammar of language: “A main source of our failure to understand is that we do not *command a clear view* of the use of our words. — Our grammar is lacking in this sort of perspicuity” (*PI* 122, italics in original). This lack of perspicuity is due to “Misunderstandings concerning the use of words, caused, among other things, by certain analogies between the forms of expression in different regions of language” (*PI* 90); “So long as there is a verb »be« that seems to function like »eat« and »drink«, [...], humans will continue to bump up against the same mysterious difficulties, and stare at something that no explanation seems able to remove” (*BT* 424).

Another cause for misunderstandings is that certain pictures are embedded in language, which affect or determine how we pose our questions. These questions are meaningless, but they

seem to have meaning in the context of embedded pictures: “A *picture* held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably” (*PI* 115, italics in original).

Let’s look at an example of not noticing that despite certain surface grammatical similarities, some expressions function very differently in different contexts. Wittgenstein’s most frequently used example is the verb “have” (“haben” in German).

Take “I have an apartment”, or “I have a book”. They both express a relation between myself and something else (an apartment and a book). Let’s now take “I have an image” (“I habe eine Vorstellung” in German). The three sentences share their surface structure. Due to this surface correspondence, we tend to understand the third sentence, too, as expressing a relation between myself and a thing (namely, an image). This way, since we committed ourselves to the existence of the image as a *thing*, we come to understand “I have an image” as “I have something, namely an image” instead of simply taking to mean “I am imagining something”.

Wittgenstein thinks we already have a trouble here. For this image, which is related to me is clearly not a public object but something that is essentially private. Let’s see the following wording:

“[W]hen I imagine something, or even actually *see* objects, I have *got* something which my neighbour has not.” — I understand you. You want to look about you and say: “At any rate only I have got THIS” (*PI* 398).

Et voilà, this is how Wittgenstein thinks the sense-datum theory is born out of a misunderstanding of the collocation of “have” and “image”. As a result of the misunderstanding of these two expressions, you think “You have a new conception and interpret it as seeing a new object” (*PI* 401), namely a sense-datum; and “You interpret a grammatical movement made by yourself as a quasi-physical phenomenon which you are observing” (*ibid.*). Finally, this “grammatical movement” leads you to ask questions such as “Are sense-data the material of which the universe is made?” (*ibid.*). This is how a simple and innocent-looking but in fact harmful linguistic misunderstanding generates a meaningless metaphysical question.

Another type of linguistic misunderstanding is when we are misled by the pictoriality of language. Wittgenstein elaborates on this most fully when he discusses the metaphysical problem of time with special regards to Augustine's view. Let me quote a longer passage here:

"Where does the present go when it becomes past, and where is the past?" — Under what circumstances has this question an allurement for us? For under certain circumstances it hasn't, and we should wave it away as nonsense. It is clear that this question most easily arises if we are preoccupied with cases in which there are things flowing by us — as logs of wood float down a river. In such a case we can say the logs which *have passed* us are all down towards the left and the logs which *will pass* us are all up towards the right. We then use this situation as a simile for all happening in time and even embody the simile in our language, as when we say that "the present event passes by" (a log passes by), "the future event is to come" (a log is to come). We talk about the flow of events; but also about the flow of time — the river on which the logs travel.

Here is one of most fertile sources of philosophical puzzlement: we talk of the future event of something coming into my room, and also of the future coming of this event. We say, "*Something* will happen", and also "Something comes towards me", we refer to the log as "something", but also the log's coming towards me. (*BB* 60, italics in original)

The question "Where does the present go when it becomes past, and where is the past?" is meaningless, but it seems meaningful in the context where we compare time to a river in which events float like objects do, from left to right — from the past, through the present and into the future. To put it more accurately: it is *only* in this context that it seems to be meaningful. If, however, trying to resist the pictoriality of this metaphor, we could part with the picture of time as a river, then we would instantly recognize the meaninglessness of this question. Just as we can instantly recognize that the questions "Where does the candle's light go after you have put it out?" or "Where does light go once you turn off the light?" (see *BB* 60) are meaningless.

1.2 The role of grammatical investigations

According to certain interpreters, grammatical investigations serve theoretical purposes in the later Wittgenstein's philosophy. They interpret passages such as "*Essence* is expressed in grammar" (*PI* 371, italics in original); "Grammar tells what kind of object anything is" (*PI* 373) as saying that grammatical investigations have positive goals (see e.g. Kenny 1984, 43) — they have to reveal certain essences.

In fact, this is not about *Wesensschau* at all — the later Wittgenstein is not a kind of grammatical Husserl. Grammatical investigations can indeed reveal certain "essences", but this means nothing else than realizing how we actually use certain expressions in ordinary language. The results of grammatical investigation are embodied in uttering *trivialities* — Wittgenstein calls them "grammatical propositions" (*PI* 251). He thinks of sentences such as "Sensations are private" (*PI* 248); "One plays patience by oneself" (*ibid.*); "[T]he smile of an unweaned infant is not a pretence" (*PI* 249); "[A] dog [cannot] simulate pain" (*PI* 250); "This body has extension" (*PI* 252).

The repeated utterance of these trivialities plays the role of reminders of the actual use of our words. These sentences remind us of the fact that we use our expressions *this way* and not otherwise. We need these reminders because only by having these trivial grammatical sentences in mind can we be clear about *where we diverge* from the everyday use of our words when we formulate philosophical problems.

Wittgenstein refers to this role of grammatical investigations when he says "What *we* do is to bring words back from their metaphysical back to their everyday use" (*PI* 116, italics in original); this is the point of the passage that looks enigmatic at first sight, according to which "The work of the philosopher consists in assembling reminders for a particular purpose" (*PI* 127); and this is what he means when he says that philosophical problems are dissolved "by looking into the workings of our language, and that in such a way as to make us recognize those workings: *in despite of* an urge to misunderstand them" (*PI* 109, italics in original).

The trivial nature of grammatical sentences uttered during the grammatical investigations makes Wittgenstein say "If one tried to advance theses in philosophy, it would never be possible to debate them, because everyone would agree to them" (*PI* 128, italics in original),

and that “Philosophy only states what everyone admits” (*PI* 599). This is also the reason why he writes “Since everything lies open to view there is nothing to explain” (*PI* 126), and that “There must not be anything hypothetical in our considerations. We must do away with all *explanation*, and description alone must take its place” (*PI* 109, italics in original).

What should one do if one wishes to follow Wittgenstein? In the words of an interesting Harry Potter character, Alastor Morden, what one needs is “constant vigilance!” Why does one need constant vigilance? Because our language *continuously* misleads us and *continuously* prompts us to ask meaningless questions due to its surface grammar, misleading pictoriality and false analogies. Thus, the eliminating of philosophical problems (which is the only purpose of philosophy) cannot happen overnight but is a long process, or to quote Wittgenstein: “*a slow cure*” (*Z* 382, italics in original). Or, to use a more vivid metaphor of his: “Philosophy is a *battle* against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of our language” (*PI* 109, italics mine), i.e. it is a *constant struggle* with language; *constant resistance* to the temptation to concern ourselves with meaninglessness due to our misunderstanding of language.

From the fact that philosophy is a struggle, it follows that good and meaningful philosophy is not embodied in various studies (journals and textbooks) — instead, its ontological status is *activity*. What should the followers of Wittgenstein do? Two things. On the one hand, they (as interpreters of Wittgenstein) need to show that “Wittgenstein was not taking sides in the muddled controversies [...], and his reflections cannot be fitted into the misconceived pigeon-holes currently in vogue. The premises upon which these latter-day controversies stand would all be rejected by him as dogmas, absurdities, and misunderstandings.” (Hacker 1993, 546) On the other hand, they (as the lonely and heroic advocates of therapeutic philosophy) need to show that most of the philosophical studies published and read, or even quoted sometimes are the meaningless products of misunderstanding language.

1.3 The psychological component

So far, I have intentionally ignored the most important aspect of Wittgenstein’s therapeutic philosophy. I only claimed that he thinks philosophical problems are meaningless, as they arise from the misunderstanding of language. At the same time, I passed over in silence the fact that he thinks that philosophical problems can cause unsettling tension, i.e. real *emotional*

disorders.

Let's see Wittgenstein's following phrasings: "What we call a philosophical problem is a kind of particular, individual disturbance" (*PG* 193); "The problems arising through a misinterpretation of our forms of language have the character of *depth*. They are deep disquietudes; their roots are as deep in us the forms of our language and their significance is as great as the importance of our language." (*PI* 111, italics in original)

He also says the following: "The philosopher's treatment of a question is like the treatment of an illness" (*PI* 255); "A philosophical problem has the form: »I don't know my way about«" (*PI* 123); "The philosophical problem is an awareness of disorder in our concepts" (*BT* 421). And, finally, here are the most vivid metaphors and similes: philosophical problems are "knots in our thinking" (*BT* 422); "bumps" (*PI* 119); "constant irritations" (*BT* 409); and they are "like having a hair on one's tongue; one feels it, but can't get hold of, and therefore can't get rid of it" (*ibid.*)

Or let's take the well-known passage:

Naming appears as a *queer* connexion of a word with an object. — And you really get such a queer connexion when a philosopher tries to bring out *the* relation between name and thing by staring at an object in front of him and repeating a name or even the word "this" innumerable times. (*PI* 38, italics in original)

Richard Rorty is wrong when he attributes irony and sarcasm to Wittgenstein in this and similar remarks of his and calls the *Philosophical Investigations* "volumes of satire" (Rorty 1979, 369). There is no irony, sarcasm or satire to be found here. Instead, Wittgenstein describes the symptoms of a peculiar *illness*, since a person who keeps repeating the word "this" while staring at an object in order to use his introspection to discover how the word "this" denotes the object in front of him is miserable and ill. He is someone who deserves sympathy and treatment instead of irony and sarcasm.

In light of the above passages, it is understandable what Wittgenstein sees his own duty in: "As I do philosophy, its *entire* task is to shape expression in such a way *that certain worries disappear*" (*BT* 421, italics mine); "The real discovery is the one that makes me capable of

stopping doing philosophy when I want to” (*PI* 133).

Now, if dealing with philosophical problems leads to psychological/emotional problems, then philosophy is only legitimate as *therapy* (see *PI* 133). And the goal of this therapeutic philosophy can only be to eliminate those unsettling tensions (those conscious experiences that have uncomfortable phenomenal characters) that arise from dealing with philosophical problems. In other words, it should bring us the “peace of mind” (*BT* 416) we long to have. Therapeutic philosophy done well brings “*peace*, so that [we are] no longer *tormented* by [philosophical] questions” (*PI* 133, italics mine).

It is important to see that Wittgenstein did *not* just consider his own recovery. He did not want to be just the home therapist of philosophers, either, as the emotional disturbances caused by philosophical problems can take a hold of *anyone* at any time if they are not on their guard. No one is immune to linguistic misunderstanding, so it is not just philosophers working professionally on philosophical problems who are exposed to the mesmerizing power of language but *everyone else* is: “Human beings are deeply imbedded in philosophical, i.e. grammatical, confusions” (*BT* 423). Given all this, Wittgenstein thinks that philosophy is not just the business of philosophers. It is much more and more important than that. It is an activity that *everyone* ought to carry out on account of being exposed to these dangers.

There is something else I need to stress. The problem is not simply that we are disturbed or lack our peace of mind. If we are deeply unsettled by a mathematical or physical problem as mathematicians or physicists, that is completely in order. All we need to do is solve the problem at hand and we will have achieved, for a while at least, our peace of mind. It is only the disturbance caused by philosophical problems that is pathological. If these cause us to be unsettled, then, as we are battling pseudo-problems, we suffer *senselessly*. So, we need to achieve our peace of mind differently to how a mathematician or physicist does. This is the point at which the therapeutic philosophy suggested by Wittgenstein can come to our aid.

2 The failure of Wittgenstein’s therapeutic philosophy

I don’t want to dispute that there are meaningless philosophical problems and that their meaninglessness stems from some conceptual confusion. Thus, I don’t want to dispute that

some philosophers are really deceived by the surface grammar or pictoriality of language, which leads them to put forward meaningless philosophical theses and makes their philosophical beliefs meaningless. But I do dispute that *all* philosophical problems are pseudo-problems arising from the misunderstanding of language and that *all* philosophers who put forward philosophical theses are victims of conceptual confusions. In a word, I cannot identify with Wittgenstein's therapeutic philosophy — I don't think that Wittgenstein reacts appropriately to the epistemic failure of philosophy, or that he gives a right answer to the question "What should we do with our philosophical beliefs in the light of the epistemic failure of philosophy?"

I have three main concerns about Wittgenstein's therapeutic philosophy.

2.1 Self-defeat

I think that Wittgenstein's therapeutic philosophy is *self-defeating*. Here goes the argument. In order for Wittgenstein to hold that the only task of doing philosophy is to provide therapy, there has to be some kind of *diagnosis* first. And there is one indeed. According to this, philosophical questions and problems are meaningless. But in order not to simply declare this, Wittgenstein needs to give clear criteria of meaningfulness and meaninglessness. But these criteria should also not simply be declared *ex cathedra*, so he has to say *something* about the nature of linguistic meaning. And he does: "[T]he meaning of a word is its *use* in the language" (*PI* 43, italics mine). But that is still not enough. Since an expression can be used wrongly (e.g. somebody may systematically substitute the word "theology" with the word "teleology", or the expression "phenomenology" with the expression "phenomenalism"), Wittgenstein must say (and he says indeed) that "the meaning of a word = its *right* use". Now, the right use of words and expressions presupposes certain *rules*: "right use = right rule-following". The question arises as to what determines right rule-following. Wittgenstein must answer something, and he does say it: right use is not determined by some mental or neural fact but only the standard practice of the language-using community. Furthermore, following a rule is not a disposition manifested in some behavioral pattern but simple conformity with existing practice (see *PI* 198–241; and see esp. Kripke 1982).

The appeal to the right use of words that does not differ from the actual practice of the

language-using community is a crucial point in Wittgenstein's line of thought. The success of the diagnosis depends on it. It is by appealing to the right use of words that he has to show that assertions that *prima facie* seem to be meaningful (e.g. "A physical event is defined by where and when it happens"; "The distinguishing mark of the »mental« is that the subject of mental phenomena accesses them differently than other people do"; "Causal relation is contrafactual dependence") are actually meaningless pseudo-assertions. Wittgenstein cannot think the same of the status of this theory of meaning (or rather, conception of meaning) as of philosophical theories in general, viz. that it is meaningless, since one meaningless conception of meaning will surely not ground the criterion that is desired and fundamentally important for his diagnosis. Thus, he must view his own conception of meaning as *meaningful*. However, it is not enough for it to be meaningful, it also must be *true*, since a bad and false conception of meaning cannot serve as the grounds for the desired criterion. If, however he considers it to be true, then there will certainly be such a philosophical problem, philosophical conception, philosophical thesis and philosophical belief that he considers as meaningful and true — consequently, he cannot claim that all philosophical problems, theories, theses and beliefs are meaningless. But since he claims this, he is caught in the trap of self-defeat.

I think there are only two ways to avoid the conclusion that Wittgenstein's therapeutic philosophy is self-defeating. One is to claim that "All philosophical theses are meaningless *except* those that feature in the diagnosis needed for the therapy". The other is to claim that "The making of a diagnosis needed for the therapy is *not a philosophical achievement*; everything Wittgenstein says about the nature of linguistic meaning, i.e. everything that is to ground the criterion of meaningfulness is *not a substantial philosophical thesis*, but something else — something that is a *triviality* in an absolute sense, which does not need any justification".

These, however, seem to be *ad hoc* maneuvers. Frankly speaking, they cannot easily be taken seriously. Firstly, why should *exactly those* substantive philosophical theses (concerning linguistic meaning) be the *only* meaningful ones that Wittgenstein asserts in establishing a diagnosis needed for his therapy? Secondly, *why should it not be a substantive (linguistic) philosophical thesis* that "The concept of right use has a pivotal role in defining or characterizing the concept of meaning"; or that "The ability of rule-following is nothing but simple conformity with actual practice"? Moreover, *why should it be a triviality* to say that "The concept of use (and not, say, that of truth or inferential role) is fundamental to defining

or characterizing the concept of linguistic meaning”; or that “Rule-following is determined only by the standard practice of the language-using community”? All the more so, because both theses are open to several rock-hard objections.

2.2 Convincing force close to zero

My other main concern with Wittgenstein’s therapeutic philosophy is simply that the convincing force of his therapeutic exercises is close to zero. Let me start with the sense-datum theory. The orthodoxy is that the strongest argument for the sense-datum theory is the argument from hallucination. In outline, it goes as follows:

- (1) When *S* hallucinates a red tomato, then *S* is aware of *something* — it is phenomenologically implausible to describe *S*’s hallucinatory perceptual experience as *S* is not aware of anything.
- (2) The entity that *S* is aware of during the hallucination cannot be identified with any element in the world that exists independently of *S*’s current perceptual experience but is a mind-dependent entity (sense-datum).
- (3) If *S*’s hallucinatory perceptual experience is subjectively indistinguishable from *S*’s veridical perceptual experience, then *S* is in the same type of mental state when *S* is hallucinating and when *S* has a veridical perceptual experience.

Therefore:

- (C) When *S* veridically perceives the red tomato, *S* is (again) directly aware of a kind of mind-dependent entity (sense datum) and only indirectly perceives the red tomato that exists independently of *S*’s current perceptual experience.

Can you see *anything* in this argument that would allow you to draw the conclusion that the proponent of the argument from hallucination is a victim of some conceptual confusion? Premise (1) says *on the basis of the phenomenology* of hallucinations that *S* is aware of something when *S* hallucinates. Premise (2) is *a simple stipulation* — it is a definition of the

concept of a sense-datum as a mind-dependent entity. Premise (3), according to which two numerically distinct but subjectively indistinguishable conscious experiences are the same type of mental events, is *the most obvious suggestion* — what else could determine the type of a conscious experience than factors we can access subjectively? In other words, the concept and theory of sense-datum seem to have apparently nothing to do with the alleged misunderstanding of “have/haben” and “image/Vorstellung” — thus Wittgenstein’s diagnosis is not convincing, and consequently, neither is his therapy built thereon.

As for the metaphysical problem of time: one has to admit that it is not the best way to formulate the question thus: “Where does the present go when it becomes past, and where is the past?”. But one can paraphrase Augustine’s question as follows: “Does the past exist, and if so, in what sense?”, to which one can answer: “Yes, it exists, as do past facts, and past facts exist in the same sense as present ones do”. Here is a sketch of a possible argument for eternalism:

(1) For every true contingent proposition, there is (or: must be) something which makes it true. For example, the proposition “Whales are mammals” is made true by the fact that whales are mammals. If this fact did not obtain, then the proposition “Whales are mammals” would not be true.

(2) Propositions about the past can be true. For example, the proposition “Dinosaurs walked the Earth in the Jurassic period” is true. Or, the proposition “Wittgenstein was born in Vienna” is also true.

Therefore:

(C) The past and past facts exist, and they are as real as the present and present facts are. If only the present and present facts existed, then there would be nothing that would make propositions about the past true, so they could not be true.

My question is the same as before: can you see *anything* in this argument that would allow you to draw the conclusion that the proponent of the argument for eternalism is a victim of some conceptual confusion? Seriously, which premise comes from the image of the river of time embedded in our language? Premises (1) and (2) seem to be obvious truths. If I was ill-

willed, I would bring up Wittgenstein himself against his own therapeutic philosophy, saying that our convictions that “There must be something that makes contingently true propositions true” and that “We can assert true propositions about the past”, in his own words, “form the *foundation* of all operating with thoughts (with language)”. (OC 401, italics mine). Consequently, these, as the cases of “pre-knowledge” (“*Vorwissen*”), cannot arise from misunderstanding language.

Of course, in saying this I don’t want to claim that all premises of the above two arguments are true, and that the arguments themselves are compelling. All I claim is that, *for the life of me, I cannot see* any conceptual confusion or misunderstanding of language in any of the premises. That is, even if both arguments are strongly controversial, neither of them is meaningless.

A Wittgensteinian therapist could retort that I’m *still* a victim of conceptual confusion. I don’t notice that premise (1) of the argument from hallucination is meaningless, because in the case of hallucinations, it is meaningless to say that “Someone *is aware of something*”. Likewise, I don’t notice that premise (1) of the argument for eternalism is also meaningless, because it is meaningless to say that “Such and such a thing *makes* such and such proposition true”, that is, “Something *makes* a truth of something else”. And after rebuking me this way, he could add that “It is no wonder you don’t find Wittgenstein’s suggested therapies convincing, since you keep using meaningless sentences even in giving reasons for why you don’t find these suggestions convincing”.

This objection is hard to answer. All I can say is the following: perhaps one cannot go on like that infinitely. To put it mildly, it is not very polite for the Wittgensteinian therapist to counter my misgivings about his offered therapies by saying that I misunderstand language *again and again*. Insofar as he were able to place himself in the perspective of “the baffled ones” (let me add that he must be able to do that as a therapist), beyond a point, I think, he *would have* to admit that these therapeutic suggestions are really unconvincing. His efforts to find linguistic misunderstandings at all costs in the premises of the above two arguments are forced, and his certainty that he has found them is questionable.

In other words, the reason why it is difficult to argue with the Wittgensteinian therapist is that he keeps repeating that I don’t notice that I speak nonsense *even when* I try to make him

understand why it doesn't seem to me that there are any conceptual confusions or linguistic misunderstandings in the above two arguments. I concede that I have no knock-down arguments for my not being a victim of conceptual confusion when it does not seem to me that this or that premise is meaningless. At the same time, I think that the Wittgensteinian therapist must (or should) concede that it is not easy to seriously and sincerely believe that every philosopher who does not see any conceptual confusions in the premises of the above two arguments suffers from fatal blindness, and that Wittgenstein and the Wittgensteinian therapists *are the only ones* who can see something that not a single soul except them can see.

2.3 Undermotivation

I think that Wittgenstein's anti-philosophy attitude that characterized the whole course of his career was engendered by the — possibly unexpressed — experience of philosophy's epistemic failure. As he puts it: "Philosophy *really doesn't make any progress*, that the same philosophical problems that occupied the Greeks keep occupying us" (BT 424, italics mine). The already analyzed conceptual connection is clear: if philosophers had succeeded in solving certain substantive philosophical problems, then we should count that as progress — at t_1 they did not *yet* know the solution of this or that substantive philosophical problem, but at t_2 they *already* know it. Nevertheless, philosophers have not succeeded in solving a single substantive philosophical problem, consequently we cannot talk about substantive progress in philosophy.

I cannot see any other explanation. If some substantive philosophical problems had been solved by the community of philosophers, and so there would be consensually accepted philosophical theories, then Wittgenstein *could not consider* these problems to be meaningless. If philosophers had agreed in 1935 that charge, mass, spin, etc. are immanent universals, as physicists did about Maxwell's equations in the same year, then Wittgenstein would not have had any reason to deem the problem of universals to be meaningless.

However, let's take notice that even if we face the epistemic failure of philosophy as forcefully as Wittgenstein did, we still do not have to interpret this failure by saying that philosophical problems are meaningless pseudo-problems arising from conceptual confusion. Considering the self-defeating character of Wittgenstein's therapeutic philosophy and its close

to zero convincing force, it seems more obvious to say that philosophical problems are meaningful but are unsolvable with the tools of philosophy. I'm not saying that we have to be meta-skeptics, all I'm saying is that the commitment to Wittgenstein's therapeutic philosophy is *undermotivated*. After all, if someone, like Wittgenstein does, aims at achieving peace of mind, that is, stopping doing philosophy whenever they want to (see *PI* 133), then they can achieve that goal by suspending their philosophical beliefs as well. This is because the suspension of philosophical beliefs entails "at best" the abandonment of philosophical truth-seeking, which "offers the prospect" of the slow waning of one's cognitive needs for dealing with philosophical problems.

3 Farewell to Wittgenstein

I think Wittgenstein does not react appropriately to philosophy's epistemic failure, nor does he give a right answer to the question of what we should do with our philosophical beliefs in the light of the epistemic failure of philosophy. His view is almost certainly self-defeating. His therapeutic practices have very little convincing force. Choosing his therapeutic philosophy would be undermotivated, as there are other, probably more effective ways of achieving peace of mind.

But, instead of repeating my earlier criticism, I would like to say what it is that I find especially unsympathetic in the later Wittgenstein's philosophical attitude.

In my opinion, there are only two possibilities, and in my eyes, both are equally insupportable. One is that Wittgenstein *sees*, and in his sincere moments, *even admits to himself* that his therapeutic philosophy is self-defeating because while he supports the diagnosis for his therapies with a substantive philosophical conception of linguistic meaning (from now on, a bit defiantly, I'll call this concept "use theory"), he also thinks that all substantive philosophical theories and all substantive philosophical theses are meaningless. If this is indeed the case, what Wittgenstein does is quite *unethical*, as he uses the slogans "Surely, I don't produce any real philosophical theories", "Oh no, putting forward any substantive philosophical theses is far from me" as a cover. Thus, he consciously plays down and lies about an existing contradiction that seems ineliminable. In a word, he is a charlatan.

The other (and more probable) possibility is that Wittgenstein *seriously believes* that the use theory of meaning underlying the diagnosis for his therapies is not a substantive philosophical theory, and as such, it is not in need of any philosophical justification. That is, he thinks that what the use theory of meaning says is something absolutely evident, a triviality. He even introduces it this way: “For a *large* class of cases — though not for all — in which we employ the word ‘meaning’ it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language” (*PI* 43, italics in original).

However, Wittgenstein must know (and he obviously knows) that there are philosophers who strongly contest the truth of the use theory of meaning. Wittgenstein is not silly, so he obviously sees that the reasoning of *PI* 43 is circular, because he can only appeal to the *use* of the word “meaning” to point out the trivial truth of the use theory of meaning if he has already committed himself to the use theory of meaning — for why would it be of any interest otherwise?

With the above, I want to say that if Wittgenstein *really* believes that the use theory of meaning is not a substantive philosophical theory but — in spite of its controversial nature — something absolutely evident, then it can be strongly suspected (I for myself cannot imagine any other possibilities) that Wittgenstein considers himself as a kind of *oracle*, with the spirit or genius of ordinary language speaking through him, someone from whom the truths about linguistic meaning and rule-following are emanated — without the need for his supporting them with *any* philosophical arguments or considerations. Which means that he thinks “I, Ludwig Josef Johann Wittgenstein, am in an *epistemically privileged position* because I can *access the deep structure* of ordinary language and *can see it face to face*; thus, *I can safely ignore* the objections of all those who disagree with me, and *can rightly consider as my epistemic inferiors* all those who don’t recognize the meaninglessness of their philosophical theses”. In a word, he isn’t a charlatan but a fanatic.

Now, whether we consider the case that he consciously downplays self-defeat, or the case that he considers himself an oracle, I feel that to me, Wittgenstein’s attitude is anything but an example to be followed if I want to be accountable for my substantive philosophical beliefs with epistemic responsibility. And, I think, it cannot be an example to *anyone* who seriously faces up to the fact of pervasive disagreement in all fields of philosophy (including dissensus about linguistic meaning), and who doesn’t think it would be right to downplay the problem

that a philosopher draws on substantive philosophical theses to support his philosophical view that all substantive philosophical theses are meaningless, and who considers himself an infallible oracle and so an epistemic superior of all other people. In other words, it cannot be an example to anyone who considers charlatanism and fanaticism as equally unacceptable.

CHAPTER FOUR

PHILOSOPHERS WITH EXTRA HIGH EPISTEMIC SELF-CONFIDENCE

Here is the second reaction to philosophy's epistemic failure:

I'm well aware that philosophers haven't fulfilled their promises — they haven't solved philosophical problems. Still, this means only that my predecessors and contemporaries have failed. I, however, have succeeded — I have found the truth and I have got compelling justification for my substantive philosophical beliefs.

This formulation: “*I* have found truth” or “*I, of all people*, am the one who has compelling justification”, or perhaps “*We, of all people*, are the ones who have at last succeeded” forms the *essence* of this reaction. It largely says that:

After thorough investigation, I have realized that there are no philosophers or philosophical schools that are in possession of some well-founded and substantive philosophical truths. Even if there are some philosophers who hold the right view, their arguments aren't strong enough — they don't have compelling force. *I myself* had to produce compelling justifications for this or that philosophical thesis. *I myself* had to reassuringly solve this or that philosophical problem. And, after a number of aborted attempts by others, *I myself* had to create and promote philosophy as an epistemically successful enterprise.

In this chapter, I deal with this reaction to philosophy's epistemic failure, which — not without sarcasm — I will call the “I'm the only one” view. First, I will illustrate the “I'm the only one” attitude with some well-known quotes. In what follows, I will put myself in the place of an imaginary “I'm the only one” philosopher and try to vividly describe the gist of the “I'm the only one” attitude and its main motivations. Finally, I will say why I think that the “I'm the only one” philosophers' reaction to philosophy's epistemic failure is inappropriate and why I think they give a wrong answer to the question “What should we do with our philosophical beliefs in the light of philosophy's epistemic failure?”.

1 The “I’m the only one” attitude — an illustration

The attitude of the followers of the epistemic tradition (for I’m speaking about them, although not all of them) has always been characterized by the above duality. On the one hand, they were dissatisfied with philosophy’s accomplishment up to that point, and often had a very low opinion of some — or even all — other philosophers’ activity. On the other hand, they themselves made attempts to turn philosophy into an epistemically fruitful enterprise — not infrequently considering themselves as the Copernicus or Newton of philosophy. They precisely saw philosophy’s epistemic failure, but at the same time, they were certain that — in contrast to their predecessors and contemporaries — they will fulfil (or have already fulfilled) their promises and remedy (or have already remedied) the situation. They often sharply criticized the arguments of their predecessors and contemporaries, but thought that their own arguments were flawless and so they might as well create the much-awaited consensus in philosophy. Their characteristic rhetoric was the following: “So far all philosophy” [insert a criticizing phrase here such as “was lost”; “had no solid grounding”; “provided no certain knowledge”], “but now (!) that *I* have entered the story, everything is going to change (!)” [insert a nice fat promise here]. This rhetoric and attitude is familiar to you, isn’t it?

Among the great dead philosophers, Descartes voiced his dissatisfaction this way:

Concerning philosophy I shall say only that, seeing that it has been cultivated for many centuries by the most excellent minds [...] and that, nevertheless, there still is nothing in it about which there is not some dispute, and consequently nothing that is not doubtful [...]. Then, as for the other sciences, I judged that, insofar as they borrow their principles from philosophy, one could not have built anything solid upon such unstable foundations. [...] And thus I thought that book learning [...] does not draw nearly so close to the truth as the simple reasonings that a man of good sense can naturally make about the things he encounters. (Descartes 1637/2000, 49–51)

Or, here is Hume’s beautifully written passage:

Nor is there requir’d such profound knowledge to discover the present imperfect condition of the sciences [that is, philosophy], but even the rabble without doors may judge from the noise and clamour, which they hear, that all goes not well within. There

is nothing which is not the subject of debate, and in which men of learning are not of contrary opinions. The most trivial question escapes not our controversy, and in the most momentous we are not able to give any certain decision. Disputes are multiplied, as if every things was uncertain; and these disputes are managed with the greatest warmth, as if every things was certain. (Hume 1739/2000, 3)

Let's leap forward and see Husserl's strict diagnosis:

I am not saying that philosophy is an imperfect science; I am saying quite simply that it is still not a science, that is has yet to begin as science, when measured by the standard of whether it possesses a piece, even if a small one, of objectively justified theoretical doctrinal content. (Husserl 1910-11/2002, 250)

And now on to the promises! Here is a promise from Kant, presented with drumroll and packed with moderately creative metaphors:

[T]hese Prolegomena will bring [everyone] to understand that there exist a completely new science, of which no one had previously formed merely the thought, of which even the bare idea was unknown, and for which nothing from all that has been provided before now could be used except the hint that Hume's doubts had been able to give; Hume also foresaw nothing of any such possible form in science, but deposited his ship on the beach (of skepticism) for safekeeping, where it could then lie and rot, whereas it is important to me give it a pilot, who, provided with complete sea-charts and compass, might safely navigate the ship wherever seems good to him, following sound principles of the helmsman's art drawn from a knowledge of the globe. (Kant 1783/2004, 11–12)

And the promise goes on:

Here then is such a plan subsequent to the completed work, which now can be laid out according to analytical method, whereas the work itself absolutely had to be composed according to the synthetic method, so that the science might present all of its articulations, as the structural organization of a quite peculiar faculty of cognition, in their natural connection. (Kant 1783/2004, 13)

But let me quote Kant's account of the successes he achieved two years earlier:

I have not avoided reason's questions by pleading the incapacity of human reason as an excuse; rather I have completely specified the questions according to principles, and after discovering the point where reason has misunderstood itself, I have resolved them to reason's *full satisfaction*. [...] In this business I have made comprehensiveness my chief aim in view, and I make bold to say that *there cannot be a single metaphysical problem that has not been solved here*, or at least to the solution of which the key has not been provided. (Kant 1781/1998, 101, [Axii–Axiii], italics mine)

And here is Husserl's promise:

[A]gainst these and all similar ills [i.e. the failure of philosophies] there is only one remedy: scientific critique and in addition a radical science, rising up from below, grounded on sure foundations, and progressing in accordance with the most rigorous method: the philosophical science we are advocating here. Worldviews can quarrel, only science can decide, and its decision bears *the stamp of eternity*. (Husserl 1910-11/2002, 291, italics mine)

Let me quote three other passages of Husserl's, since he is probably the most grandiose philosophical promise-maker of all times:

[I]t lies precisely in the essence of philosophy, insofar as it returns to the ultimate origins, that its scientific work moves in spheres of direct intuition, and it is the greatest step our age has to make the see that with philosophical intuition in the right sense, *the phenomenological seizing upon essences*, an endless field of work opens up and a science that, without any indirectly symbolizing and mathematical methods, without the apparatus of inferences and proofs, nevertheless obtains an abundance of the most rigorous cognitions, which are decisive for *all* further philosophy. (Husserl 1910-11/2002, 294, italics in original)

Or:

What is the new "revolution" to mean to us? Perhaps the turn away from the idea of

rigorous science? And what is the “system” to mean to us for which we yearn, which as ideal is to light the way in the depths of our inquiring work? A philosophical “system” in the traditional sense; as it were, a Minerva that springs already completed and armed from the head of a creative genius — in order then in later times to be preserved in the silent museum of history alongside other such Minervas? Or a philosophical system of doctrine that, after the colossal preparatory work of generations, actually begins from below with *an indubitable foundation* and *rises up* like any sound edifice, wherein *stone is set upon stone, each as solid as the other*, in accordance with guiding insights? On this question minds and paths must part. (Husserl 1910-11/2002, 251, italics mine)

It is also worth seeing what Husserl thinks about the utmost significance of his own philosophy, which is supposed to give a new meaning to human existence due to phenomenological reflection:

[T]he ultimate self-understanding of man as being responsible for his own human being [is] *his self-understanding as being in being called to a life of apodicticity*, not only in abstractly practicing apodictic science in the usual sense but [as being mankind] which realizes its whole concrete being in apodictic freedom by becoming apodictic mankind in the whole active life of its reason — through which it is human. (Husserl 1936/1970, 340–341, italics in original)

Finally, let me quote Moritz Schlick’s passage, who presented a sneakier way of promising than the above authors, since not only does he emphasize how well he is aware of philosophy’s epistemic failure so far, but he also stresses how well he is aware of how many unfulfilled promises have been made previously by different philosophers:

I refer to this anarchy of philosophical opinions which has so often been described, in order to leave no doubt that I am fully conscious of the scope and weighty significance of the conviction that I should now like to express. For I am convinced that we now find ourselves at an altogether decisive turning point in philosophy, and we are objectively justified in considering that an end has come to the fruitless conflict of systems. We are already at the present time [...] in possession of methods which make every such conflict in principle unnecessary. What is now required is their resolute application. (Schlick 1930-31/1959, 54)

And here is Schlick's optimistic prophecy and the epistemic degradation of those philosophers who disagree with him:

Thus after the great turning point of philosophy shows its decisive character even more clearly than before. It is only, indeed, because of this character that the conflict of systems can be ended. I repeat: [...] we may today consider it as in principle already ended. [...] Certainly there will still be many a rear-guard action. Certainly many will for centuries continue to wander further along the traditional paths. Philosophical writers will long continue to discuss the old pseudo-questions. But in the end they will no longer be listened to; they will come to resemble actors who continue to play for some time before noticing that the audience has slowly departed. Then it will no longer be necessary to speak of "philosophical problems" for one will speak philosophically concerning *all* problems, that is: clearly and meaningfully. (Schlick 1930-31/1959, 59, italics in original)

We rarely meet such great promises laced with rhetoric fireworks in the literature of epistemic tradition. The rhetoric and the promise are usually more modest. Of the followers of the epistemic tradition, only a few describe their successes with expressions such as "complete sea-charts and a compass", the "safely navigating pilot", the "stamp of eternity" and "great turning point of philosophy", only a few give their essays pretentious titles such as, for example, Cudworth (*A true intellectual system of the universe*), or as Spinoza (*Ethica: ordine geometrico demonstrata*), and only a few set such major goals to themselves as the philosophers quoted above.

As for the rhetoric, you should not be misled by the watered-down wording used by most followers of the epistemic tradition. Despite their moderate rhetoric, the "I'm the only one" philosophers of this tradition believe *just as* seriously that they can compellingly justify their philosophical views and disprove all the rival conceptions as Kant, Husserl or Schlick did. They are just as hopeful about the epistemic success of their *own* philosophical activity as the great dead ones were when they were alive, apart from the fact that they hardly ever compare their significance to Newton's or Copernicus', thereby thankfully avoiding a comparison out of proportion. You would misunderstand their intentions if you thought that their reserved rhetoric indicates that they don't fully trust in the success of their theory and present their

arguments at half-mast, so to say.

As for the promises, not all “I’m the only one” philosophers think that they have succeeded in reassuringly solving some *big* philosophical problem once and for all. Rather, many of them think something like this: “I have only solved just a *tiny piece* of the great puzzle, and by solving this piece I do my share in the great success of philosophy as an epistemic enterprise”. For example, if a philosopher thinks that he has succeeded in compellingly justifying the philosophical thesis that there are no abstract artefacts, and interprets his achievement as taking a *small* but *certain* step *forward* on the road to making sure that later generations can compellingly justify the big philosophical thesis that only concrete entities exist, then he is *also* an “I’m the only one” philosopher. This means that the “I’m the only one” attitude doesn’t presuppose that the philosophical thesis to be compellingly justified is a significant, comprehensive one — what only counts is that the philosopher must be *sure* that he has compellingly justified his thesis.

I wouldn’t like to scorn the followers of the epistemic tradition — I’m just trying to throw light on the nature of the “I’m the only one” attitude. Namely, the “I’m the only one” philosophers are not naïve when they embark on a quest for philosophical truths, and they do not underestimate the difficulty of their enterprise. They are well aware that their predecessors and contemporaries have not managed to fulfil their promises, but they are undeterred by this fact. The later “I’m the only one” members of the epistemic tradition precisely know that the promises made by the above-quoted great dead philosophers have remained unfulfilled. They know that — *pace* Kant — nothing at all was “ultimately” developed by the suggested analytic method, and if Kant has a way of observing his successors’ (e.g. the German idealists’) works from the beyond, he is unlikely to be rubbing his hands with satisfaction. They know that — *pace* Husserl — the ideas he had about the redemptive role of his own phenomenology did not come true, to put it mildly. Husserl thought that by intuitive fulfilment, he would be able to anchor all his insights in a kind of field of evidence, and thanks to his work, a so far undiscovered space will open, every fruit of which would grow out of apodictic soil. In reality (and using another metaphor), as for the apodictic truth-fishing in the transcendental sea of the eidetic phenomenology of essences he introduced, the net hangs off his boat rather empty. They know that — *pace* Schlick — it did not take too long before logical empiricism was crumbled to pieces; and was considered as one of the least tenable theories put on display as a deterring piece in the retrospective hall of the museum of

philosophical theories.

I really don't want to heap scorn. Instead, I would like to draw your attention to the peculiar feature that despite the incredible amount of unfulfilled promises and failures, the epistemic tradition of philosophy has survived and is alive and kicking even today. That is, to the feature that more and more philosophers join this tradition, who try to "force truth into the open" with the tools of philosophy again and again. And they are able to live with the unshakable conviction that — unlike others — they (*of all people*) have succeeded in doing so.

2 Dialogue with an "I'm the only one" philosopher

One participant of the dialogue is Sophie. Of her, it is enough to say that she is not a constructive (theorizing) character, yet she considers it very important to clearly see the epistemic status of her philosophical beliefs, and she does her best not to deceive herself. The other participant of the dialogue is a figure in the epistemic tradition — a full-fledged "I'm the only one" philosopher. Of him, it is enough to say that he is firmly convinced that he knows substantive philosophical truths and has compelling arguments for his philosophical view; moreover, he does not hide his extra-high epistemic self-esteem. I will call him "Philonous" for the sake of the game.

Sophie: What philosophical view do you hold?

Philonous: I'm specialized in the problem of the metaphysical status of possible worlds. I'm an actualist, an ersatz-realist to be exact. I claim that there is only one world that contains concrete particulars (physical objects and physical events) — the actual world, the one we live in. However, there are also abstract entities in our world besides the concrete particulars — they represent how our world could be. Thus, I consider possible worlds abstract entities.

Sophie: And what do you make of the fact that your view (i.e. that possible worlds are abstract entities) is just one of the great many rival philosophical views? The other views (modal deflationism, modal fictionalism, robust moral realism, modal combinatorism and modal dimensionalism) are logically incompatible with ersatz-

realism, but they are also well-supported by philosophical arguments. Don't you think you should take your confidence back a notch?

Philonous: I don't understand why it should bother me. I'm in an epistemically privileged position. As opposed to my interlocutors, I do have access to the natural joints of reality.

Sophie: What do you mean by that?

Philonous: Let me illuminate it with a parallel. Think about how you are, along with everyone else, in an epistemically privileged position regarding your own conscious experiences. You have privileged access to them. Now, you see, I, too, have privileged access to the ontological structure of reality. The arguments for my view exactly suit the ontological landscape of reality.

However, if you don't like these metaphors, I can put it this way: my view is free from the mistakes of rival views and unifies their advantages. My arguments have shown this — beyond all doubts, that is, compellingly.

Sophie: But apart from appealing to your alleged epistemically privileged position, can you show me at least one independent argument for your having no reason to worry about the others' views?

Philonous: Of course I can. When I have to decide whether I can believe with all certainty in the existence of abstract entities that represent possible situations, I only have to consider the issues which are *inherently* connected with this question. In other words, it would only be reasonable to "take my confidence back a notch" if I discovered a seemingly irresolvable *internal* difficulty within my own theory. However, I don't see any such difficulty. I can show beyond all doubts that all alleged difficulties are based on mistakes or on misunderstanding.

To put it differently, if I couldn't answer the question "What distinguishes the actual world from the innumerable non-actualized possible worlds?", or if I couldn't explain the concept of transworld identity, or, if, as I am committed to the existence of abstract

entities, couldn't answer the question "How we, persons existing in space-time (concrete particulars) can have access to these abstract entities that are outside of space-time?", then — I concede — I would start having some doubts about the truth of ersatz-realism. But, excuse me, I don't care at all if the philosophical views held by others are incompatible with mine, because it is evident that this fact is not one of the difficulties with my theory. This has nothing whatsoever to do with it, being neither in favor of nor against it.

Sophie: But how is it possible that your confidence is not shaken if you recognize that there are rival theories that were also worked out by smart philosophers, and they don't accept your arguments as compelling? Why do you think that it is *precisely your* own theory that is epistemically privileged? How can you justify that it is *precisely your* own theory that carves nature at its joints, and all other views misrepresent them? If *you* can consider yourself an epistemically privileged person, then you must allow for the possibility that the advocates of other views can do so as well. Or, if *you* can consider your arguments compelling, then you must allow for the possibility that the advocates of other views can consider their own arguments compelling as well.

Philonous: Of course, all my interlocutors would vindicate the epistemic privileged position to themselves. But it is only *I* who can do it *legitimately*, because my arguments *do support* my view compellingly, and I can make irrefutable objections to the rival theories. Those who think otherwise than me haven't understood the arguments for my view. Although I pointed out the mistakes of their arguments, it was in vain because they failed to recognize these mistakes. It is not my responsibility if they cannot see the compelling force of my arguments, just like it is not my responsibility if they cannot notice the fatal pitfalls in their arguments. Sophie, the thing is that my interlocutors are *not* my epistemic peers. All of them are my epistemic inferiors.

Sophie: Excuse me, but I still can't believe you. Imagine a mathematician who comes up with the proof of a conjecture. After reading his paper, his colleagues conclude that the proof is insufficient, or at least not compelling. What's the difference between you and this mathematician? Your papers are read by your colleagues who conclude that your proof is insufficient, or at least not compelling. Perhaps is it the case that your arguments are more difficult to follow than a mathematical proof? It's hard for me not

to suspect that you keep advertising your epistemically privileged position so intensively so you don't have to face the fact that you — like other members in the epistemic tradition — have failed to produce compelling philosophical arguments.

Philonous: Sophie, we're going in a circle again and again. I can only tell you that I already told you before. I can see *clare et distincte* that the premises of my argument are unassailable and I can see *clare et distincte* that the conclusion logically follows from its premises. That is, my argument is compelling, and whoever denies its conclusion must be irrational.

But, as you've been nagging me so much, let me tell you how things stand. Let's suppose that you enter into a debate with a philosopher, an avid follower of Marquis de Sade who cannot see that it's morally wrong to cause suffering to others out of sheer pleasure. You try to convince him with all kinds of arguments, but he is adamant that you're wrong. He brushes off your arguments and requests you to produce some additional ones, which would prove beyond all doubt that it is *precisely your* own view that carves the moral world-order at its joints.

Sophie, you better admit that you couldn't produce any additional argument like that, moreover, you wouldn't think that any such further argument is necessary in this situation. You'd simply think that the marquis' follower doesn't understand your arguments, that is, he lacks the ability of philosophical insight. You would say "I know I'm right, I know that my interlocutor is wrong, because I can see *clare et distincte* the truth of the proposition »It's morally wrong to cause suffering to others out of sheer pleasure«". But you might as well say that "My interlocutor lacks moral sense". Now, what I think of my interlocutors is similar: it's that they lack the appropriate *philosophical* sense. If you wish, their "philosophical device" is faulty. If you wish, they're "epistemically ill-equipped". And don't give me the line that whereas you would argue for some obvious truth in the above imaginary situation and your interlocutor would deny some obvious truth, I'm arguing for some non-obvious truth and my interlocutors deny some non-obvious truth. You shouldn't do that because, in the light of my arguments, the truth of ersatz-realism is as evident to me as the truth of the proposition "It's morally wrong to cause suffering to others out of sheer pleasure" is evident to you.

Sophie: Well, then let me tell you how things stand in my opinion. I think the thing is that you're a victim of a peculiar defect. My diagnosis is that you're incapable of self-reflection, and unable to see yourself from the outside. You're aware that there are others who hold views incompatible with your own view — you must obviously be aware of that, as you're arguing against them. Still, you're unable — please note the emphasis — to *step out* of your philosophical cave and see your own view *as just one* among many others that are also well underpinned by philosophical arguments.

If you were capable of self-reflection (as you're not), then you would immediately *realize* that your philosophical view is just one among many. That is, if you could see the various views — among them, your own — from the outside, you would immediately *realize* that yours *doesn't have a privileged status*. Thus, if you were capable of self-reflection, your certainty that it is *precisely your* arguments that are compelling would vanish into thin air (for you would think “Indeed, why would it be *precisely my* arguments?”); and you wouldn't think it evident that it is *precisely your* arguments that “map” the ontological landscape of reality (for — you would realize — “why would it be *precisely my* arguments?”).

Let me go further. If you could put yourself in your interlocutors' perspective (as you cannot), you would see that they may be just as certain that they're right as you — the situation is *symmetrical*. You would realize that their “certainty-awareness” is subjectively *indistinguishable* from yours. Furthermore, if you could put yourself in their perspective, you would understand at last that their and your philosophical views carry *equal weight*, and they aren't your epistemic inferiors, who cannot see the compelling force of your arguments due to some fault in their “philosophical device” or “epistemic equipment”— rather, these philosophers are your epistemic peers. For you must concede that you cannot reassuringly and non-circularly justify that the intuitions your interlocutors draw on in developing their philosophical theories are less reliable than those on which your own theory is built.

Let me give you an example. If you were able to put yourself in Lewis' perspective, you would immediately see that robust realists are able to reduce modalities (that is, they're able to provide truth-makers with proper metaphysical status for our ordinary, literally

true modal statements), thus Lewis' theory — at least in this respect — *performs better* than the ersatz-realism you hold, which cannot do that. To put it simply: there are a number of important and fundamental intuitions and pre-philosophical convictions about modalities that are more consistent with rival theories than with yours.

Here is a vivid passage which, in my opinion, sheds light on the situation: “Suppose, thousands of people, each of whom wants to go to São Paulo, randomly board all flights departing Dallas-Fort Worth. Suppose they fill all departing seats, but are not told where they are going. Of these thousands, a few hundred in fact will land in São Paulo. Most will arrive somewhere else. Philosophy seems like this in many respects. It may bring some people to the proper destination, but it dumps most somewhere else. Actually, matters are worse than that. Travelers will know whether they have arrived in São Paulo. In philosophy's case, some may indeed arrive at truth. However, they will not have discernibly better grounds for believing this than their mistaken peers. They may believe themselves to have better grounds, and their peers believe this about themselves as well. However, *from the outsider's perspective* [that is, on the “level” of self-reflection], *they look the same.*” (Brennan 2010, 3–4, italics from Sophie)

Philonous: Dear Sophie, you're saying what you're saying with truly impressive vigor — too bad that it's altogether false. You're wrong to claim that I'm incapable of self-reflection. I am capable of it, and I did reflect on my own activity — I've reviewed my own view in the multitude of the many rival theories. However, my self-reflection *has not* revealed what *you think* it should have revealed, namely that my view is just one among many. Rather, it has revealed that my view is *the only true one* among many other false ones.

You're also wrong to claim that I'm unable to put myself in my interlocutors' perspective. I've already done that on several occasions, and thoroughly investigated the kinds of evidence, pre-philosophical intuitions and fundamental convictions which my interlocutors appeal to in constructing theories. However, this “putting myself in others' perspective” *has not* produced the result that *you think* it should have. Rather, it has produced the result that most of my interlocutors' pre-philosophical intuitions and fundamental convictions are delusional.

In a word, your whole reasoning is flawed, and, frankly speaking, unsympathetic. For — and now *you* note the emphasis! — you *presuppose* that my self-reflection *can only reveal* that my view is just one among many epistemically equal views. Moreover, you also *presuppose* that “my putting myself in my interlocutors’ perspective” *can only reveal* that their intuitions are not weaker than mine. Let me ask you a rhetorical question: Why do you think everything should work out just as you expect it should?

Furthermore, when you “suggest” that I’ve wrongly judged the epistemic status of my view because in fact it is of equal weight as the others, and when you “suggest” that the degree of my certainty cannot be higher than my interlocutors’ — well, I can tell you that *you’re the one* who judges wrongly because *you yourself* are unable to see the compelling force of my arguments for ersatz-realism.

I doubt that there are many “I’m the only one” philosophers who would put it this bluntly. Still, I believe that Philonous’ case well represents their attitude. Deep in their heart, most “I’m the only one” philosophers think like Philonous about the epistemic status of their substantive philosophical beliefs — including almost all great dead philosophers as well as those who think that all what they have reassuringly solved, once and for all, is just a tiny piece of a philosophical puzzle, that is, what they have compellingly justified is just a philosophical thesis of minor significance.

This is because they could not really do otherwise. As “I’m the only one” philosophers, they can only think what Philonous thinks, namely that they are in possession of substantive philosophical truths. And they are not in possession of substantive philosophical truths because they are the lucky winners of an epistemological lottery draw, but rather because they have produced compelling arguments for the philosophical truths at issue, arguments which can be countered only irrationally. To do so, they must think what Philonous thinks, namely that their views correctly represent the structure of reality; that the arguments for their views “map” the ontological landscape of reality; and that their views are free from the mistakes of the rival ones, and unify their advantages.

To put it differently, in the light of the pervasive and permanent dissensus in philosophy, one can only join the epistemic tradition by thinking that one’s own position is epistemically privileged and that others are one’s epistemic inferiors. Without it, on what grounds could an

“I’m the only one” philosopher rationally believe that his — and not some of his interlocutor’s — philosophical view is the right one?

Using another terminology, the „I’m the only one” philosophers are advocates of the steadfast view. Of course, they do not embrace the variant of the steadfast view that goes hand in hand with permissivism — the “I’m the only one” philosophers don’t allow for rational disagreements concerning philosophical problems; in their opinion, there can be *only one* rational view on a philosophical problem. Nor do they embrace that version of the steadfast view which says that *S* can rationally stick to the truth of belief *p* because the evidence (or set of evidences) on the basis of which *S* originally committed himself to the truth of *p* has more epistemic weight than the fact, recognized by *S*, that some philosophers who are his epistemic peers deny that *p* is true. In the eyes of the “I’m the only one” philosophers, the latter wording is weak, insincere, unprincipled and spineless — for according to them, a philosopher can only rationally stick to the truth of *p*, while being aware that others think *p* to be false, if he *does not consider those others his epistemic peers* but rather his epistemic inferiors. In a word, the “I’m the only one” philosophers think that the only right variant of the steadfast view which can be upheld sincerely is that which enjoins one to *epistemically degrade* those who disagree with him — since this is the only way for one to rationally stick to the truth of one’s substantive philosophical beliefs.

3 The lesson of the dialogue — epistemic blindness

If I had to, I would bet a lot that you side with Sophie and not Philonous in their debate. For there is something displeasing and almost irritating in Philonous’ attitude. It is probably clear from the dialogue what the most displeasing factors are, but let me make them explicit.

(1) You may find it displeasing and irritating in Philonous’ attitude that he is not the least swayed by the fact that other philosophers do not accept his arguments as compelling. You may think that Philonous has the epistemic duty to take his self-confidence back a notch. Instead, he keeps obsessively repeating that his arguments are compelling, and he knows that with all certainty because he *clare et distincte* sees the compelling force of his arguments. However, Philonous can retort that no argument or justification can be invalidated by the fact that others hold it flawed. And he really *clare et distincte* (if you wish, face to face) sees the

compelling force of his arguments, so he has no reason, not to mention epistemic duty, to take his self-confidence back a notch.

(2) You may also find it displeasing and irritating in Philonous' attitude his unwillingness to concede that the rival theories about the metaphysics of possible worlds are of equal weight as his ersatz-realism, and his view of the advocates of rival theories as his epistemic inferiors. Philonous, however, might reply that the reason he does not concede that the rival theories are of equal weight as his is that they are not of equal weight as his. His theory is true, and all other theories are false. And he rightly considers his interlocutors as his epistemic inferiors because they believe falsehoods, and are unable to see the compelling force of the arguments for his view.

(3) You may also think that Philonous does not understand the concept of self-reflection, and — although he is convinced of it — he has not carried out a single self-reflective act during his career. For had he carried out one, he should have realized that his view is really just one among many and is not privileged. Philonous, however might reply that he does understand the concept of self-reflection precisely and he has already carried out several self-reflective acts. But his self-reflective acts have made him see the incontrovertible truth that his view is not merely one among many in the multitude of views, but a privileged one, because it is true.

(4) Finally, you may also find it displeasing and irritating in Philonous' attitude that he is unable to put himself in his rivals' perspective. He merely says that he is able, but in fact he is unable to do that, and he merely says he has done that, but in fact he has not. For had he done that, he should have realized that his rivals also drew on strong intuitions in working out their theories, and there are some intuitions that are consistent with those rival theories but not with his own. Philonous, however, might reply that he does not merely say so but he did put himself in his opponents' perspective. But his putting himself into their perspective has resulted in his seeing without a doubt that the intuitions on which the rival theories are based are all delusional, and deceive those who draw on them in constructing a theory.

This is how I see the main lesson from the debate between Sophie and Philonous and from the contrasts listed above. Philonous is the unshakable champion of the "I'm the only one" view. He has answers to every objection. He is able to neutralize all of them, and what he says is unassailable from his own perspective. Philonous is absolutely consistent. If his arguments are

really compelling, then it is really irrelevant that others doubt them. Philonous is absolutely sincere. He sincerely believes that he *clare et distincte* sees the compelling force of his arguments. He also sincerely believes that the theory he holds is epistemically privileged, and thus he sincerely believes that his interlocutors are all his epistemic inferiors whose intuitions and fundamental pre-philosophical convictions are delusional.

At the same time (and now take it as a wink!) *we all know* that Philonous' resistance to Sophie's objections and his consistency and sincerity are not virtues but rather symptoms. *We do not believe him* that he is capable of self-reflection or that he is able to put himself in his opponents' perspective and to really weigh the intuitions on which the rival theories are based. And we can safely say these things of him even though we would not stand a chance to convince him of our truth.

For, as Sophie has rightly pointed out, Philonous' belief in his epistemically privileged position stems from his special deficiency. I call this deficiency *epistemic blindness*. Philonous is blind. He is not inattentive, like a man who accidentally leaves his king in the hitting position during a game of chess. He does not make any logical fallacies, either. He does not ignore the arguments brought up against his view. He is simply blind to others' epistemic perspective, to the recognition of "epistemic attractiveness" of considerations and arguments for rival theories.

And, of course, he is blind to his own deficiency. His own epistemic blindness is *hidden* and *undetectable* for him. He is unaware of his incapability of self-reflection. He is unaware of his incapability of putting himself in others' perspective. As an "I'm the only one" philosopher (in his dark philosophical cave), Philonous can do philosophy throughout his entire career, secure in the conviction that his philosophical position is epistemically privileged and that the truth of his ersatz-realism is beyond dispute — without having second thoughts for a moment.

Now (and take it again as a wink!), all unbiased persons can precisely see Philonous' blindness. They see that he does not have the faintest idea as to what Sophie finds wanting in his activity. Philonous' epistemic blindness is *transparent* — and being so, it is frightening. Philonous' mind *darkens* whenever he judges himself to be epistemically superior to everybody else. What is *fatal* about his blindness is the fact that he cannot do anything against it, as he is unaware of it. In fact, Philonous is a sick fanatic, who is unfortunately able to make

himself believe that Sophie's misgivings are all groundless and irrelevant. He is unable to notice that his consistency and "unassailable" arguments against Sophie actually block the way to realizing his own blindness.

Let's suppose that Sophie, as a last desperate move, tries to parody Philonous. She points out that Philonous' self-confidence to shrug off all criticism is ridiculous and at once pathetic. She also points out that Philonous' fanaticism is not much different from that of Osama bin Laden or Savonarola. She lists the great many names of those who, coming before Philonous in the history of philosophy, made self-confident promises, the great many names of those coming before him who already said "All philosophies have so far been wide of the mark, but mine is a game-changer". She brings it to Philonous' attention that this promise-making can be continued infinitely, because philosophers foolishly tend to believe that the more often they repeat a promise — while bringing up the past breakings of promises with a resentful or apologizing tone — the more convincing it will be, for the more truth it includes of the past. In a word, she tries to appeal to Philonous' sense of humor or self-irony.

It might be that on watching the parody, Philonous would laugh at himself together with Sophie and realize that his awareness of his epistemic privilege is comic indeed. But knowing Philonous' character, it is not too probable. A more probable scenario is that Philonous would say to Sophie: "The punch line is off, because I'm not one among many who broke their promises, but rather, I'm the only one who has kept it". To make Philonous laugh, it would be necessary to enable him to see himself *from the outside* — but nobody could force him to do so. Although we know that Philonous' self-confidence is comic (and the same goes for most of the great dead philosophers), he is incapable of self-reflection, so there is a danger that his own comic nature remains forever hidden to him.

4 Farewell to the "I'm the only one" view

Although I consider the "I'm the only one" view an inappropriate reaction to philosophy's epistemic failure and the "I'm the only one" philosophers as fanatics or comic figures, I have some residual bad feeling. For what if I'm wrong, and an "I'm the only one" philosopher who is able to compellingly justify his philosophical theses has already been or will soon be born? I have to admit that all I've done is wink at you and reject this reaction by appealing to your

presumed agreement.

Now I have to say something to that. And *the most* I can say is this: I reject the “I’m the only one” view as a reaction to philosophy’s epistemic failure because *I don’t want to be a man like Philonous*. Dare I say it, *I don’t feel it right to become a man* who imagines himself to be epistemically superior to everybody else, and who considers everybody else his epistemic inferior. And I don’t feel it right to become a man who doesn’t know the expression “in my opinion”, who is resistant to every criticism and insensitive to the convincing force of arguments for rival theories; who thinks that the “philosophical device” and “epistemic equipment” of his interlocutors is faulty, and simply declares that their intuitions and fundamental pre-philosophical convictions are deceptive. I feel that it would be wrong — *very wrong* — to become a man like this, and that’s why I reject the “I’m the only one” view.

Of course, this is anything but an “ordinary” philosophical argument. But, as I see it, like solipsism, the “I’m the only one” view or attitude is irrefutable and unassailable. Just as the solipsist does not think that other persons’ epistemic perspectives are relevant because he thinks they don’t exist and so he renders himself virtually immune to any objections, the “I’m the only one” philosopher does more or less the same. To put it differently, the “I’m the only one” view — just like solipsism — looks „as a little frontier fortress that will undeniably be forever invincible, but whose garrison can never leave, so we may go safely past it and not be afraid to leave it behind us” (Schopenhauer 1818/2010, 129). And if it is invincible, then — beyond winking and parody — I cannot do anything but to tell you why I feel that this infinitely consistent and unassailable attitude is *morally wrong*, and why I feel that for me, the “I’m the only one” philosopher is *not a role model*, and his reaction to philosophy’s epistemic failure is *not an example to follow*. In some instances, the most one can do is to make a personal confession in rejecting a philosophical view or attitude.

Thus, in rejecting the “I’m the only one” view, I do not place the emphasis (more precisely, the main emphasis) on the point that — in light of the pervasive and permanent dissensus in philosophy — it is almost certainly the case that no “I’m the only one” philosophers have so far succeeded in coming up with compelling arguments for their substantive philosophical theses. (Who knows, perhaps some of them have succeeded — I cannot rule out this possibility.) The main emphasis is on the point that the “I’m the only one” philosophers’ extra high epistemic self-confidence actually stems from their epistemic blindness and the

epistemic devaluation of their interlocutors — and that is why I find their attitude unacceptable.

Now I make a leap. It is a well-known fact in the history of philosophy that Descartes (as one of the “I’m the only one” philosophers) sent the manuscript of *Meditations* to six philosophers, asking them to formulate objections to the line of thought of his work. On the one hand, this is a very sympathetic and fair gesture — Descartes insisted on having his book published with these objections and the replies to them. On the other hand, however — and this is a less known fact — he made only one change in the original text in response to the criticisms. He revised this sentence:

The second reason for doubt was that since I did not know the author of my being, I saw nothing to rule out the possibility that my natural constitution made me prone to error even in matters which seemed to me most true. (Descartes 1641/1991, 53)

by inserting *seven* words (five in Latin) in brackets into it “in response” to Arnauld’s criticism:

The second reason for doubt was that since I did not know the author of my being (*or at least was pretending not to*), I saw nothing to rule out the possibility that my natural constitution made me prone to error even in matters which seemed to me most true. (*ibid.*)

That’s all he did. By the way, he thought that *each* of the close to 100 objections were misguided. *None of them*, he thought, was powerful enough to make him change the “perfect” line of thought of the *Meditations*.

What I want to illustrate through this example is the “I’m the only one” philosophers’ attitude towards other philosophers who disagree with them. Descartes (as an “I’m the only one” philosopher) considered the objections of Hobbes, Arnauld, Gassendi and others as relevant and took their epistemic perspective seriously *only to the extent* that he was able to incorporate their objections to his own “flawless” philosophical theory, which enabled him to articulate it in an even more powerful and elaborate form. That’s why he published his book with his replies to those objections.

Just as in the case of Wittgenstein, Descartes' attitude is not an example for me to follow. Obviously, I'd like to have such intellectual hardware that Descartes had (who wouldn't?), but I wouldn't like to have the same attitude as his to my own philosophical beliefs.

CHAPTER FIVE

PHILOSOPHY WITHOUT COMPELLING JUSTIFICATION

Several philosophers think that there can be no compelling justifications for our substantive philosophical beliefs. Thus, in their opinion, it is not right to react to philosophy's epistemic failure by sticking to the original goal of the epistemic tradition. Nor it is right to react to it by committing ourselves to meta-skepticism — to suspend our substantive philosophical beliefs and thereby end the standard (ordinary) practice of philosophy. David Lewis puts it this way in the preface to Volume I of his *Philosophical Papers*:

The reader in search of knock-down arguments in favor of my theories will go away disappointed. Whether or not it would be nice to knock disagreeing philosophers down by sheer force of argument, it cannot be done. Philosophical theories are never refuted conclusively. [...]

It might be otherwise if, as some philosophers seem to think, we had a sharp line between [...] “intuition”, which must be taken as unchallengeable evidence, and philosophical theory, which must at all costs fit this evidence. If that were so, conclusive refutations would be dismayingly abundant. But whatever may be said for foundationalism in other subjects, this foundationalist theory of philosophical knowledge seem ill-founded in the extreme. Our “intuitions” are simply opinions; our philosophical theories are the same. Some are commonsensical, some are sophisticated; some are particular, some general; some are more firmly held, some less. But they are all opinions, and a *reasonable goal for a philosopher is to bring them into equilibrium*. Our common task is *to find out what equilibria there are that can withstand examination* but it remains for each of us to come to rest at one or another of them. (Lewis 1983, x, italics mine)

I would like to point out two things in the above quote. Firstly, according to Lewis, the foundationalist theory of philosophical knowledge is ill-founded. Our intuitions, pre-philosophical beliefs and fundamental convictions *do not need* any justification. Nonetheless, the intuitions, pre-philosophical beliefs and fundamental convictions have a *decisive role* in philosophical theorizing — philosophers draw on them and elaborate them in constructing

their theories. As Lewis puts it in another context:

It is not the business of philosophy [...] to justify these preexisting opinions, to any great extent, but only to try to discover ways of expanding them into an orderly system. A [philosophical] analysis [...] is an attempt at systematizing our opinions [...]. It succeeds to the extent that (1) it is systematic, and (2) it respects those of our pre-philosophical opinions to which we are firmly attached. (Lewis 1973, 88)

Gary Gutting sees things similarly:

On any account, philosophy is concerned with our convictions — beliefs about fundamental human issues [...]. According to the view that I've called philosophical foundationalism, the project of philosophy is to provide compelling arguments for or against our convictions, so that our beliefs [...] can be put on solid rational basis. But, I have maintained, one of the most important achievements of recent philosophy has been to discredit this foundationalism. Philosophers themselves have good reason to believe that our convictions do not require [...] compelling philosophical justifications. [...]

Prior to philosophical reflection, our convictions are not very well articulated and can be profitably regarded as expressing general *pictures*; that is, general schemes for thinking about some major aspect of the world. One of the main projects of philosophical thinking is the development of the precise and detailed formulations of important pictures that I called *theories*. (Gutting 2009, 225, italics in original)

Secondly, Lewis distinguishes between the task of *individual* philosophers and the *community* of philosophers. The task of individual philosophers is to develop theories that are in harmony or equilibrium with *their own* pre-philosophical convictions and to defend and protect this equilibrium. Although Lewis does not say, he obviously thinks that insofar as philosophers can do that, they can rationally stick to their philosophical theories, that is, their considered philosophical beliefs. And the task of the community of philosophers is to present *more and more* well-formulated philosophical theories which are resistant to objections, thereby showcasing the possible views about philosophical problems. In short, philosophy aims to populate the logical space with consistent philosophical theories, stable equilibria.

This metaphilosophical vision stands in contrast with the epistemic tradition in both respects. On the one hand, the followers of the epistemic tradition are foundationalists — they consider their fundamental convictions as justified (moreover, compellingly justified), on which they build their philosophical theories. On the other hand, the goal of individual philosophers and the philosophers' community is the same in the epistemic tradition — to acquire substantive philosophical knowledge, and to come up with compellingly justified substantive philosophical truths.

As far as I can see, this kind of metaphilosophical vision that has given up on seeking compellingly justified philosophical truths but wishes to refrain from suspending beliefs is increasingly popular among contemporary philosophers. More and more philosophers interpret their own activity within the metaphilosophical vision described above, which is a humbler ambition than that of the great dead philosophers. It is no surprise that this is so. What this vision suggests — contrary to both the search for compelling philosophical arguments and a general suspension of judgment — neither seems hopeless, nor is depressing but something that philosophers *are able to* actually do and philosophy is *capable of* doing.

Following Lewis, I will call this metaphilosophical vision *equilibrism*. In this, I differ from the terminology in which “equilibrism” is used to denote a narrower metaphilosophical vision than the one delineated above (see Beebe 2018). As for terminology, according to equilibrism, philosophy is not an epistemic or truth-seeking enterprise. To put it more precisely, it is not an epistemic enterprise in the sense defined in Chapter I of this book, in that it should present compellingly justified substantive philosophical truths. Apart from this, equilibrism is, of course, also a cognitive (or, if you wish, a *quasi*-epistemic) enterprise because it gives us knowledge of what equilibria are possible and which equilibrium we should commit ourselves to in the light of our own pre-philosophical convictions.

In this chapter, I first outline the metaphilosophical vision of equilibrism. In doing so, I will try to introduce it in its most convincing form possible, and underline those features that make it attractive to many philosophers. Secondly, I will present my concerns about this vision. I will try to show that however attractive and lucrative the commitment to this vision that gives up on seeking compellingly justified philosophical truths may seem, it actually *cannot be held sincerely* and (contrary to what it promises) *it cannot yield real cognitive peace*. And this is a grave problem for a vision that is supposed to serve as a general framework for philosophers'

self-interpretation. Finally, I will briefly deal with that version of equilibrium which says that the good strategy is not to *believe* in our substantive philosophical theses but only to *accept* them — and present my misgivings about it.

1 Equilibrium as a metaphilosophical vision

Let's first see the goal of individual philosophers and that of the philosophers' community, and then where the attraction of equilibrium lies.

1.1 The goal of individual philosophers

According to equilibrium, every philosopher has two clearly distinguishable tasks. The first is to come up with a philosophical theory. Whether this theory has Hegelian ambition or concerns only an isolated and partial problem; whether it includes some positive view or a negative one; whether it has an existential stake or not — these are all completely irrelevant. Now, a philosopher's theory construction is successful if she can come up with a consistent theory that is in equilibrium with *her own* pre-philosophical convictions — those which she is not willing to (or cannot) abandon under any circumstances. In short, if she can develop her own pre-philosophical convictions into a philosophical theory.

To use a very simple example: if Esther's fundamental pre-philosophical conviction is that mathematical theorems are truths that are discovered instead of being invented by mathematicians, and Esther constructs a philosophical theory according to which there are abstract entities (there is a Fregean "third realm"), then she has already completed her first task. She now has a philosophical theory that is in equilibrium with her pre-philosophical conviction.

The second task of philosophers is just as important. What is more, they spend most of their time completing this task, since it is not enough to find or construct a philosophical theory that is in equilibrium with their pre-philosophical convictions. They must defend this equilibrium as well, as it is threatened by more than one thing. The equilibrium they reach, to use Gary Gutting's expression, needs *intellectual maintenance* (see Gutting 2009, 225; 2015,

258).

Intellectual maintenance has two components. Firstly, philosophers have to defend the theory that is in equilibrium with their pre-philosophical convictions against objections. They have to do this because philosophical objections ultimately have the intended conclusion that it is *not rational* to stick to the philosophical theory at issue. For this reason, the bulk of philosophers' work is *defensive* in nature — they have to show that none of the objections against their theory are compelling, and since they are not, they can *continue* to rationally stick to their theory. If a philosopher is unable to find a weak point of the objections brought up against her theory, she cannot rationally stick to it anymore, so she has to give it up. In this case, the previously created equilibrium is upset. She continues to have so and so pre-philosophical convictions, but she can no more rationally believe the philosophical theory that elaborates these convictions.

Here is an example. Let's suppose that Judith has the fundamental conviction that God, as an infinitely perfect being, exists. Of course, Judith is well aware of the objections to the existence of God: the arguments from evil and from divine hiddenness. It is relatively easy for her to respond to the latter, because according to her elaborate vision of the history of salvation (similar to Ficthe's [see Ficthe 1806/1999]), one of the necessary stages in the development of the human race is when it does not perceive its own supernatural/divine origin. The argument from evil, however, is a challenge to her. She does not hold the kind of theodicy to be convincing which explains the evil in the world by appealing to man's free will, nor the one which says that every evil is the logical precondition for something greater good. She thinks that due to the great many senseless and horrible human and animal sufferings, one cannot rationally stick to the view that our world is the best of all possible worlds, no matter which theodicy one chooses, and she thinks that this belief of her is incompatible with her belief in the perfection of God. After lengthy consideration, Judith finally concludes that she can only resolve this incompatibility by committing herself to theistic modal realism (see Almeida 2008), according to which our world is just one among infinitely many (taken in the Lewisian sense) concrete universes created by God. And since God has created a multiverse (a plurality of worlds), and since we do not have good reasons to suppose that it is *precisely* our world that should be the best among them, she thinks that God's perfection is compatible with the fact that our world is not the best of all worlds. In short, after committing herself to theistic modal realism, Judith can continue to rationally

believe in the existence of God as an infinitely perfect being — for she can show that the argument from evil does not have compelling force.

The second part of the intellectual maintenance of philosophical theories does not have to do with possible objections but with the cognitive household of philosophers, as the (naturally fragile) equilibrium they reach may be upset otherwise than by certain objections. It can also be upset if a philosopher realizes that her theory x is in equilibrium with her pre-philosophical convictions c_1 , c_2 and c_3 and theory y that she also holds is in equilibrium with her pre-philosophical convictions c_4 , c_5 and c_6 , but y cannot be reconciled with one of c_1 , c_2 and c_3 . In short, the intellectual maintenance of philosophical theories assigns philosophers the task of dissolving these types of conceptual-logical tensions.

Let me give you an example of this as well. Let us suppose that Andy's pre-philosophical convictions are that the physical world is causally closed and that there is mental causation. Unsurprisingly, he embraces a version of the reductive physicalist theory of mind. Moreover, let's suppose that Andy has already defended reductive physicalism against the well-known objections, so he has finished this phase of intellectual maintenance. However, during his reflective self-monitoring he realizes that one of his pre-philosophical convictions is that humans possess moral responsibility, and concludes that only the theory of agent-causation can be in equilibrium with this pre-philosophical conviction, because only this theory ensures proper (increased) control. Nevertheless, he finds that agent-causation seems hardly compatible with the causal closure principle, which he needs in order to rationally stick to his belief in reductive materialism. In this case, the intellectual maintenance of Andy's beliefs should result either in his rejection of one of the two philosophical theories, or perhaps in the reconciliation of them, against all odds.

It is hard to say about this description of philosophers' activity that it is un-lifelike and "phenomenologically" implausible. In fact, I think it gives an accurate picture of what philosophers actually do. With regard to this activity, the following is worth stressing from the viewpoint of equilibrium.

The goal of the intellectual maintenance of a philosophical theory and philosophical argumentation is not to "*force the truth into the open*" — the goal of philosophers is not to convince *everyone* with their arguments. Of course, philosophers can and do have positive

arguments for their philosophical theories, but these cannot be compelling, according to equilibrium. The fundamental role of philosophical argumentation then is *to defend* theories — and a defensive philosophical argument, as opposed to any positive one, *can be successful*. Philosophers can successfully defend their philosophical theories against objections (if they can show them not to be compelling), and so they can form a right to rationally stick to their philosophical theories. According to equilibrium, this is the *only* sense one can talk about successful philosophical arguments.

To sum up (and this is what I take to be the most important message of equilibrium): philosophers' activities are essentially *egocentric*. I do not use this word in a morally condemning sense, of course. Instead, what I want to stress with this expression is the following. According to equilibrium, the goal of individual philosophers cannot be more than (1) to construct philosophical theories that are in equilibrium with *their own* pre-philosophical convictions which they are unable to abandon and which form an essential part of their *personal* integrity and cognitive economy, and (2) to defend and maintain these equilibria in ways that are reassuring *to themselves*, thereby preserving the equilibria intact.

Make no mistake, however. The above does not imply that equilibrium would like to ease the rigor of philosophical argumentation or to lower professional standards in any sense. Philosophers must do the intellectual maintenance of their philosophical theories with the *same* professional conscience as those philosophers do who aim at coming up with substantive truths, try to support their theories with compelling arguments and make attempts to solve philosophical problems.

Equilibrium also attributes *epistemic duties* to philosophers. They *must* respond to all relevant objections that are known to them; they *must* strive for consistency; they *must* carefully weigh all evidence that is accessible to them, etc. That is, they *must* proceed the same way *as if* they were seeking the truth themselves. The difference between those philosophers who act in the spirit of the epistemic tradition and those who act in that of equilibrium is only to be found in how they interpret their own activity. While philosophers who set themselves less humble goals than equilibrium think that their work is to formulate arguments which compellingly justify the truth of their philosophical beliefs, equilibrists think that their work aims at no more than to create and preserve their own cognitive peace.

1.2 The goal of the community of philosophers

The goal of the community of philosophers can be defined as a function of the individual philosophers' goal. In this sense, if the philosophers' goal is not to present substantive truths and justify them compellingly but to develop theories which are in equilibrium with their own pre-philosophical convictions and can be shown to resist even the strongest of objections, then, as Lewis puts it: "[The] common task is to find out what equilibria there are that can withstand examination" (Lewis 1983, x). In other words, the goal of the community of philosophers is not to present consensually accepted substantive truths but rather to map the logically possible and consistent philosophical views, i.e. to populate the logical space with stable equilibria.

The goal of the community of philosophers can easily be formulated differently, using different emphases and terminology — and maybe it is worth doing so, as the descriptions given above may seem narrow and alien to certain philosophers. Here are a few "more ceremonial" definitions: the goal of the community of philosophers is to form *perspectives* which conceptually "organize" the world; to develop *viewpoints* which "give meaning" to phenomena. Or, to be even bolder: the goal of the community of philosophers is to "present" "productive discourses", "narratives", "forms of meaning", "spaces of meaning", "dimensions of meaning", "constitutive connections in meaning" etc., all of which resist objections and can help those who are open to it to understand and conceptually articulate the world and themselves within it.

1.3 The attraction of equilibrism

One of the main attractions of equilibrism stems from the fact that according to this metaphilosophical vision, *philosophy is not a failed enterprise*, consequently philosophers need not see themselves as participants in a failed epistemic enterprise. The goal that equilibrism sets to the individual philosophers and the community of philosophers is such that the tools of philosophy are *suitable* for attaining it, moreover, philosophy has *excelled* in attaining it. From the viewpoint of equilibrism, philosophy is one of the most successful intellectual enterprises of all time. From the very start, it has been able to satisfy our innate

cognitive need for giving a conceptually well-articulated and consistent form to our fundamental pre-philosophical convictions.

Just think about it. Seen from the ambition of the epistemic tradition, we are bound to admit that philosophy has failed and stagnates — what we didn't know at t_1 we still don't know at t_2 because we haven't solved a single substantive philosophical problem, we haven't succeeded in finding a reassuring answer to a single substantive philosophical question, nor in presenting a single consensually accepted and substantive philosophical truth. However, if we part company with this view in the spirit of equilibrium, we can see that the community of philosophers is able to develop an increasing number of philosophical theories, that is, an increasing number of ways for us to think consistently about the nature and knowledge of reality or about morally right action; and, thanks to its activity, the cost-benefit equations of these philosophical theories are becoming clearer and clearer. In Lewis' words: "what we accomplish in [philosophy]: we measure the price; [and] [...] that is something we can settle more and less conclusively" (Lewis 1983, x). True, we don't possess any substantive *sub specie aeternitatis* truths, but the fact that we have come to possess several important non-trivial and non-substantive truths richly compensates for it. This is because knowing the costs and benefits of various philosophical theories amounts to the recognition of many true propositions of the „If...then" type and relevant conceptual distinctions, and as such, it qualifies as a case of *philosophical knowledge* (see Gutting 2009, 226–231).

I can also put it this way: because according to equilibrium, the goal of the community of philosophers is not to present well-founded and consensually accepted substantive truths, philosophers do not have to struggle with *feelings of inferiority* towards scientists. According to equilibrium, philosophy is *not a competitor* to the natural sciences. Only the advocates of the epistemic tradition think that it is — and needless to say, that it stands on the losing side. And if so, the well-known malicious comment from Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinov seems fair and correct:

Philosophy is dead. Philosophy has not kept up with modern developments in science, particularly physics. Scientists have become the bearers of the torch of discovery in our quest for knowledge. (Hawking – Mlodinov 2010, 5)

According to equilibrium, this criticism misses the point, because the goal of philosophy is not

to acquire knowledge of the world, but to map those conceptual perspectives (equilibria) which form the foundation and starting points for us to think consistently about the world.

At first sight, one could think that equilibrism is in trouble because it sets different goals to individual philosophers and the community of philosophers. For if the goal of individual philosophers is to work out and defend their own equilibria, then, presumably, they are not motivated by working out one possible equilibrium among many. But this is not so. Quite contrary, the equilibrists — unlike the “I’m the only one” philosophers — do not suffer from epistemic blindness and do not see their interlocutors as their epistemic inferiors. For them, other philosopher’s views that are inconsistent with theirs are of the highest importance. In fact, equilibrists are *happy* to see their opponents formulating stronger and stronger arguments because it helps them to hold their own equilibria in even stronger forms which are even more resistant to objections. And the fact that the community of philosophers continues to populate the logical space is useful and beneficial to equilibrists because they can reliably “price” their own theories by comparing them to other theories. It is in comparison with other theories that the virtues and weaknesses of their theories “show up” sharply, which helps them to see the points where their theories need improvement and the ways to improve them.

So, equilibrism is that variant of the steadfast view which goes hand in hand with permissivism. Moreover, it is its friendliest and most permissive form. For if a philosopher successfully meets the requirement of intellectual maintenance, then, according to equilibrism, she can rationally stick to her substantive philosophical beliefs. Furthermore, if a philosopher thinks that her interlocutors (like her) have successfully met the requirement of intellectual maintenance, then, according to equilibrism, she must think of them that they are as rational as she is — regardless of the fact that their substantive philosophical beliefs are incompatible with hers.

Another attraction of equilibrism is that it is able *to legitimate the doing of philosophy* — more precisely, the way it is being done in academic circles. You don’t have to agree with Dennett on the point that philosophy is just “luxury decoration on society” (as quoted by Goldhill 2016, 2). The equilibrist may think that philosophy can have a serious *social value*, namely, putting the outsiders’ minds in order. To use Gutting’s example: “an atheist who thinks all arguments for God’s existence are demonstrably fallacious *may need* a clever philosopher to show what’s wrong with a sophisticated version of the cosmological argument

or the design argument from fine-tuning” (Gutting 2015, 258, *italics mine*). In other words, the social value of doing philosophy lies in its capacity to help articulate one’s fundamental convictions in a conceptually organized manner.

To sum up: equilibrism is especially attractive and motivated, because it seems to be the *only* metaphilosophical vision that, unlike the epistemic tradition, does not set hopeless goals to philosophers and, unlike meta-skepticism, it does not offer them a bad deal. Here is a possible consideration in support of equilibrism that appeals to your sincerity:

Put your hand on your heart! Can you imagine that the following report will ever be published in *Nature*: “X university’s philosophy research group has recently confirmed that charge, mass and angular momentum are Aristotelian immanent universals; multi-local entities, which can wholly and perfectly be present at different locations in space at the same time, and more than one of which can be present in one place at a time. It is only a matter of months before they find a solution to the metaphysical nature of physical objects and have their hypothesis confirmed that physical objects are bundles of universals plus a fundamentally distinct entity, a substrate as a bare particular”. No, you cannot. And, put your hand on your heart once more! Are you willing to give up all of your philosophical beliefs because of philosophy’s failure as an enterprise to find the truth if you can see clearly that they are built on your fundamental convictions, which are the constitutive elements of your personal integrity and cognitive household? No, you are not.

2 Why I cannot identify with equilibrism

Naturally, the strongest argument against equilibrism would be if I could come up with some (undoubtedly) compelling argument for a substantive philosophical thesis. In this case, I could say that any commitment to equilibrism is *undermotivated* and we have no reason to attribute goals to philosophy that are humbler than finding the truth, since, as you can see, philosophy is capable of attaining these less humble purposes. But an equally strong argument against equilibrism would be if I could come up with a compelling argument for meta-skepticism. In this case, I could say that equilibrism is *untenable*, because every philosopher has the epistemic duty to suspend their substantive philosophical beliefs — no matter whether it

would damage their cognitive household. But I don't have such compelling arguments, so I cannot show equilibrism to be either undermotivated or untenable. On the contrary, I think that equilibrism is a rather strongly motivated metaphilosophical vision. It is no accident that it is gaining in popularity.

My main objection to equilibrism is this: as equilibrists, *we cannot seriously and sincerely believe in the truth* of our substantive philosophical theses — *we cannot take epistemic responsibility for the truth* of our substantive philosophical theses.

2.1 Two kinds of philosophical problems

I will start from afar. One can make a distinction between two kinds of philosophical problems. One category includes problems concerning which *there is a truth simpliciter*, i.e. *things are a certain way independently of our* (linguistic or mental) *representations*. These problems are either about what type of entities there are or about what their nature consists in.

Some examples: “Do the past and the future exist along with the present?”; “Are there abstract entities?”; “Are there multi-local entities?”; “Are there worlds that are causally and spatio-temporally disconnected from ours?”. Or, “What is the connection between our conscious experience and our brain states?”; “Is it true that our actions were not predetermined by the universe's initial conditions (plus laws) but are not accidental either?”.

I think all the questions listed above are such that you would be surprised if God did not know the answers to them. You would be surprised if God said: “*I do not know* if I created one world or a multiverse”; “*I do not know* whether the past and the future exist or only the present does, even though I created time”; “*I do not know* what the relationship is between the mind and the body, even though I created all living beings, including humans”, etc.

The other kind of philosophical problems includes those concerning which there are *no truths simpliciter* — *things are not in any way independently of our linguistic or mental representations*. Thus, these problems are exclusively about *how to conceptualize* certain phenomena — *how to understand and how to make sense* of them for ourselves. These problems contain concepts that do not directly refer to anything existing independently of

these concepts — characteristically, entities are carved out according to these concepts *as a result of* concept formation.

Some examples: “What is the definition of art?”; “What is modernity?”; “How should we classify different speech acts?”; “What is the difference between science and pseudo-science?”; “To what extent does the correct interpretation of a literary text depend on its author’s intentions?”; “What does civil disobedience consist in?”; “How can we define the concept of labor?”.

I think you would be surprised if God would be able to answer these questions. You would be surprised to hear from Him, for example, that “*I know* that the institutional theory of art is false, since a work of art is rendered as such by virtue of its perceptual properties and these perceptual properties are structural universals”. And before you would object (knowing your mind), He would go on: “Duchamp-type ready-mades are not counterexamples — these are only quasi-works of art, since revealing their punchlines substitutes for the perception of their perceptual properties”.

In what follows, I will call the former set of issues *factual* philosophical problems and those of the latter sort *conceptual* philosophical problems.

Now, this categorization of philosophical problems is *universal* and *exclusive* — every single philosophical problem is either factual or conceptual, and there is no philosophical problem which belongs to both kinds, just as there is no philosophical problem that belongs to neither. Thus (and I consider it very important to emphasize this point), *the meta-question* “Which philosophical problems are factual and which are conceptual?” *is itself a par excellence factual philosophical question* — since this categorization of philosophical problems is based on which of them allow us to formulate propositions that can be made true or false by a reality existing independently of our conceptual framework, and which problems do not allow us to formulate such propositions.

2.1.1 Non-trivial cases

This categorization of philosophical problems is intuitively clear though not unproblematic. In

contrast to the evident cases listed above, several philosophical problems do not allow us to reassuringly decide whether we should categorize them as factual or rather as conceptual. Such harder cases are, for example, the following: “Are proper names rigid designators?”; “Are meanings in the head?”; “Is there metaphysical necessity above and beyond logical necessity?”; “Are holes material objects?”. I am sure that if I were to list these philosophical problems under the heading of factual versus conceptual philosophical problems, then I could not expect a relatively stable consensus.

It is also an interesting and important question whether *normative* philosophical problems belong to the category of conceptual philosophical problems or rather to that of factual ones.

I see it as follows. Let’s suppose that Mike thinks that no moral values and facts exist in their own right (independently of our concepts) — Mike denies the (concept-independent) existence of a moral world order. He thinks that we do not discover but rather “create” moral values and facts — in his opinion, moral rightness or wrongness is ultimately a matter of agreement. Consequently, *normative* ethical questions such as “Is it morally *right* to do X?” or “*Must* X be done?” are *conceptual* to Mike — our answers to them depend on our conceptual framework and cannot depend on anything else. However, let’s suppose that according to Claire, some moral values and facts exist in their own right (independently of our concepts) — according to Claire, there is a (concept-independent) moral world order. She thinks that instead of “creating” moral values and facts, we discover the truth of the proposition “It is morally wrong to cause pain to others out of sheer pleasure” just as we discover the truth of the proposition describing the value of the gravitational constant, or the truth of the proposition “If an integer n is greater than 2, then the equation $a^n + b^n = c^n$ has no solutions in non-zero integers a , b , and c ”. Thus, *normative* ethical questions such as “Is it morally *right* to do X?” or “*Must* X be done?” are *factual* to Claire — our moral duties depend on the facts of a moral world order (existing independently of our concepts).

Now, it is easy to see that the question which of them is right is also a *factual* philosophical question. Their debate concerns *whether there exist or not* facts independently of our concepts, which determine what counts as morally right.

Here is another example. Let’s suppose that David has contextualist or social constructivist views about propositional knowledge. He thinks that the question “What conditions must

obtain for S to know that p ?” is not a factual one — our answer to this question depends only on our (context-dependent) conceptual framework, and cannot depend on anything else. Thus, *normative* epistemological questions are *conceptual* to David. But let’s suppose that Meryl thinks about propositional knowledge in the spirit of the classical definition of knowledge (more precisely, some expanded and corrected version of it). That is, according to Meryl, the question “What conditions *must* be met for S to know that p ?” is a factual one — because the concept-independent fact that these conditions are met either obtains, in which case S knows that p , or does not obtain, in which case S does not know that p . Thus, *normative* epistemological questions are *factual* to Meryl — there is a kind of “epistemic world order” (similarly to the moral world order), which determines what conditions must be met so we can speak about knowledge (and not mere belief).

Also, it can be easily seen that the question which of the two is right is a *factual* philosophical question. Their debate concerns *whether there exist or not* facts independently of our concepts, which determine what counts as a case of propositional knowledge.

With the above, I would like say that (even if the terminology may seem strange at first sight): normative philosophical questions, too, are either factual or conceptual. If there is a concept-independent moral and/or epistemic world order which makes our moral and/or epistemic statements true, then normative philosophical questions are factual. By contrast, if there is no concept-independent moral and/or epistemic world order, then normative philosophical questions are conceptual — the choice of those moral and/or epistemic statements to which we commit ourselves depends only on our conceptual framework.

2.1.2 Two bad objections

There are certainly some who dispute the validity of the above categorization of philosophical problems. Now, it is *evident* that those who do so do not think that all philosophical problems are factual — they think that all are conceptual.

On the one hand, they can claim that this categorization is wrong because there are no facts that exist independently of our concepts, and so there are no philosophical problems concerning which there would be truth simpliciter (independent of our conceptual

framework). I can answer this objection as follows: even if it were true (although I think it is certainly untrue) that there are no facts existing independently of our concepts, the ones who formulate this objection must concede that they have committed themselves to the truth of a *par excellence* factual philosophical thesis, namely global antirealism, which leads them to contradict themselves.

On the other hand, they can argue by singling out a philosophical problem which seems *par excellence* factual (for example, the question “Is there a God?”), and then go on saying that “Even though this problem seems to be a factual one at first sight, if we go deeper, we have to see that it all depends on *what we mean* by the concept of »God«.”

I can answer this objection by saying that although it is true that the question “Is there a God?” needs some conceptual clarification and specification, this is not an impossible task. Here is a somewhat more precise phrasing: “Is there anything that has the following properties: it created the world; it is a person and not a kind of principle; it is not indifferent to the fate of humanity; its abilities and knowledge exceed our abilities and knowledge to an inconceivable extent?”. If they keep responding to this that the question “Is there a God?” is a conceptual one, as everything depends on what we mean by “the creation of the world”, “the fate of humanity” etc., then I can only say to this, using Wittgenstein’s well-known metaphor, that “my spade is turned” (*PI* 217) and they are just provoking me. If they sincerely meant what they said, then they could reiterate the “What do you mean by this and that term?” question *endlessly* about the existence and nature of every posited entity, and if they did this consistently, they would have to conclude that there is no question the response to which could be “yes” or “no”.

Using a different approach, concerning those who deny the existence of factual philosophical problems in the above spirit, we must primarily appeal to their *sincerity*. It is worth asking them to be sincere and admit that (after some conceptual clarification) *everybody precisely understands* the question “Is there a God?” — no less than the question “Are there intelligent aliens similar to us in the universe?”. Also, they should admit that *everybody knows exactly* that the answer to both questions is either a simple yes or a simple no, which means that both questions are factual.

To sum up, I do not think it can be seriously thought that all philosophical discourse *en bloc*

and *sui generis* is not fact-stating, and there is no single philosophical problem concerning which the question of truth or falsehood comes up simpliciter and there are no factual problems at all.

2.2 Insincerity

I came up with the above classification of philosophical problems because I think that equilibrium cannot be sincerely held concerning factual philosophical problems. But before I can show this, I must first explain why it can be sincerely held concerning conceptual philosophical problems.

The point is the following. Insofar a philosophical problem is a conceptual one, you *can be satisfied* with focusing *only* on whether the philosophical theory you have chosen or elaborated is in equilibrium with your pre-philosophical convictions. The reason why you can be satisfied with this is that there is nothing *besides* your pre-philosophical convictions (which you think you're unable to reject) that you should conform to or take into account during the construction of your philosophical theory. Furthermore, if a philosophical problem is a conceptual one, you *can be satisfied* with the intellectual maintenance of the achieved equilibrium. The reason why you can be satisfied with this is that it is out of the question that things may be different to the way as your philosophical theory says they are — because the things at issue *are not in any way at all* in themselves, independently of your conceptual framework. In a word: regarding conceptual philosophical problems, you don't need to worry that your pre-philosophical convictions may turn out to be false and misrepresent the nature of those things your philosophical theory is about.

Let me put it differently. If you take sides regarding a conceptual philosophical problem, then you can *sincerely believe* in your philosophical theory. This is because, if it is really the case that the things at issue are not in any way at all, independently of our conceptual framework, then, in fact, *it only matters* to what extent you are able to bring your philosophical theory into equilibrium with your pre-philosophical convictions, and how successfully you can intellectually maintain your philosophical theory. If you fully discharge these two epistemic duties, you can sincerely believe from your egocentric perspective that you should “piece together” or articulate your theory *in this way and not in another one*. You will not have to ask

the question that “This and that are my pre-philosophical convictions, and this is my theory which is in equilibrium with them — but could it be the case that I’m wrong and my theory is *simpliciter* false?”.

I will go further. No matter how you take sides regarding a conceptual philosophical problem, you don’t need to feel insecure knowing that other philosophers have other pre-philosophical convictions and correspondingly they conceptualize the phenomenon at issue differently than you. That is, you don’t need to begin to have doubts because of the philosophical disagreement between you and other philosophers. For if a phenomenon is not in any way at all in itself, then you can safely think that other philosophers’ other equilibria can be just as plausible, enlightening and productive etc. as yours.

To put it simply: if entity *e* is not in any way at all in itself, then the pluralism of philosophical theories (equilibria) of *e* is *welcome*. It is welcome because the question of truth *simpliciter* will not arise about the philosophical theories concerning *e*, and consequently it would be unnecessary and meaningless to discredit even a single one of them. Each equilibrium “shows”, “brings out”, “elucidates”, “captures” etc. *something* about *e* — each offers us a consistent conceptual framework/perspective/viewpoint for thinking about *e*. Thus, by discrediting any of these equilibria, we would only divest ourselves of a possible perspective in which (or on the basis of which) *e* can be interpreted.

By contrast, with regard to factual philosophical problems, the situation is entirely different. Firstly, if Sarah takes sides regarding a factual (and so non-conceptual) philosophical problem, the truth-conditions of the proposition “Sarah achieved the desired equilibrium and successfully defended it against objections” are different to the truth-conditions of “Sarah’s philosophical theory is true”. The first proposition can be true even if the second is false and *vice versa*. In other words, in contrast to conceptual philosophical problems, in the case of factual philosophical problems, the following *always remains an open question*: “Sarah’s philosophical theory is in equilibrium with her pre-philosophical convictions and she intellectually maintained her theory through fully discharging her epistemic duties, but is her philosophical theory *true*?”. This question is open because — according to the equilibrist — Sarah does not have (and cannot have) appropriate justification which shows that her pre-philosophical convictions, i.e. the basis of her philosophical theories are *not* false.

Secondly, every philosopher's aim may be put in such a general way that they would like to know what they should believe. However, note that the proposition "Sylvia knows what she should believe" is ambiguous. On the one hand, it can mean that "Sylvia knows what she should believe *depending on* what her pre-philosophical convictions are". On the other hand, it can also mean that "Sylvia knows which proposition(s) she should believe in order to believe something *simpliciter true*". Now, while only the first meaning of "Sylvia knows what she should believe" is in play in the case of conceptual philosophical problems, in the case of factual philosophical problems both possible meanings are in play, and it is the second one that is relevant.

Thirdly, every philosopher's aim is to make philosophical propositions in which they can believe rationally. However, note that the proposition "Sonia rationally believes that p " is also ambiguous. On the one hand, it can mean that "Sonia rationally believes that p because p is *in equilibrium with* her pre-philosophical convictions and her other beliefs, which Sonia cannot discard". On the other hand, it can also mean that "Sonia believes p rationally because she believes that her justification of p is *truth-conducive*". Now, while only the first meaning of "Sonia rationally believes that p " is in play in cases of conceptual philosophical problems, in cases of factual philosophical problems both possible meanings are in play, and it is the second one that is relevant.

The three above-mentioned differences clearly show that while you can sincerely commit yourself to your philosophical theory with a clear intellectual conscience if the philosophical problem is a conceptual one, provided you fulfil the expectations of equilibrium (by developing and intellectually maintaining a philosophical theory which is in equilibrium with your pre-philosophical convictions), you cannot do that regarding factual philosophical problems. After all, you're not an "I'm the only one" philosopher, you don't believe that you have knock-down arguments for your philosophical view, so you may ask the questions (quite emphatically, unnervingly and strongly appealing to your intellectual conscience): "What if I'm wrong?"; "What if things stand otherwise than I believe they do?"; "What if my philosophical theory is false?". Even if you have fulfilled all the epistemic duties prescribed by the equilibrist, when you take sides in a factual philosophical problem, *it does not seem to be an unnecessary and meaningless worry or too pedantic* to ask yourself: "Can I seriously and sincerely believe in the *simpliciter truth* of my philosophical view merely on the basis of the fact that it is in equilibrium with my pre-philosophical convictions?"; "Can I take

epistemic responsibility for the *simpliciter truth* of my philosophical beliefs if the most I can provide them with is egocentric »justification«?»; “Can I commit myself to the *simpliciter truth* of my philosophical view with a clear conscience if my fundamental pre-philosophical convictions on which my view is based are epistemically unjustified and the most I can say for them is that I cannot discard them without damaging my personal integrity and/or my cognitive household?”.

I would be surprised if someone dared to call these questions irrelevant with a clear intellectual conscience. I would also be surprised if someone disputed that these questions may arise in the equilibrist in the most natural way — developing unnerving doubts in her. All this, I think, clearly shows that equilibrism is *insensitive* to the difference between conceptual and factual philosophical problems. It is insensitive to the difference that whereas you can safely and sincerely choose to be an equilibrist concerning conceptual philosophical problems — you can content yourself with the intellectual maintenance of your considered philosophical beliefs because the question of truth or falsity does not arise about these problems independently of your own conceptual framework —, you cannot safely and sincerely choose to be an equilibrist concerning factual philosophical problems. In this case, you cannot content yourself with the intellectual maintenance of your considered philosophical beliefs because here the question at stake is that of truth or falsity concerning these problems, which arises *independently* of your own conceptual framework.

Let me put it differently. If *S* believes that *p* concerning a conceptual philosophical problem, then *S*’s *p*-belief does not aim at some truth that is independent of his own concepts — rather, it aims at some truth that can be inferred from *S*’s conceptual framework. This is because each and every belief that is in line with *S*’s own fundamental pre-philosophical convictions can be inferred from *S*’s pre-philosophical convictions and his conceptual framework. By contrast, if *S* believes that *p* concerning a factual philosophical problem, then *S*’s *p*-belief aims at some truth that is independent of *S*’s conceptual philosophical framework. However, in this case, the truth of *S*’s belief cannot be inferred from his pre-philosophical convictions and conceptual framework.

If concerning a factual philosophical problem *S* believes that *p*, then *S* believes that *p* is true simpliciter — *p* describes things as they actually are. However, *S* cannot take epistemic responsibility for the *simpliciter truth* of his *p*-belief if the most *S* can say for the *simpliciter*

truth of *p* is that it is *p* that is in equilibrium with his own unjustified pre-philosophical convictions which he is unable or unwilling to discard. In order to take epistemic responsibility for *p*, it is not enough for *S* to say “As (1) these are my fundamental pre-philosophical convictions (which are epistemically unjustified and only practically justified — meaning *merely* that I cannot abandon them), and since (2) *p* is in equilibrium with these pre-philosophical convictions of mine, I can seriously and sincerely believe in the simpliciter truth of *p*”.

Here is a confession of a disillusioned equilibrist:

I take it for certain that the mind-body problem is a factual philosophical problem — that things stand one way or the other, independently of my conceptual framework. I also take it for certain that if God exists, then He knows the nature of this relation. He knows the truth about it.

What do I know? The only thing I know is which philosophical view I should commit myself to so it can be in equilibrium with my pre-philosophical convictions. *As it happens*, one of my pre-philosophical convictions is that conscious experiences are non-physical — I simply cannot conceive how an entity whose nature is essentially subjective could be placed in the framework of a purely physicalist ontology. My other pre-philosophical conviction is that our conscious experiences can cause physical events — it seems to me untenable that our conscious experiences are epiphenomenal. Now, the only variant of dualism with which these two pre-philosophical convictions of mine are in equilibrium denies the principle of the causal closure of the physical.

Earlier I thought that if I can show that none of the arguments against my dualism is compelling, and I can clearly see that my dualism does not contradict any of my fundamental pre-philosophical convictions, then I can seriously and sincerely believe in the truth of my dualism. But now, I’m completely uncertain about that. Why?

On the one hand, because I can no longer overlook the fact that my dualist-equilibrium is *nothing else but* the elaboration of the above two fundamental pre-philosophical convictions of mine. And although these pre-philosophical convictions of mine are really elements of my personal-cognitive integrity, I must also see that they are

unjustified. Thus, the most I can say with a clear intellectual conscience is that “*In my opinion, dualism is true*”, and “*I cannot give up my dualism without damaging my personal-cognitive integrity*”. But, these two propositions are certainly *insufficient epistemic reason* for me to take responsibility for my dualism. Earlier, I was an equilibrist because I was concerned *exclusively* with the intellectual maintenance of my personal-cognitive integrity. Now, however, I can clearly see that it is not enough to cherish my pre-philosophical convictions and my dualism which is in equilibrium with them.

On the other hand, if the most I can say is that “I’m a dualist because dualism is in equilibrium with my fundamental pre-philosophical convictions, which I *de facto* have”, then I’m actually in no better epistemic situation than the one who *rolls a dice to decide* which view he should commit himself to. This is because what kind of fundamental pre-philosophical convictions I have *is a matter of chance* to the same extent (the same brute *contingent* fact) as the result of his dice roll. While I can say that “There is such and such relation between mind and body depending on what my pre-philosophical convictions are”, he can say that “There is such and such a relation between mind and body depending on the result of my dice roll”. Moreover, apart from the fact that my decision about which propositions I hold true is based on contingent factors similar to the result of a dice roll (for this must be the case if I decide about them on the basis of my pre-philosophical convictions) seems to be an irresponsible act in itself, I must also realize that I will quite probably come to adopt mistaken views with the use of this “method”. There are several different configurations of pre-philosophical convictions, and correspondingly there are several possible equilibria. There is only a slight probability that of all pre-philosophical convictions, it is precisely mine that are true and that it is precisely the equilibrium corresponding to them that is true.

Furthermore, I’m confronted most sharply with my own insincerity when I abstract away from my pre-philosophical convictions. This is when I can see that the community of philosophers has worked out several epistemically *equivalent* and mutually inconsistent equilibria concerning the mind-body problem. Now, if these equilibria are epistemically equivalent (that is, they stand an *equal chance of being true*), then I have no good epistemic reason to seriously and sincerely commit myself to the truth of *any* of them. This is because it would certainly not be a proper epistemic reason for me to say

that “*As it happens*, these and these are my pre-philosophical convictions, consequently I must hold dualism to be true, out of the several epistemically equivalent equilibria.”

In a word, as a disillusioned equilibrist, I must admit that I cannot take epistemic responsibility for the truth of my dualism, and I must seriously consider the possibility of becoming a meta-skeptic — even if it is a terrible thought that the suspension of my dualism would collapse my cognitive household.

Take a deep breath and put your hand on your heart before you answer the questions below! Do you think that the confession above is nothing more than a philosopher’s excessive worry, groundless lack of self-confidence, meaningless self-recrimination and causeless complaint? Do you think that her doubt is completely groundless if she thinks that her appeal to her unjustified pre-philosophical convictions is not enough for her serious and sincere commitment to the truth of dualism? And do you think that it is entirely groundless for her to think that perhaps suspending her belief in the truth of dualism would be the right thing to do because she has realized that her only ground for believing in the truth of dualism is that dualism is in equilibrium with those pre-philosophical convictions of her which she is psychologically unable to discard?

I think that you cannot answer these questions with a definite yes if you have a bit of intellectual empathy. And if you realize that you cannot answer them with a definite yes, then you must also realize what the insincerity of equilibrism consists in concerning factual philosophical problems.

2.3 Epistemic schizophrenia

Let’s suppose that you realize that as an equilibrist, you cannot commit yourself to your substantive factual philosophical views with epistemic responsibility. Nevertheless, you’re unable to discard these philosophical views. Let me illustrate the nature of this cognitive unrest with another dialogue — this time with a real philosopher, instead of a fictitious one. The interlocutor is, again, Sophie, but I’m going to quote the answers to her questions from actual papers by van Inwagen:

Sophie: The other day I got involved in a lengthy and rather depressing debate with Philonous about the epistemic status of his philosophical view. The take-home message from our discussion was that Philonous is incapable of self-reflection and of putting himself in the perspective of his opponents. Philonous considers himself as epistemically privileged and thinks that all those philosophers who disagree with him are his epistemic inferiors. I know that you're not an "I'm the only one" philosopher, yet you have definite views on certain philosophical issues. You think that possible worlds are not concrete physical objects, that physical objects are not four- but three-dimensional entities, and that free will is incompatible with determinism. Let me put this question to you, too: aren't you made uncertain by the fact that the views that some other very smart philosophers (Lewis, for example) have on these issues are incompatible with yours?

van Inwagen: So you wonder, "How can I believe (as I do) that free will is incompatible with determinism or that unrealized possibilities are not physical objects or that human beings are not four-dimensional things extended in time as well as in space, when David Lewis — a philosopher of truly formidable intelligence and insight and ability — rejects these things I believe and is already aware of and understands perfectly every argument that I could produce in their defense?" (van Inwagen 1996, 138)

Sophie: Exactly. But, for the sake of simplicity, let's take only the problem of free will and determinism. What do you think of the significance of Lewis' having a view different from yours? Do you think that your belief in incompatibilism is rational and Lewis' belief in compatibilism is not?

van Inwagen: "It seems more plausible to say (to revert to the example of David Lewis and myself) that David and I have the same evidence in the matter of the problem of free will, and to concede that this entails that either we are both rational or neither of us is" (van Inwagen 2010, 27).

Sophie: And what do you think of this?

van Inwagen: "The position that we are both rational [...], is hard to defend. If I suppose that we are both rational, I hear W. K. Clifford's ghost whispering an indignant

protest. [...]

If you and Lewis are both rational in accepting contradictory propositions on the basis of identical evidence, and *you* accept one of these propositions — incompatibilism — on the basis of evidence, that does not direct you toward incompatibilism and away from compatibilism. (For, if it did, it would have directed *him* away from compatibilism, and it would not have been rational for him to be a compatibilist.) But of all the forces in the human psyche that direct us toward and away from assent to propositions, only rational attention to relevant evidence *tracks the truth*. Both experience and reason confirm this. And, if you assent to a proposition on the basis of some inner push, some 'will to believe', it I may coin a phrase, that does not track the truth, then your propositional assent is not being guided by the nature of the things those propositions are *about*. If you could decide what to believe by tossing a coin, if that would actually be effective, then, in the matter of the likelihood of your beliefs being true, you might as well do it that way." (van Inwagen 2010, 28, italics in original)

Sophie: Let me tell you in my own words the nature of your doubt, step by step. (1) You're aware of the empirical fact that Lewis has a view that is the opposite of yours — namely, he's a compatibilist. (2) You suppose that both of you have the same evidential basis. (3) You think that if the evidential basis is common yet your views are different, then the only explanation for it is that the common evidential basis does not sway you toward or away from any view. (4) You think that if both of you expound your mutually incompatible views drawing on the same evidential basis, then the theory construction or line of argument of at least one of you is affected by "forces" that don't track the truth. (5) You think that these "forces" operate in an undetectable way, and you cannot rule out the possibility that it is you who is being misled by them. (6) As you cannot rule out the possibility that these "forces" deceive you, you cannot rationally believe that incompatibilism is true and that your Consequence Argument for it is compelling. (See van Inwagen 1975).

In my opinion, the cause of this difference of views between you lies elsewhere. I think that the difference of views between you persists because your fundamental pre-philosophical convictions are different. Thus, it is not the case that you both start out constructing your philosophical theories on the basis of a given and shared set of

evidence, and subsequently, at some point of theory construction, some “mysterious force” starts to operate undetectably and misleads both of you (or at least one of you). What is rather the case is that you and Lewis take different intuitions at “face value” about the concept of free will.

But all this is not so relevant to our present conversation, since as I see it, the essence is the following. Let’s suppose that you’re right from God’s perspective and Lewis is wrong. But, as you cannot rule out the possibility that it is not your pre-philosophical convictions or intuitions that are delusive (or that it is not you who is misled, at some point of your argument, by that “mysterious force” of which Clifford’s ghost is speaking), after all it is a *matter of chance* that you’re right and Lewis is wrong. To put it differently, if you don’t believe that your argument for incompatibilism is a knock-down one (and you don’t believe that), then your choosing of your philosophical view is necessarily haunted by uncertainty.

It seems that you’re completely aware of all the above. Then, how is it possible that you still stick to incompatibilism and don’t suspend your judgment?

van Inwagen: “I am unwilling to listen to the whispers of Clifford’s ghost; that is, I am unwilling to become an agnostic about everything, but empirically verifiable matters of fact. (In fact, I am unable to do that, and so, I think, is almost everyone else; as Thoreau said, neither men nor mushrooms grow so.) And I am unable to believe that my gnosticism, so to call it, is irrational. I am, I say, unwilling to listen to these whispers. *But I am unable to answer them.*” (van Inwagen 2010, 27, italics from Sophie.)

As I see it, the lesson of this dialogue is this. If *S*, as an equilibrist, does not believe that she has a compelling justification for her philosophical view, then *S* will most naturally entertain doubt about the truth of her philosophical view. If, despite this doubt, *S* still wants to stick to her view, then the only way for her to do so is to say to herself: “I stick to my philosophical view *because I’m unable to discard it*”. Now, as we have seen, *the most S*, as an equilibrist, can say about the nature of this inability, is this: “I’m unable to discard my philosophical view because it is in equilibrium with my fundamental pre-philosophical convictions and the latter are elements of my personal-cognitive integrity.” To put it simply: on the one hand, *S realizes* that she cannot take epistemic responsibility for her philosophical beliefs, while on the other

hand, *S confesses* that she is unable to suspend them.

Let's not sugarcoat, this is *writhing* indeed. I will christen it right away: *epistemic schizophrenia*. I am asking you to have empathy and try to imagine what it like is to live through this “battle”! Try to imagine yourself in van Inwagen's place — you're unable to give up your incompatibilism, while you have to hear the continuous reproachful whispering of Clifford's ghost. What can come out of this? Something like this may do:

If I assume that determinism is true, then by that I state (or I may be guided by “will to believe”) that given the world's initial condition and the laws of nature, nothing can happen differently to how it actually happens. If, however I state that nothing can happen differently to how it actually happens, then I also have to state (oh, it may just be my heart's voice): every action, on account of being a physical event, is forced by other physical events that do not fall under the agent's control. And if every action as a physical event is forced by other physical events that do not fall under the agent's control, then I have to say this (although I am so afraid that this is only a result of “some inner push”): when, for example, Joseph Franz signed the document declaring war on Serbia in 1914, this was something he had no way to avoid — his hand had to move the exact way it did.

You cannot just wave aside again this line of thought that is quite “impregnated” with cognitive unrest, and cannot say that its author is troubled by unnecessarily self-recrimination and meaningless worry. This would be a sign of excessive insensitivity. You must see that epistemic schizophrenia overwhelms *every* philosopher who is sufficiently reflective and sincere to confess to himself that his philosophical theory is built on his unjustified pre-philosophical convictions, and who, for this very reason, entertains doubts about his ability to maintain his view with epistemic responsibility, but who — thanks to his self-reflection — must also realize that he is unable to give up his philosophical theory without his personal-cognitive integrity falling apart.

This cannot end well. If a philosopher's doubt triumphs, then he will become a meta-skeptic. He suspends his substantive philosophical beliefs and gives up on seeking philosophical truths. And if a philosopher finally gives in to an irresistible urge to stick to his view at any cost, then he cannot but retire to his philosophical cave and try to put Clifford's or Sophie's

words out of his head — even if it is (at least initially) accompanied by a hellish intellectual remorse.

Van Inwagen seems to take the latter option — at least, some passages attest to it:

Well, I *do believe* these things [my first-order philosophical views]. And I believe that I am justified in believing them. And *I am confident that I am right*. But how can I take these positions? I don't know. That is itself a philosophical question, and I have no firm opinion about its correct answer. I suppose my best guess is that *I enjoy some sort of philosophical insight* (I mean in relation to these particular theses) that, for all merits, is somehow denied to Lewis. And this would have to be an insight that is incommunicable — at least, I do not know how to communicate it — for I have done all I can to communicate it to Lewis, and he has understood everything perfectly everything I have said, and he has not come to share my conclusions. (van Inwagen 1996, 138, italics mine)

This is how van Inwagen lets go of his tormenting epistemic schizophrenia (at least for a while) — for all his doubts, he convinces himself of his being able to be *justified* about and *confidently* believe in his substantive philosophical theses by appealing to a (veridical) insight that is incommunicable, mysterious and *accessible only to him*. And this way, we can witness the (possible) transformation of a *non*-“I'm the only one” philosopher into an “I'm the only one” philosopher.

3 Philosophy without philosophical beliefs

Here is the core idea in brief. The advocates of Lewis-style equilibration would like to stick to their philosophical *beliefs* — what is important to them is that *they can believe* in their philosophical theories. As Lewis puts it in his “maxim of honesty”: “never put forward a philosophical theory that you yourself cannot *believe* in your least philosophical and most commonsensical moments” (Lewis 1986, 135, emphasis mine).

The advocates of Lewis-style equilibration admittedly do not possess any compelling justifications for their philosophical theories. However, the intellectual maintenance of our

considered philosophical beliefs (if you wish, the mere egocentric “justification” of our philosophical theses) is not enough for them to rationally believe in the truth of their philosophical theories.

The failure of the Lewis-style equilibration clearly shows that *the philosophers’ beliefs* are the source of all troubles. But it also clearly shows the solution: to be able to commit themselves to a philosophical theory, philosophers *should not believe in it* (what is more, it is even counter-indicated for them to do that), but rather *merely accept it* (see e.g. Barnett 2019; Beebe 2018). The reason is that the mere acceptance of a philosophical theory means a *less binding, looser* commitment. In a word, “no belief, no cry”.

3.1 Belief vs. acceptance

Here is one formulation of this suggestion:

I suggest [...] that something like van Fraassen’s view about “acceptance” of scientific theories can be made to solve the problem. Constructive empiricism faces a similar problem to equilibration: given that science does not aim at the truth, and hence knowledge, of scientific theories — it only aims at empirical adequacy — how can we make sense of the fact that scientists *do* (and indeed *must*, for the purpose of pursuing that aim) make assertions that apparently express belief in claim about unobservables for which they have no justification? Van Fraassen’s answer, in short, is that “acceptance” of and belief in such claim are two distinct phenomena — and that only acceptance is required. [...]

Roughly, then, the idea is that in “accepting” a scientific theory that is ontologically committed to unobservables, the scientist does not (or, at least need not) adopt the attitude of *belief* towards what the theory says about those unobservables [...].

[I]f we are not entitled to *believe* that claims of our own theories, in what sense can they truly be said to be *our* theories? How can we sincerely endorse the claims those theories make? Acceptance, I take it, is supposed to deliver sincerity. The attitude of acceptance does not, of course, constitute sincere *belief*, but it is sincere nonetheless. The working

scientist adopts a theoretical view, works hard to accommodate the existing evidence and explore further consequences of her theory, makes adjustments where necessary, and so on. And she can do all of this entirely sincerely while yet merely accepting rather than believing her own theory [...]. All of this, I suggest, amounts to the scientist's *taking a view* in as much of a sense of “taking a view” as is required of her for the purposes of playing her part in the progress of science.

If something like van Fraassen's notion of acceptance really can constitute a legitimate sense in which one might “take a view”, then it can, I think, be applied to the working philosopher no less than to working scientist. The aims of science [...] and the aims of philosophy [...] differ, of course: the aim of empirical adequacy in science is very different to the pluralist aim in philosophy of discovering the equilibrium positions that can withstand examination. But in each case the acceptance of a theory that one cannot rationally believe serves a purpose relative to that aim. In the case of science, the aim of empirical adequacy demands that theories that posit unobservables are developed and tested, and in the case of philosophy the aim of the discovery of equilibria demands that we take on board a set of core assumptions and methodological prescriptions in order to develop and scrutinize an equilibrium position of our own that can withstand examination. (Beebe 2019, 20–22, italics in original)

The thing is the following. Let's make a difference between belief in a theory and acceptance of a theory (see e.g. van Fraassen 1980; Cohen 1989, 1992; Engel 1998). Putting subtleties and related major and minor disagreements aside, and concentrating solely on factual philosophical problems, I would like to point out the following differences between the concepts of belief and acceptance.

Firstly, if we believe that p , then our p -belief aims at *truth*. For example, if we believe that mereological sums do not exist, it means that we hold true the proposition that “Mereological sums do not exist”. By contrast, if we merely accept that p , then the acceptance of p does not aim at truth — we accept p solely for practical purposes. For example, if we merely accept that mereological sums do not exist, it means that we hold mereological nihilism as a possible philosophical equilibrium to be productive, rich in prospects, progressive etc. — something that yields a lot of “juice” when squeezed.

Secondly, if we believe that p , then we must be able to adduce *epistemic reasons* for the truth of p . For example, if we believe that free will is incompatible with determinism, then we must be able to argue for the truth of incompatibilism and the falsity of compatibilism. By contrast, if we merely accept that p , then we do not need to have epistemic reasons for the truth of p . For example, if we merely accept that free will is incompatible with determinism, then we must only be able to argue for the claim that incompatibilism as a philosophical equilibrium is productive, rich in prospects, progressive etc.

Thirdly, if we believe that p , then our p -belief is *not a result of our deliberate decision* (or just very rarely is) — we do not have control over our beliefs (or have only minimum control over them). For example, if we believe in the existence of God, then we did not decide that from that moment on, we hold true the proposition “God exists”. By contrast, if we merely accept that p , then it is always a result of our deliberate decision — we have strong control over what we accept. For example, if we accept that God exist, it means that we made a conscious decision that from now on, we will work on developing and defending a theist equilibrium, and take sides in other philosophical issues its spirit.

Fourthly, if we believe that p , then our p -belief *has personal significance to us*. For example, if we believe that phenomenal consciousness is not a physical property, then this belief of ours cannot be detached from several other beliefs, and is (or can be) an integral part of our personal and cognitive identity. By contrast, if we merely accept that p , then our acceptance of p has no personal significance to us. For example, if we merely accept that phenomenal consciousness is not a physical property, then it has nothing to do with the system of our beliefs — it may well be possible that we actually believe anti-physicalism to be false.

To sum up: as opposed to our belief in a philosophical theory or thesis, to accept a philosophical theory is nothing else but to commit ourselves to a well-defined *working hypothesis*, of which we *believe* (because this is the *only thing* we must *believe* in) that it is sufficiently productive, rich in prospects, progressive etc. *to be worthy* of our further development and defense, and to provide us a framework for doing philosophy.

What is the significance of this distinction? Here is the answer: if we start from the assumptions (1) that we cannot appropriately justify our philosophical theories to be able to rationally believe in their truth, (2) that belief in a philosophical theory is not a necessary

condition for rational commitment to it, (3) that we are free to accept any philosophical theory (equilibrium), and (4) that doing philosophy is a valuable thing, which we should not eliminate, then it is *advisable* that we show an attitude of acceptance towards philosophical theories instead of an attitude of belief. The reason is that there is *nothing at stake* for us in merely accepting a philosophical theory, it is *not* an integral part of our system of beliefs, it does *not* involve taking a personal stance and it has *nothing* to do with our intuitions, pre-philosophical beliefs and fundamental convictions — consequently, *it cannot happen* that we are suddenly visited by cognitive unrest or the disease called epistemic schizophrenia. In other words, it is advisable that we merely accept philosophical theories instead of believing in them because this is the only way for us to achieve *complete cognitive peace* to do our share in implementing that great and noble goal of the community of philosophers, that of populating the logical space with stable and increasingly sophisticated equilibria.

Taking a different track, in contrast to Lewis' (let me call it “human-faced” from now on) equilibrism, according to the “no belief, no cry” equilibrism, our appropriate reaction to philosophy's epistemic failure should be just to *pretend* having any philosophical beliefs — while we don't believe in the truth of a single substantive philosophical thesis. The proper conduct for us during philosophical discourse is to act *as if* we had philosophical beliefs — while we don't have any. The proper attitude for us is to interpret philosophical discourse *in a fictionalist manner* — that is, as it is inevitable, we should keep *saying* that “I believe that *p*”, but we *don't assert* it literally. Thus, we (can) sustain our usual philosophical discourse and we don't have to worry about the uncertainty of our philosophical beliefs.

3.2 Phalanstery of philosophers

I don't want to dispute that the “no belief, no cry” equilibrism offers an attractive alternative to many philosophers. I also concede that if the “utopia” of the “no belief, no cry” equilibrism came true, then philosophers would not live in cognitive uncertainty any more indeed, as they would have no philosophical beliefs, “the source of all troubles”.

At the same time, I must confess that I cannot identify with the “no belief, no cry” equilibrism. I will try to briefly tell you why I am so averse to and displeased by this metaphilosophical vision.

(1) Let's imagine how work would go on in the "no belief, no cry" "utopia". Since, according to this metaphilosophical vision, philosophy's exclusive goal is to populate logical space with consistent equilibria that resist objections, there is no doubt that the most suitable candidates for this task would be those philosophers who *do not at all have* any philosophical beliefs. For if a philosopher does not have philosophical beliefs that are significant to him (or, what is more, have existential stake), then, after all, he can work with complete cognitive peace of mind in the "assembly hall" of *any* equilibrium.

Of course, there could be some "malfunctioning" in the "no belief, no cry" "utopia", too, as the following dialogue illustrates.

Philosopher No. 123422: Dear equilibrium construction manager, I have a small problem. Ashamed as I am, I have to confess this: it seems that I still have some residual philosophical beliefs. For example, a fundamental conviction of mine is that a political community does the right thing if it benefits the least advantaged in allocating resources. It is also a fundamental conviction of mine that there are no abstract entities. Another is that the mind is part of the physical world. I can "vividly" believe all the (just mentioned) propositions, and my personal-cognitive integrity would be damaged if I had to give up any of them. But, as I take it for sure that there can be no compelling arguments in philosophy, and as I've realized that the Lewis-type "human-faced" version of equilibrism necessarily gives rise to cognitive unrest, I cannot see how I could do my share in the works of implementing philosophy's ultimate goal, the construction of equilibria.

Equilibrium construction manager: God save us from you constructing philosophical equilibria related to these fundamental convictions of yours. If you don't want to catch the disease called "cognitive unrest" or "epistemic schizophrenia", just let go of your cherished pre-philosophical convictions and the equilibria that elaborate them!

Philosopher No. 123422: But what should I do, then?

Equilibrium construction manager: Don't worry! We will surely find some philosophical problems that you don't have any definite intuitions about. For instance,

do you have any definite pre-philosophical convictions about the problem “The ship of Theseus”?

Philosopher No. 123422: None at all.

Equilibrium construction manager: Great! Starting from tomorrow, you will be busily building the equilibrium which says that the original ship is identical with the reconstructed ship — of course, in the spirit of mereological essentialism. But if you deem the topic of mereological essentialism to have already been thoroughly dissected by your predecessors, and think that you would not benefit much from it, then feel free to choose an equilibrium that promises more new insights. For example, the one which says that the original ship undergoes fission. Still, the best you can do is to obtain a thorough taxonomy of the “Ship of Theseus” problem (let’s say the one written by Gallois [Gallois 1998]) and choose the philosophical equilibrium from which you think you can squeeze the most philosophical juice.

I don’t know how others deal with it, but for me, the vision of “no belief, no cry” equilibrium is not a pleasant, serene, sunny and peaceful utopia, but a horrible and frustrating dystopia. Of course, I cannot rule out that my unwillingness is idiosyncratic, and perhaps even self-destructing in a certain sense. The most I can say is this: “I have some »vivid« substantive philosophical beliefs that are important to me, and I think that a person like me *would not prefer to live* in this »utopia«”. The reason is that I consider it my epistemic duty to try to account for my substantive philosophical beliefs in the light of philosophy’s epistemic failure — and if I worked in the “no belief, no cry” utopia, doing philosophy in the spirit of “no belief, no cry” equilibrium, then I would continuously and definitely feel that *I do not do* what I should do, and what I should do is *not what I do*. In a word, in my eyes the “no belief, no cry” equilibrium is a *superficial* metaphilosophical vision.

(2) Let’s imagine, however, a philosopher who — unlike me — would like to live in this “utopia”. He might say this:

I like the vision of “no belief, no cry” equilibrium because, I experience it as a kind of liberation. I don’t believe that there could be knock-down arguments in philosophy, and I don’t sympathize with the “human-faced” version of equilibrium either. For me, the

“no belief, no cry” vision is the only option to commit myself to a philosophical theory with cognitive peace of mind. This is because it requires me no more than to accept a working hypothesis, and do my job in accordance with it day after day.

The reason why I can do my job with complete cognitive peace of mind by accepting the working hypothesis that I’ve chosen or I’ve been assigned is that for me, the work of building (or assembling) equilibrium x is no more significant than the work of building (or assembling) equilibrium y . I believe neither in x nor in y . And as I don’t have any philosophical beliefs, I don’t mind, and even consider as another challenge, if in the meantime the community of philosophers expects me to accept another working hypothesis (one whose content is incompatible with the earlier one) and the construction of a corresponding equilibrium.

But that’s not all. The vision of “no belief, no cry” equilibrism strongly attracts me because it offers a moral redemption at once. I don’t have to lie to myself any more when trying to account for my decision to continue my professional philosophical activity, even though I no longer believe in any substantive philosophical theories.

I don’t know how others deal with it, but in my eyes the above is a clear proof that the “no belief, no cry” equilibrism is in fact nothing else but an open and sophisticated yet displeasing form of that opportunism that tries to divert attention from the unsolvedness of philosophical problems and the misery of those burnt-out philosophers who have lost all their substantive philosophical beliefs by reassuring them that “although you have failed both intellectually and morally, you can keep on doing everything as you did so far”.

As you can see, I used some morally condemning expressions — I called the “no belief, no cry” equilibrism superficial and unprincipled opportunism. At the same time, I have to admit that whether a philosopher likes or dislikes the “no belief, no cry” equilibrism is, like so many other things, depends on *value choice* at the end of the day — being a matter of *taste*, if you wish.

I fully admit that someone could think that populating the logical space, knowing possible equilibria and the clarification of the philosophical-logical relations among them is *a value in itself* for which it is *worth* doing philosophy. I don’t think it is. I cannot see why the

production of increasingly more precise and detailed maps of philosophical equilibria would be a value in itself if one *doesn't want to believe at all* in the truth of a single substantive philosophical theory or equilibrium. In my eyes, for example, there is no special value in a philosopher's ability to make fine-grained distinctions among different kinds of supervenient dependence; he has the highest resolution picture of the advantages and difficulties of various theories of supervenience — while he *does not* (and *does not want to*) *believe* anything at all about the mind-body relationship, or, if he believes anything about it, his belief *has nothing on earth to do* with his above-mentioned ability.

Of course, someone could say (see e.g. Barnett 2019), that we should only *temporarily* be “no belief, no cry” equilibrists — until one or other equilibrium gains the upper hand over its rivals. As soon as this happens, we may begin to believe in their truth with clear conscience.

However, I cannot commit myself to this proposal either. Let's suppose that at some point in his career, Thomas decides to do no more than accept certain substantive philosophical beliefs, because he sees that he cannot identify with the “human-faced” version of equilibrism. In my opinion, Thomas can seriously think that his decision is just a temporary one (and not final), *only if he strongly believes* that sooner or later (hopefully, in his life) the “Epistemic End of Day (Macbride 2014, 231) will arrive — only if he *strongly believes* that one day someone (hopefully, he himself) will come up with some knock-down argument(s) for a given equilibrium, or refute all its rivals with knock-down arguments, and so he will be able to safely discredit them all. In a word, Thomas has good reason to think that he is just a temporary (and not a permanent) “no belief, no cry” equilibrist *only if* he at the same time believes that there can be compelling justifications in philosophy.

Now, since like the “human-faced” equilibrists, I think that there can be no compelling justification for our substantive philosophical theses, any commitment to this optimistic version of the “no belief, no cry” equilibrism is not a viable alternative to me.

4 Farewell to equilibrism

I don't want to repeat my misgivings about the human-faced or the “no belief, no cry” variants of equilibrism — I wish to say something different.

Recall the section in which I listed the main motives for choosing equilibrium. Among them, I mentioned the fact that equilibrium is capable of legitimating the received way of doing philosophy. To illustrate this, I quoted the passage below from Gutting: “an atheist who thinks all arguments for God’s existence are demonstrably fallacious may need a clever philosopher to show what’s wrong with a sophisticated version of the cosmological argument or the design argument from fine-tuning” (Gutting 2015, 258). In what follows, I will confine myself to reacting to this point, because this is where the insincerity of the human-faced equilibrium is especially clear.

Let’s take again the mind-body problem as a factual philosophical problem. Let’s suppose that Alex, an outsider is deeply interested in how the mind and the body are related to each other. What can the community of philosophers offer her? Two things. Firstly, it can show her which philosophical view she should endorse in light of her fundamental pre-philosophical convictions in order to avoid logical/conceptual contradiction with herself. Secondly, it can enlighten Alex about how she should address the objections against her view.

Nonetheless, this is not what Alex expects. She does not turn to the clever community of philosophers in order to be enlightened about what she should think in harmony with her fundamental pre-philosophical convictions and how she could neutralize objections. For example, if Alex is uncertain but inclined to believe in the immortality of the soul, it will not comfort her that the community of philosophers shows her beyond doubt that no materialist objection is compelling. Or, if Alex is uncertain but inclined to believe that the soul is not immortal in any sense, it will not comfort her that the community of philosophers shows her beyond doubt that none of the anti-physicalist objections are compelling.

The equilibriumist, of course, may say (what she has *always* said) that Alex cannot expect more than this from the community of philosophers. Alex, however, may retort (and I’m convinced that any outsider who is sincerely curious would retort with this as well) that if the community of philosophers cannot provide more than this, it would be more *righteous* or at least *sincere* for it to confess that it *does not have a clue* about what the relationship is between the mind and the body — because they *actually* do not have a clue.

But let me dramatize this further. I think that the insincerity of equilibrium is even more

obvious when an outsider turns to the community of philosophers for an answer to a philosophical question which has great existential importance to him. Let's suppose that Sammy had a long but immoral life. He enjoyed torturing others and tortured many people in an extremely cruel way. Furthermore, let's suppose that Sammy feels that the end is near. And let's also suppose that Sammy firmly believes in the truth of the conditional that "If God exists, sinners will be condemned to eternal damnation". (He believes this as firmly as he believes that the plane which he boarded does not crash and almost as firmly as he believes that there is a mind-independent reality). However, he is uncertain about the existence of God. Of course, Sammy would not like to be condemned to eternal damnation, so he turns to the community of philosophers (for whoever else could he turn to?) in order to learn what he should believe regarding the existence of God and the afterlife.

Now, let's suppose that Sammy is told: "First you should explicate your fundamental pre-philosophical convictions about supernatural beings and the mind-body problem, and then we will tell you in which theories of philosophy of religion and philosophy of mind *should you* believe, given these convictions". If this is the answer from the community of philosophers to his question which has extreme importance to him, then Sammy rightly retorts that it did not help him at all, because he *did not* get a real answer to his question. He got to know certain relevant aspects of the problem, but he did not get to know the most important thing which was the reason he asked anything in the first place. Namely, he did not get to know whether he does have reason to worry or not.

If the community of philosophers (as it did in Alex's case) addresses this problem by saying that one should not expect more from philosophy than this, it is abundantly clear that what the equilibrist can provide Sammy is *not more than* what a thoroughbred meta-skeptic is able to provide. The answer "If these are your fundamental pre-philosophical convictions, then you should believe this and that" *has the exactly the same value* for Sammy as the answer "We are unable to tell you what you should believe".

What is more — and in my view, this is the main trouble — if the equilibrist was successful and Sammy was satisfied with the above "if..., then..."-type answer, then the equilibrist would "teach" Sammy only how he *does not have to be aware* that he is *still as ignorant as he was before* regarding a question which has great importance to him. Thus, it was even *worse* for him than if he had met a meta-skeptic. Sammy could not receive a reassuring answer from

him either, but the meta-skeptic could raise Sammy's awareness of his ignorance and its consequences. In contrast to the equilibrist, the meta-skeptic *would not mislead* Sammy.

CHAPTER SIX

META-SKEPTICISM

According to meta-skepticism, philosophers *cannot rationally believe* in the truth of their philosophical theses, views and theories, so *their epistemic duty is to suspend* their philosophical beliefs.

This definition of meta-skepticism is incomplete as yet — it needs completion at two points. Let's first see what the meta-skeptic means by saying that “philosophers cannot *rationally* believe in the truth of their philosophical theses”.

By rational belief I simply mean *justified belief*. *S* is justified in believing that *p* if *S* has *good reason* to believe that *p* — if *S does well* to believe that *p*. (According to some philosophers, we can have rational beliefs that don't require justification — but now I don't want to discuss that view.)

The proposition “*S* rationally believes that *p*” is ambiguous. It can mean that *S* has good reason to believe that *p* because *S*'s belief in *p* has some *useful consequences or benefits* for *S* (or for someone else). I will call this notion of rationality (which appeals exclusively to useful consequences and benefits) *practical* rationality, and the corresponding justification *practical* justification.

However, the proposition “*S* rationally believes that *p*” can also mean that *S* has good reason to believe that *p* because the justification *S* has for *p* gives *S* good reason to believe that *p is true*. In other words, “*S* rationally believes that *p*” = “*S* has good reason to believe that *p* is true”. I will call this kind of justification *epistemic* justification, and the rationality based on this kind of justification rationality in the *epistemic* sense.

Now, when the meta-skeptic claims that “Philosophers cannot rationally believe in the truth of their philosophical theses”, he does not mean it in the sense of “all-inclusive” rationality. According to him, philosophers cannot rationally believe in the truth of their philosophical theses in the sense that *they have no good epistemic reason* to think that they have truth-conducive justification for their philosophical beliefs.

So, the meta-skeptic doubts that philosophy's truth-seeking and justificatory tools are adequate and suitable for establishing truth and for the compelling justification of philosophical theses. Now, if they are not adequate and suitable, then the use of these tools does not give philosophers any accessible and good epistemic reason to hold their philosophical beliefs to be true. Consequently, they cannot rationally hold their philosophical beliefs to be true.

The meta-skeptic is dissatisfied with all kinds of externalist justifications (which merely appeal to some reliable cognitive process). According to him, even if (similarly to chicken-sexers) there were some chosen philosophers who always believe the right philosophical propositions to be true thanks to some philosophical super-skill that is *inaccessible* to them (like chicken sexers accurately determine the sex of a given chicken as female or male), they could not rationally believe in the truth of their philosophical theses. The reason is that — primarily in the light of the permanent dissensus in all areas of philosophy — they, *too*, would have good epistemic reasons to doubt whether their philosophical skills are reliable and whether their philosophical beliefs are true.

Let's now turn to the second half of the meta-skeptical thesis. The meta-skeptic does not necessarily dispute that philosophers may have good epistemic reasons to believe in the truth of some *non-substantive* philosophical propositions. He can allow that *S* can rationally believe in the truth of propositions like the following: "If physical objects are bundles of immanent universals, then the principle of the identity of indiscernibles is true". Or: "Conceptualism about perceptual content has the virtue of being able to easily account for the role of perceptual experiences in our beliefs about the external world, but it has a hard time accounting for the phenomenology of perceptual experiences, for example for the phenomenological fact that perceptual experiences are finer-grained than the concepts under which they are subsumed".

As the meta-skeptic does not necessarily dispute that philosophers can rationally believe in the truth of such philosophical propositions, he does not necessarily expect them to suspend the philosophical beliefs corresponding to them. That is, the meta-skeptic need not necessarily claim that philosophers have the epistemic duty to suspend *all* of their philosophical beliefs. What he *must* claim is that philosophers cannot have good epistemic reasons for the truth of

their substantive philosophical theses, and consequently they have the epistemic duty to suspend all their *substantive* philosophical beliefs.

Another interesting issue is whether the meta-skeptic would expect philosophers to suspend those beliefs of theirs concerning which we cannot talk about truth simpliciter — their philosophical views on *purely conceptual* philosophical problems. In my opinion, the meta-skeptic can be lenient, or alternatively, he can be hardline. If he is lenient, he can say that “If *S*’s philosophical belief *p* does really nothing but enables *S* to conceptually »piece together« the »world«, then for all I care, *S* may believe that *p*, and *S* need not suspend *p*”. But if he is a hardliner, he can say that “Because *S* cannot have good epistemic reason to believe, for instance, the proposition that »Works of art are expressions of the artist’s emotions«, *S* must suspend this belief”. From now on, I will focus on the lenient variant of meta-skepticism — considered as a more consistent variant of it.

Taking these remarks into account, I would like to give the following definition of meta-skepticism as the fourth reaction to philosophy’s epistemic failure:

Meta-skepticism: (1) Philosophers cannot (in the epistemic sense) rationally believe in the truth of their substantive and factual philosophical theses because they have no accessible and good epistemic reasons for thinking that their substantive and factual philosophical theses are appropriately justified, therefore (2) philosophers have the epistemic duty to suspend their substantive factual philosophical beliefs.

It is very important to emphasize that although meta-skepticism is, of course, a *normative* philosophical view, in the meta-skeptic’s eyes (1) and (2) are *not conceptual but factual* philosophical theses — *independently* of our conceptual framework, it is *true simpliciter* that philosophers’ substantive factual beliefs are irrational, and *independently* of our conceptual framework, it is *true simpliciter* that they have to suspend them. Which means that according to the meta-skeptic, it is a *fact* (existing independently of our conceptual framework) that philosophers’ substantive factual beliefs are not justified appropriately enough to entitle them to rationally stick to those beliefs, and it is a *fact* (existing independently of our conceptual framework) that philosophers have the duty to suspend them. In other words, according to the meta-skeptic, we do not have to accept (1) and (2) because they follow from our conceptual framework, but because (1) and (2) are made true by the epistemic world order.

Now, most philosophers do not consider meta-skepticism an attractive alternative. There are three well-known and rather serious worries which make them think that meta-skepticism is an untenable metaphilosophical view.

Firstly, meta-skepticism is a *self-defeating* view — the propositional content of this view *defeats the belief* in its propositional content. According to the meta-skeptic, philosophers cannot rationally believe in the truth of their substantive factual philosophical theses, consequently *the meta-skeptic cannot rationally believe* in the truth of the substantive factual philosophical thesis that “Philosophers cannot rationally believe in the truth of their substantive factual philosophical theses”, *either*. Furthermore, according to the meta-skeptic, philosophers must suspend their belief in the truth of their substantive factual philosophical theses, consequently *the meta-skeptic, too, must suspend his belief* in the truth of the substantive factual philosophical thesis that “Philosophers must suspend their belief in the truth of their substantive factual philosophical theses”.

Secondly, the meta-skeptical view requires us to do something psychologically impossible (or at least extremely difficult), namely to suspend even philosophical beliefs such as “There is a mind-independent external world”, “There are other minds”, “There is a difference between morally right and wrong acts”, and so on. We simply cannot go down this road — *we cannot live our lives* as consistent meta-skeptics.

Thirdly, even if somehow it were psychologically possible to suspend our substantive factual philosophical beliefs, we have no practical reason to commit ourselves to meta-skepticism because *it offers no prospects*. It narrows down our intellectual options, in particular the scope of our philosophical activities and stances, without offering anything in exchange. In a word, adopting the meta-skeptical strategy is the worst possible business.

The above three worries do not have equal weight. The first one is the most serious because if all possible arguments for meta-skepticism undermine their own conclusions, then it is not rational to adopt meta-skepticism. But if it is possible to formulate a non-self-defeating and perhaps compelling argument for meta-skepticism, then the second and third worries are *eo ipso* invalidated. This is because if there are compelling arguments for the thesis that philosophers have the epistemic duty to suspend their substantive factual philosophical

beliefs, then — however difficult and painful, and however hopeless it may be — philosophers *must* suspend them.

In this chapter, I first expound and characterize the general argumentative strategy of meta-skepticism, trying to show what premises a meta-skeptic can use in his argument to support his view in the most promising way. I give a detailed analysis of the meta-skeptic's theses (1) and (2), and say what he can do with the problem of self-defeat. In what follows, I put myself in the meta-skeptic's perspective to describe what he sees as the mistake of those philosophers who stick to their philosophical beliefs, and what kind of "training" he offers them so they can suspend their philosophical beliefs. Finally, I try to show that the meta-skeptic does not react appropriately to philosophy's epistemic failure, and does not give a right answer to the question "What should we do with our philosophical beliefs in the light of philosophy's epistemic failure?".

1 The meta-skeptical argumentative strategy

1.1 The main argument for meta-skepticism

Before presenting the argument, I would like to make some preliminary clarificatory remarks. First, the meta-skeptic must give *compelling* argument(s) for his view. Why cannot he be satisfied with non-compelling arguments? Because non-compelling arguments — as you could see in the discussion of equilibrium — can at most provide egocentric "justification", and so the meta-skeptic could be allowed to say just this much: "*In my opinion*, philosophers cannot rationally believe in their substantive factual philosophical theses, and *in my opinion*, they should suspend their substantive factual philosophical beliefs, for this view is in equilibrium with my fundamental pre-philosophical convictions". This formulation, however, is not identical with the thesis of meta-skepticism, as it is no more than *one equilibrium* among other (metaphilosophical) equilibria.

The meta-skeptic, then — at least in this respect — must proceed similarly to the followers of the epistemic tradition. The meta-skeptic is indeed different from the equilibrist. While, according to the equilibrist, there can be no compelling arguments in philosophy, the meta-skeptic thinks that one can argue compellingly for the philosophical thesis that philosophers

cannot rationally stick to their substantive factual philosophical beliefs and so they must suspend them.

Secondly, the argument for meta-skepticism must be distinguished from the one for conciliationism. As I said earlier, in their arguments the conciliationists typically conclude from the fact of dissensus among experts recognizing each other as epistemic peers that the rational thing to do for the participants of a debate is to suspend their beliefs or at least reassess their epistemic status.

The fact of dissensus *has another role* in the argument for meta-skepticism. As the meta-skeptic sees it, philosophical dissensus (or rather, the permanent dissensus in all areas of philosophy) clearly indicates that the tools of philosophy are inadequate and unsuitable for establishing truths. As Jason Brennan puts it:

The goal of philosophy is uncover certain truths. Radical dissensus shows that philosophical methods are imprecise and inaccurate. Philosophy continually leads experts with the highest degree of epistemic virtue doing the very best they can, to accept a wide array of incompatible doctrines. Therefore, philosophy is an *unreliable* instrument for finding truth. (Brennan, 2010, 3.)

To complete the argument: if the tools of philosophy are inadequate and unsuitable for establishing truths, then philosophers cannot have good epistemic reasons to stick to their substantive factual philosophical beliefs, and, willy-nilly, painfully or not, they must suspend them.

To sum up, the main difference between the argumentative strategies of conciliationism and meta-skepticism is that the meta-skeptic does not directly infer from the fact of dissensus among philosophers that philosophers cannot rationally believe in their theses. He does not go into the epistemology of disagreements, and his goal is not to present philosophical arguments for conciliationism and against the steadfast-view. In the eyes of the meta-skeptic, the epistemology of disagreements is merely an $n+1^{st}$ philosophical problem, about which — just like in other areas of philosophy — there is disagreement among philosophers. Instead, the starting point of the meta-skeptic is that the fact of dissensus in all areas of philosophy is an *unambiguous, unassailable and indisputable proof* that the tools of philosophy are inadequate

and unsuitable for establishing truths and compellingly justifying substantive factual philosophical theses — and *from the latter*, he infers that philosophers cannot rationally believe in the truth of their substantive factual philosophical theses, and they must suspend them.

Thirdly, the meta-skeptical argument against philosophical knowledge works otherwise than standard (first-order) skeptical arguments. The latter (and here I don't mean the skeptical arguments appealing to infinite regress) are made to the following recipe. (1) Take a bizarre scenario (we are brains in a vat; we are dreaming all the time; God created the world five minutes ago etc.), which, if true, would be indistinguishable from normal experience from a subjective perspective. (2) Show that there is no way for us to rule out the possibility that we are actually in the scenario at issue. (3) Draw the conclusion that we do not have knowledge of the external world, or of the past that is earlier than five minutes ago, since all our beliefs about the external world or about a past that is earlier than five minutes ago are unjustified because there is no way for us to rule out the possibility that we are actually not in some of these skeptical scenarios.

Standard skeptical arguments derive their extraordinary power from the fact that although everyone is absolutely certain that the skeptical scenario does not obtain, this certainty means nothing — everyone would still be absolutely certain that it does not obtain even if it did. Everyone would still be just as certain that they are not a brain in a vat even if they happened to be just that.

The argument for meta-skepticism is made to a different recipe. (1) Take as your starting point the fact of philosophy's epistemic failure. (You can safely do that, given the permanent dissensus in all areas of philosophy). (2) In the subsequent premises, use expressions that properly capture the nature of this failure (for example: the truth-seeking and justificatory tools of philosophy are “wrong”; “inaccurate”; “inadequate for establishing truths”; “unsuitable for compelling justification of philosophical theses” etc.). (3) Finally, make it explicit that based on such truth-seeking and justification, no rational person can believe in substantive factual philosophical theories, views or theses.

Here is a meta-skeptical argument made to this recipe:

(1) Philosophy is a failed epistemic enterprise — the philosophers in philosophy's epistemic tradition have not solved any substantive factual philosophical problems, nor have they come up with any compellingly justified substantive factual philosophical truths.

(2) The best explanation for philosophy's epistemic failure is that the truth-seeking and justificatory tools of philosophy are inadequate and unsuitable for establishing substantive factual philosophical truths and for providing compelling justification of substantive factual philosophical theses — philosophers seek truth and justify their substantive factual philosophical theses with tools that are inadequate and unsuitable for establishing truths and for providing compelling justifications for their substantive factual philosophical theses.

(3) If philosophers seek truth and justify their substantive factual philosophical theses with tools that are inadequate and unsuitable for establishing truths and for providing compelling justifications for their substantive factual philosophical theses, then philosophers cannot rationally believe in the truth of their substantive factual philosophical theses.

Therefore:

(C1) Philosophers cannot rationally believe in the truth of their substantive factual philosophical theses.

Furthermore:

(4) If philosophers cannot rationally believe in the truth of their substantive factual philosophical theses, then they have the epistemic duty to suspend their substantive factual philosophical beliefs.

Therefore:

(C2) Philosophers have the epistemic duty to suspend their substantive factual philosophical beliefs.

1.2 The premises of the meta-skeptical argument

It is the “I’m the only one” philosophers who deny premise (1). They think it is untrue that philosophers haven’t solved any philosophical problems and haven’t come up with any compellingly justified substantive factual truths. For *they* have solved this or that philosophical problem and *they* do have some compelling arguments for their philosophical view — even if other philosophers don’t concede that to them.

Like the equilibrist, the meta-skeptic doesn’t believe the “I’m the only one” philosophers. In the eyes of the meta-skeptic, premise (1) is an evident and undeniable empirical fact, and the “I’m the only one” philosophers are unlucky, epistemically blind, fanatic or just comic figures whose raving assertions are not to be (and must not be) taken seriously.

The meta-skeptic may admit that he cannot infallibly rule out the possibility that philosopher *X* has already presented some knock-down argument for some substantive factual philosophical thesis, and it is just that other philosophers don’t understand it and are unable to see its compelling force. However, according to him, it is incomparably more plausible to think that there have never been any compelling arguments in philosophy. Because if there had been any, then the community of philosophers would have recognized their compelling force — similarly to the way the community of mathematicians can recognize the compelling force of a mathematical proof, however complex, ramified and hyper-sophisticated it may be. To put it differently, in the eyes of the meta-skeptic, it would be insufficient and intellectually unscrupulous to argue against premise (1) like this: “Premise (1) is not sufficiently supported because (i) some philosophers are convinced that they have substantive factual philosophical knowledge (true belief plus corresponding compelling justification), and (ii) no one would be able to prove beyond doubt that they are mistaken”.

Against premise (2), one can say that it is not true that the best explanation for philosophy’s epistemic failure is that philosophy’s truth-seeking and justificatory tools are inadequate and unsuitable for establishing substantive factual philosophical truths and for compellingly justifying substantive factual philosophical theses.

So far so good, but what explanation could one offer instead of it? One can say this: the reason for philosophy's epistemic failure is not that its truth-seeking and justificatory tools are inadequate and unsuitable, but *the way individual philosophers do philosophy*. The truth-seeking and justificatory tools of philosophy are *good*, it is just that philosophers use them in the wrong way — mistakes are bound to happen whenever philosophers try to use the tools of philosophy in the right way: for example, certain unconscious factors interfere with their right use and philosophers never catch these unconscious mechanisms in the act when they appear.

The meta-skeptic can admit that he cannot infallibly rule out the possibility that *it merely happened so* (is a *contingent* fact) that philosophers have been unable to solve philosophical problems and to come up with compellingly justified substantive factual truths; and they might as well have been successful if they appropriately used the truth-seeking and justificatory tools of philosophy — for, after all, they are adequate and suitable. However, he might add, this is a highly implausible explanation. Why? Because philosophy's epistemic failure is *pervasive and permanent* — so it is very hard to take seriously any explanation according to which the activity of individual philosophers is responsible for philosophy's epistemic failure; that so far, every philosopher has committed some fatal (but otherwise avoidable) mistake in justifying their views.

In other words, *occasional* failures can be plausibly explained with *occasional* mistakes — by contrast, a pervasive and permanent failure could *hardly* be explained this way. Let's suppose that 80 per cent of customers assemble a piece of IKEA furniture by consulting its assembly instructions, and only 20 per cent of them fails to assemble it. In this case, a plausible explanation is that the 20 per cent of them has made some mistakes — and the assembly instructions are impeccable. But let's suppose that *nobody* is able to assemble a piece of IKEA furniture at issue by consulting its assembly instructions. In this case, it is not a plausible explanation that each and every customer has made some (otherwise avoidable) mistake — the plausible explanation is that the assembly instructions are unsuitable for assembling that piece of furniture while consulting them.

The situation is similar with philosophy. If it were the case that some philosophers succeed in coming up with compellingly justified substantive philosophical truths, whereas other philosophers fail to achieve that, then a plausible explanation would be that those who fail have made some mistake. But, in fact, *no* philosopher can come up with compellingly

justified substantive philosophical theses. Consequently, the explanation that each philosopher makes some mistake is implausible. It would be much more plausible and lifelike to suspect that the source of the trouble is that philosophy's truth-seeking and justificatory tools are inadequate and unsuitable for establishing substantive factual philosophical truths. Which is to say that *the way* (namely, using the tools of philosophy) in which philosophers seek truths and try to justify their theses is *sui generis* inappropriate for the goal.

Make no mistakes about it. When the meta-skeptic claims that the source of the trouble are philosophy's truth-seeking and justificatory tools, he doesn't mean by it that philosophy has some *special* truth-seeking and justificatory toolkit that is *different* from the toolkits of all other epistemic enterprises, and that the style of argument that uniquely characterizes philosophy is inadequate and unsuitable. Of course, the meta-skeptic doesn't dispute that there exist general rules of arguments, nor does he dispute that philosophers know and conform to these rules. What he claims is this: for some reason (and he either has some definite and substantive concept of it or he hasn't), the standard tools of truth-seeking and justification break down whenever they are applied to philosophical problems. *This is all* that the meta-skeptic means by saying that philosophy's tools are inadequate and unsuitable for establishing truths and for compellingly justifying substantive factual philosophical theses.

Returning to the objection: here are some well-known explanations for philosophy's pervasive and permanent epistemic failure, and they are such that the meta-skeptic can commit himself to any of them. Firstly, philosophical theories and theses cannot be justified empirically — and if it is so, then all philosophical justifications necessarily hang in the air. Secondly, in trying to provide justification for their philosophical beliefs, philosophers inevitably appeal to their intuitions — however, people's intuitions significantly differ; what is more, they differ as a function of such factors (cultural, geographical background, socioeconomic status etc.) which have nothing to do with the topic under discussion and the corresponding truth. Thirdly, philosophical problems are closely interconnected, and are extremely complex — and the reassuring conceptual clarification of these very complex interrelations remains to be seen, and it is improbable that it will ever be accomplished. Fourthly, the construction of the concepts necessary for solving philosophical problems is cognitively closed to us — the constitution of our minds is adapted to the Stone Age environment, so our cognitive equipment does not enable us to answer philosophical problems. Fifthly, the philosophers' philosophical beliefs are determined by such factors (education, genetic heredity, moral

and/or epistemic character etc.) which have nothing to do with the question whether their beliefs are true or not — in a word, the philosophers' beliefs are all irrational (see e.g. Chalmers 2015; Daly 2017 for these and other explanations).

Now, it does not matter which explanation (or combination of explanations) the meta-skeptic commits himself to, he can consistently stick to premise (2), according to which the best explanation for philosophy's epistemic failure is that the philosophers' truth-seeking and justificatory tools are inadequate and unsuitable for establishing truths and for compellingly justifying their substantive factual philosophical theses.

Against premise (3), one can argue in this way: philosophy's and the philosophers' tools are indeed inadequate and unsuitable for compellingly justifying philosophical theses. However, they are adequate and suitable for the task of exploring and working out the possible (consistent) views concerning various philosophical problems. Moreover, they entitle philosophers to rationally hold that view which is in equilibrium with their fundamental pre-philosophical convictions.

This is the view of “human-faced” equilibrism. Thus, the equilibrist rejects premise (3) of the meta-skeptical argument. He may (and probably would) accept as true premises (1) and (2) of the meta-skeptical argument — the two reactions or attitudes to philosophy's epistemic failure come to diverge on premise (3).

The meta-skeptic may concede that philosophy's tools are indeed adequate and suitable for helping the philosophers commit themselves to philosophical theories that are in equilibrium with their fundamental pre-philosophical convictions, and these tools are also adequate and suitable for helping them defend their already elaborated philosophical theories against various objections. Nevertheless, the meta-skeptic could go on to say that according to equilibrism, the fundamental pre-philosophical convictions which philosophers draw on in elaborating their philosophical theories are *unjustified*. More precisely, they are only *practically justified*. They are justified only in the sense that one cannot abandon them without damaging one's personal-cognitive integrity. Thus, the most they allow one to say is this: “*S* has good reasons to stick to his philosophical theory because that theory is in equilibrium with his fundamental pre-philosophical convictions — and *S* has good reason to believe in the latter because if *S* did not do so, it would have some untoward consequences

which would damage his personal-cognitive integrity”.

According to the meta-skeptic, however, the above would be hardly enough — philosophers cannot (in the epistemic sense) rationally believe in the truth of substantive factual philosophical theories built on practically justified but epistemically unjustified intuitions and pre-philosophical convictions. Now, if *S* cannot (in the epistemic sense) rationally believe in the truth of his substantive factual philosophical theory *t*, then, like it or not, *S* has the epistemic duty to suspend his belief in *t*.

Finally, let’s turn to premise (4). This premise draws on the concept of epistemic duty, and so the meta-skeptic strongly commits himself to a doxastic deontology. Here is a nice definition of it:

Prior to philosophical reflection we tend to take it for granted that we are responsible for our beliefs in roughly the same way as we are responsible for our actions. Just as we have moral duties prescribing or forbidding certain types of actions in various situations, we also have epistemic duties prescribing what we should or should not believe under various conditions. Moreover, just we can be blamed for failing to fulfill our moral duties and praised for fulfilling them, we can be blamed and praised for our beliefs. *Doxastic deontology* is the view that this analogy is right: beliefs are subject to a kind of deontic evaluation which is very similar to the deontic evaluation of actions, so *there are true doxastic deontic statements*. (Forrai 2019, 1–2, italics mine)

What would the meta-skeptic consider as relevant and true doxastic deontic statements? The following: “As philosophers have no good epistemic reason to believe or deny that *p*, philosophers *must not* believe either that *p* or that not-*p*”; “As philosophers *must not* believe either that *p* or that not-*p*, they must suspend their beliefs in *p* or in not-*p*”; “If philosophers believe that *p* or that not-*p*, then they *deserve to be blamed for it*”; “If philosophers suspend their beliefs in *p* or in not-*p*, then they *deserve to be praised for it*”.

Nevertheless, the objection says that the meta-skeptic cannot commit himself to doxastic deontology — given that it is a strongly controversial philosophical theory. In his argument intended to be compelling, he cannot draw on a philosophical theory against which rock-hard objections can be brought (see e.g. Alston 1985, 1988).

The meta-skeptic can do the following. He may concede that we have significantly less control over our beliefs than over our actions. He may also concede that we don't have any control at all over some of our beliefs. In a word, he may concede that his commitment to doxastic deontology is far from unproblematic.

Still, he can say two things in his defense. On the one hand, he can warn us that we must not mistake doxastic deontology for doxastic voluntarism, which says that we have power over believing whatever we want. The latter is implausible indeed — we cannot change our beliefs at will. But his commitment to doxastic deontology is a different matter, because all he demands is that we *suspend certain beliefs* of ours as soon as we realize that our epistemic justifications for them are insufficient.

On the other hand, the meta-skeptic may say that even if we cannot suspend some of our beliefs due to our psychological incapability, his commitment to doxastic deontology would only be fateful to him if the set of our consciously suspendible philosophical beliefs were empty. This, however, seems to be a grossly inflated claim, what is more, an extremely insincere one at that. For why would it be psychologically impossible for a philosopher to suspend his beliefs with zero existential stake such as “Negative causation is genuine causation”, “A statue and a lump of bronze which constitutes the statue are two numerically different things”, or “A scar on Harry Potter's forehead in the shape of a lightning bolt is an abstract object which was created by J. K. Rowling in the 1990s”? In brief, according to the meta-skeptic, we cannot reject *the whole of* doxastic deontology because it *deeply pervades* our everyday practice — we unwittingly blame others for believing in crazy things, or in things which they have no grounds at all to believe in.

This is how the meta-skeptical argument looks like in outline, and I'm inclined to admit that to denial of its premises is weaker than the premises themselves are. For let's see how plausible the propositions featuring in the objections are. Please consider, for each of them, whether you can believe it seriously and sincerely!

(i) There are some “I'm the only one” philosophers who have already solved substantive factual philosophical problems and possess compellingly justified substantive philosophical truths. (ii) The best explanation for philosophy's epistemic failure is that philosophers use

philosophy's good truth-seeking and justificatory tools in the wrong way — and without ever noticing where and when they make mistakes in using them. (iii) We have good epistemic reason to believe in the truth of substantive factual philosophical proposition p if we can show that p is in equilibrium with our epistemically unjustified and merely practically justified fundamental pre-philosophical convictions. (iv) We have no epistemic duties at all because we do not have control over any of our beliefs — not even that much that would enable us to suspend them on realizing the insufficiency of our justification for them.

1.3 The conclusions of the meta-skeptical argument

1.3.1 What does the meta-skeptic mean by saying that philosophers cannot rationally believe in the truth of their substantive factual philosophical theses?

The simplest way for me to answer this question is to answer the following objection. Let's assume that a philosopher (e.g. Katie) is of the view that free will exists. And, let's also assume that Katie has a dispute with another philosopher who denies that free will exists by appealing to the thesis of psychological determinism. In this case, Katie can come up with the following argument to support her view:

You say that you think there is no free will because you think it is highly unlikely that psychological determinism is false. For this reason, you are asking me to change my belief — to give up my belief in the existence of free will and accept what you say. As if I had the duty to do that in the light of the facts you've brought up. But the reason why I cannot give up my belief in free will is exactly that because you asked me to. The way I see it is that we can only have epistemic or moral duties if we have free will, meaning we can choose how to act and what steps to take on the road to knowledge. Animals have no moral or epistemic duties partly because they have no free will. So, I can only assume that I would have the moral or epistemic duty to give up my belief in free will only if I was also to assume that I have free will. But this would obviously be an irrational step for me to take. I only have two rational options: either I assume that we have no epistemic and moral duties, or that free will exists. However, right now when you are placing the burden of proof on me, I can see clearly that I do indeed have epistemic and moral duties. Consequently, I can also see clearly that free will must

exist.

Let's assume that an *outsider* (say, Sylvia) is of the same philosophical view as Katie. She also asserts that free will exists. If someone asks her to justify her view, she can only say things like "I'm sure free will exists and that's it"; "Free will clearly exists"; "How on earth could we not have free will?". In other words, Sylvia, as opposed to Katie, is unable to support her philosophical view with philosophical arguments.

Now, if Sylvia is unable to support her view that free will exists with philosophical arguments, then her belief in the existence of free will is unjustified. Thus, it is correct to say that Sylvia cannot rationally believe in the existence of free will. We cannot say the same about Katie, however. Yet, the meta-skeptic says the same about both of them. He thinks that Katie's and Sylvia's philosophical beliefs are equal in terms of their epistemic status or weight — neither Katie nor Sylvia can rationally believe that free will exists. But this is a counterintuitive and implausible claim.

The objection goes as the above. It can be seen that three propositions play a key role in it:

(1) *S has an argument* for the truth of *p*.

(2) *S justifiably* believes that *p* is true.

(3) *S can rationally believe* that *p* is true.

The meta-skeptic does not generally dispute that if (1) holds then (2) holds, too, and if (2) holds then so does (3). The meta-skeptic does not dispute that it is the case for epistemically *successful* enterprises. Hence, he does not dispute the following: it is right to say about the participants of a *successful* epistemic enterprise that if they justify the truth of *p* with arguments, then they can rationally believe in the truth of *p*.

However, philosophy is a *failed* epistemic enterprise, and in this case the objection fails. It fails because if *S* adduces some philosophical argument to support the truth of *p*, then — as the meta-skeptic claims — *S* justifies the truth of *p* in an inadequate and unsuitable way. Consequently, *S*'s justification of *p* cannot be considered such that *S* could rationally believe

in the truth of p due to this justification. The person who presents the objection simply ignores the premises of the meta-skeptical argument — he overlooks that we cannot *at all* speak about epistemically successful justifications in philosophy.

Everything would be okay and the skeptic could not object if S happened to be a mathematician. In this case (2) would, in the optimal case, follow from (1), and (3) would, in the optimal case, follow from (2). S , however, is not a mathematician but a philosopher. And if S is a philosopher, then (1) is to be interpreted in the following way:

(1') S has a *philosophical argument* for the truth of p .

By the meta-skeptical argument, (1') is equivalent to:

(1'') S has an *inadequate and unsuitable justification* for the truth of p .

Now, the meta-skeptic says that because of what is included in (1''), S cannot rationally believe in the truth of p . And this is exactly what conclusion (C1) of the meta-skeptical argument says.

I will put it differently. The meta-skeptic is not saying that philosophers have no philosophical arguments for their views and *that is why* they have no rational reasons to believe that their views are true. It is clearly not the case. Philosophers can adduce philosophical arguments for their views. That is, the meta-skeptic does not doubt the *fact* that philosophers can support their views with philosophical arguments. Instead, he claims that philosophy's truth-seeking and justificatory tools are *sui generis* inadequate and unsuitable for rationally grounding the philosophers' belief in the truth of their views.

This means that there is no use repeating that "Philosophers can indeed rationally believe in the truth of p , since they can justify p by adducing philosophical arguments for the truth of p ". The reason why there is no use saying it (and this is what the skeptical argument is about) is that any justification that is based on philosophical arguments is inadequate and unsuitable. In other words, the meta-skeptic thinks it to be *maximally* reasonable to assume that the truth of p cannot sufficiently be supported with philosophical arguments, and consequently philosophers cannot rationally believe in the truth of p .

Now, if this is the case, then we should realize that appearances notwithstanding, Katie's epistemic position is *not* superior to Sylvia's. Just because Katie can support the existence of free will with philosophical arguments whereas Sylvia cannot, Katie is not the epistemic superior of Sylvia. An inadequate and unsuitable justification is *not worth any more* than not having justification.

I'm well aware that this is one of the hardest pills to swallow concerning the meta-skeptical view. Yet, this is exactly what the meta-skeptic claims, and he cannot claim anything else on the basis of the meta-skeptical argument.

Let me explain it from the meta-skeptic's perspective. It would indeed be mistaken to think that Katie's and Sylvia's attitudes towards free will are *identical* in every respect. There is some difference between the status of their beliefs; this, however, is not an *epistemic* difference but a *moral* one in the widest sense of the word. It is about one thing and one thing only, that Katie is more *conscientious* than Sylvia — while Katie does her best to see the free will debate clearly, Sylvia makes no effort to achieve the same.

There is no more to it, however. Since philosophical argument are inadequate and unsuitable, Katie does her best *in vain* to justify her belief in the existence of free will and proceeds *in vain* as conscientiously as possible — she *cannot* be epistemically superior to Sylvia. Through her unwavering efforts, Katie can elicit our moral respect (“Look how determined Katie is to find the truth!”) but she cannot gain our epistemic respect, as her truth-seeking and justificatory tools are inadequate for establishing truths and for compellingly justifying her beliefs.

Think about what happens in the following case. Let's assume that Dalma and Charlie both believe in astrology, so they both clearly think it to be an epistemically successful enterprise. They think that reliable horoscopes can be prepared on the basis of astrological methods. Let's also assume that Dalma is a particularly well-versed and thorough astrologist (you may even call her an expert), who prepares every horoscope with utmost circumspection and conscience. She consciously uses the Placidus house system instead of the Regiomontanus one, which she supports with different astrological arguments. As opposed to (in her opinion outdated) astrologists, she also takes into consideration the placement of the so-called “new

planets” (Uranus and Neptune); she uses the sidereal zodiac instead of the less effective tropic one (due to certain astrological considerations); her epistemically humble starting point is that a horoscope is only good for personal development and personality analysis, but, as man is a free being, it is not suitable to make predictions; and she only starts preparing someone’s horoscope if she knows the subject’s exact time of birth. And, let’s assume that Dalma puts forth the following proposition after long hours of analysis: “Someone who was born at 7.07 pm on 12 June 2000 much prefers security to seeking out risky adventures”. Let’s, however, also assume that Charlie also believes this proposition because he read in a tabloid’s five-line horoscope that people born in Gemini are better off avoiding adventures due to their character traits and spending as much time as possible with friends and family, where they feel secure, — and as it happened, he was born on 12 June 2000.

Let me ask: Is Dalma epistemically superior to Charlie? Has she appropriately justified proposition *p* at issue, whereas Charlie believes in *p* without any, or at least with a much lower degree of justification? And, most importantly: can you say it that while Dalma has good epistemic reason to believe in the truth of *p*, Charlie has none?

If you are of the opinion that astrology is an epistemically failed enterprise which propagates the use of inadequate and suitable truth-seeking and justificatory tools, or is a plain pseudo-science, then I doubt that you will say that Dalma appropriately justified the truth of *p* and, consequently, can rationally believe in the truth of *p*. In other words, independently of how deep and serious are the “critical considerations” which she took into account in forming her view, you won’t judge Dalma to be Charlie’s epistemic superior. All you can say is that Dalma proceeded more conscientiously than Charlie did.

Make no mistake. I have no intention to assert that astrology and philosophy are similar epistemic enterprises. I only used the parallel to highlight that if the truth-seeking and justificatory tools of a discipline are inadequate and unsuitable, then no matter how circumspectly, thoroughly and conscientiously someone uses them, he will not be the epistemic superior of those who use them less circumspectly, thoroughly and conscientiously — and of those who do not use them at all.

Now, the meta-skeptic can use this little “error theory” to explain the genesis of the false illusion about Katie and Sylvia — the illusion that since the former has philosophical

arguments for the existence of free will and the latter does not, the former is epistemically superior to the latter. No, she is not. The meta-skeptic may admit that it is a sad and disappointing result but we are forced to realize that however conscientious we are, if we are using inadequate and unsuitable truth-seeking and justificatory tools, we cannot come to conclusions which we have good epistemic reason to believe.

1.3.2 What does the meta-skeptic mean by saying that philosophers have the epistemic duty to suspend their substantive factual philosophical beliefs?

In the introductory section of this chapter I noted that the meta-skeptic does not necessarily expect the philosophers to suspend all their philosophical beliefs. He does not necessarily expect them to suspend some of their non-substantive philosophical beliefs because he can concede that they may have good epistemic reasons for believing in the truth of their non-substantive philosophical theses. And he does not necessarily expect them to suspend their beliefs on purely conceptual philosophical problems, because in their case the question of truth *simpliciter* does not arise. Apart from these, however, philosophers must suspend *all* their philosophical beliefs. More precisely, apart from these, philosophers have the epistemic duty to suspend *all* those beliefs of theirs which can only be justified philosophically.

The above is a rather stringent requirement, which is best shown by the fact that meta-skepticism does not remain at the *meta*-level — a kind of *first-order* skepticism follows from it. Here is how it goes: since (1) philosophy's truth-seeking and justificatory tools are inadequate and unsuitable, and since (2) philosophers cannot rationally believe in the truth of propositions formulated and justified with the use of inadequate and unsuitable truth-seeking and justificatory tools, it follows that (C1) if the only possible justifications for the propositions "There is a mind-independent external world" and "There are other minds" are philosophical ones (i.e. if they are justified with the use of the tools of philosophy — and what else could be used?), then philosophers cannot rationally believe that there is a mind-independent external world and that there are other minds, and (C2) philosophers must suspend their beliefs that there is a mind-independent external world and that there are other minds. In a word, the meta-skeptical argument doesn't invalidate the conclusions of first-order skeptical arguments (saying that as they're philosophical arguments, we cannot rationally believe their conclusions to be true), but — in a different way — it produces the

same result.

Now, we've come to see that according to meta-skepticism, we have the epistemic duty to suspend all our substantive factual philosophical beliefs — *without exception*. And insofar as we do not fulfil this epistemic duty of ours, we are reproachable in the epistemic sense.

Nevertheless, in the case of some substantive factual philosophical beliefs, the meta-skeptic may *exempt us* from the epistemic duty of belief suspension. In other words, according to him *we may have excuses* (but *only* excuses) for not suspending some of our substantive factual philosophical beliefs — similarly to our having excuses (but *only* excuses) for not fulfilling some of our moral duties.

Don't get me wrong. When the meta-skeptic exempts us from the epistemic duty of suspending some of our substantive factual philosophical beliefs, he does not thereby say that we can rationally believe in the truth of these theses. (Don't mistake the concept of "exempting circumstance" for the concept of "appropriate justification"!) Rather, he says: "Although we have the epistemic duty to suspend our belief in the truth of *p* and we are irrational if we don't do that, some non-epistemic factors like our psychological incapacity *may prevent* us from doing so. For this reason, we are exempt from suspending our *p*-beliefs, but we must not forget that otherwise *we would have the epistemic duty* to suspend *p*."

It's not difficult to single out those substantive factual philosophical beliefs for which the meta-skeptic exempts us from the duty to suspend them. To mention the two most evident ones, "There is a mind-independent external world", and "There are other minds". The meta-skeptic will exempt us from the duty to suspend these two philosophical beliefs of ours because he *admits* that suspending them would be a psychological nonsense. This is because these two beliefs of ours are not merely common-sense beliefs but the *visceral convictions* of every human being. They must certainly be innate ones that were implanted in our minds either by evolution or by God. We cannot do anything against them — we have them anyway. (*Nota bene*: even the meta-skeptic is unable to suspend them, as he himself has them as visceral convictions.)

Of course, the problem is that it may differ from person to person which substantive factual philosophical beliefs they are psychologically unable to abandon despite having the epistemic

duty to do so. This is to say that the set of one's visceral beliefs is highly personalized and depends on several contingent factors (culture, historical context, education etc.). Now, any philosopher can say that this or that philosophical belief of them is a visceral one, and this being so, the meta-skeptic should exempt them from the epistemic duty to suspend this or that belief. However, the meta-skeptic cannot allow every philosopher to submit such a "petition" for their own pet philosophical beliefs — at the same time, nor can he *ex cathedra* assert that someone can viscerally believe in this substantive and factual philosophical thesis but cannot believe in that one.

But then, how could he make a principled decision? To be sure, he cannot present us with any exact criteria. At the same time, there are some clear-cut cases. Among these are "There is a mind-independent external world" and "There are other minds". The following, too, are clear-cut cases (although in the inverse sense): "All properties of physical objects (even their shape) are in fact dispositional ones" and "The causal relationship is an extrinsic relation". The latter are clear-cut cases because it is highly *unlifelike* to suppose that someone could have visceral beliefs in these propositions. The existential stake of these propositions is *zero*, so a philosopher who claims them to be his visceral beliefs is almost certainly insincere. Of course, appealing to unlikelihood is not an ordinary argument, just as it is not an ordinary argument for the meta-skeptic to say that he does not believe those who claim to have among their visceral beliefs the proposition that "There are scattered objects". But the meta-skeptic can hardly do more than appeal to the philosophers' sincerity.

One may well wonder how the meta-skeptic deals with those substantive factual philosophical beliefs that certainly have existential stake. Let's suppose that, like many others, Agnes is certain that she has had religious experiences (God appeared to her and talked to her), and based on these experiences, she comes to seriously and sincerely believe that there is a God. As God often visits her, she reaches a level where her belief in God's existence becomes a visceral belief for her. Like in the case of all visceral beliefs, the meta-skeptic can exempt Agnes from the duty to suspend belief. Of course, the meta-skeptic does not claim that Agnes can rationally believe that there is a God in the light of her religious (or allegedly religious) experiences. This would only be granted if Agnes had compelling philosophical arguments to prove that her religious experiences are veridical and not hallucinatory. It would not suffice to say that she was not on magic mushrooms or that she regularly has these religious experiences and that as far as she knows, she has never had a hallucination before. Agnes, however, can

certainly not justify her assertion with compelling philosophical arguments. That said, the meta-skeptic can still acknowledge (because *he can believe*) that Agnes' belief in God is a true visceral belief, and thus he can exempt her from the duty to suspend belief.

Of course, most people appeal to their moral beliefs in objecting to the epistemic duty to suspend beliefs. Even those who are not averse to meta-skepticism and the suspension of beliefs often voice concerns like this:

I'm okay with suspending my philosophical beliefs about issues such as "Are events structured particulars?"; "Are there bare dispositions?"; "Are there tropes, and if so, are they thin or thick?" — for questions like these, I don't mind, I'm willing to suspend my philosophical beliefs. In my everyday life however, I often find myself having to decide about important moral dilemmas that affect human lives. Now, it is one of my fundamental convictions that there are objective moral facts and I'd like to make the morally right decisions in their light. So, I can't suspend my moral beliefs. What is more, it would be morally wrong for me to experiment with doing so.

According to the meta-skeptic, the situation is similar to the case of Agnes. Just as the meta-skeptic may exempt Agnes from the duty to suspend belief because he can believe that her belief in God is a visceral one, he may exempt these philosophers from the duty to suspend their moral beliefs because he can believe that their moral beliefs are visceral. The meta-skeptic would not like these philosophers to become unable to make decisions. He *only* expects them to suspend those among their moral beliefs that they formed *on the basis of their philosophical considerations*.

Nevertheless, the meta-skeptic gives the following piece of advice for difficult decisions:

When you are about to make an important moral decision, do not draw on ethical theories and do not start at all weighing up philosophical considerations. Avoid these, for philosophy (including moral philosophy) is an epistemic enterprise that uses inadequate and unsuitable tools to establish truths. Consequently, when you evaluate your potential decision on the basis of considerations from (moral) philosophy (whether it is morally right or wrong to make the decision at issue), then you choose an inadequate and unsuitable way to evaluate them.

But there's more to it. According to the meta-skeptic, it is definitely *worse* to use the strategy of drawing on ethical theories before making your decisions than to see these theories through the meta-skeptic's eyes.

Let's take the moral dilemma Sartre analyses (see Sartre 1947/2007). A young man has to decide whether to look after his gravely ill mother or to go to war against the Nazis. The meta-skeptic thinks that it would not help him at all to turn to philosophy for advice. If he were to meet a deontologist, he would probably say: "Stay home and look after your mother. You have special moral duties to her as your close relative. What happens in the battlefield will not be up to just you. You have no control over those events — as opposed to fulfilling your moral duties. It might even happen that you will be fatally shot in combat five seconds after going into your first action, before you could use your weapon." And if he were to meet a consequentialist, he would probably receive the following advice: "Go to war. This will be much more beneficial than caring for, bathing and comforting your mother and changing her chamber-pot. If you kill a lot of Nazis, you will contribute to the fall of the Nazi regime in your own way, which is incomparably a greater good than your mother's peace and comfort. Her being contented that her son is taking care of her is useless."

What the meta-skeptic tries to say is not what Sartre did (namely that everyone is condemned to be free and is responsible for everything), but that philosophical theories — including ethical theories of moral duty — are unavailing when it comes to actually making decisions. There is dissensus in philosophy about the nature of morally right actions — one ethical theory recommends a different course of action than another one does. Thus, if you do not already have any kind of (ideally visceral) willingness for the decision that is based on *non-philosophical* considerations, then you will be incapacitated in your decision-making if you turn to different ethical theories which provide mutually inconsistent pieces of advice.

In short, according to the meta-skeptic the best thing to do if you have a moral dilemma is to be a meta-skeptic and to try to make a decision on the basis of various non-philosophical considerations. If you started weighing up in a given case whether you will act morally rightly if you follow Kant's guidance or instead, if you follow Mill's, you could only put your mind to anything if you could refute one of those views by using philosophical arguments. Even tossing a coin is better than doing that — Sartre's young man could toss a coin and decide that

“If it is heads, I will tend to my mother, if it is tails, I will go to war”, and then, once the coin lands on the table, he could immediately introspect whether he *is happy about* the result. If so, he could accept it, if not, he could decide against it.

To sum up, although the meta-skeptic cannot provide clear criteria for distinguishing the philosophical theses in which one is allowed to believe viscerally from those in which one isn't — and, consequently, for distinguishing between those of our substantive factual philosophical beliefs from whose suspension he exempts us and those from whose suspension he doesn't — we have the epistemic duty to suspend most of our substantive factual philosophical beliefs. According to the meta-skeptic, there is one thing that is dishonest. It is when a philosopher simply asserts that he has a visceral belief in the truth of *p*, and then goes on to assert that thereby he is immediately exempted from the duty to suspend his belief in *p*. In the meta-skeptic's eyes, this would be nothing else but *abusing* the epistemic requirement of suspending philosophical beliefs, which cannot be allowed under any circumstances, just as abusing our moral duties cannot be allowed either, however usual and frequent it may be.

1.4 The problem of self-defeat

Although the premises of the meta-skeptical argument presented above have great convincing power and its conclusions follow from the premises, the argument itself seems irreparably self-defeating.

Here is the thing. The first intended conclusion of the meta-skeptical argument is that philosophers cannot rationally believe in the truth of their substantive factual philosophical theses — yet the proposition that “Philosophers cannot rationally believe in the truth of their substantive factual philosophical theses” is a substantive factual philosophical thesis. Furthermore, according to premise (2) of the meta-skeptical argument, the tools of philosophy are inadequate and unsuitable for providing appropriate justifications of substantive factual philosophical theses — yet the meta-skeptic uses the tools of philosophy to justify the truth of the substantive factual philosophical thesis that “The tools of philosophy are inadequate and unsuitable for providing appropriate justifications of substantive factual philosophical theses”. Moreover, the second intended conclusion of the meta-skeptical argument is that philosophers must suspend their substantive factual philosophical beliefs — consequently the meta-skeptic,

too must suspend his substantive factual philosophical belief that “Philosophers must suspend their substantive factual philosophical beliefs.”

The meta-skeptical argument would not be self-defeating if the meta-skeptic could make us believe that his argument is not a philosophical one. In this case, he could say that “There is no question of self-defeat because I don’t assert that non-philosophical arguments cannot be compelling.” And it would not be self-defeating, either, if it were not meant to be a compelling argument, and each premise were prefixed with the expression “In my opinion”. In this case, the meta-skeptic could say that “There is no question of self-defeat because all I assert is that »*In my opinion* philosophers cannot rationally believe in the truth of any substantive factual philosophical thesis«”.

But the meta-skeptical argument is a philosophical argument, and it is intended to have compelling force. Thus, the meta-skeptic asserts that “Because my argument is a philosophical argument with compelling force, I can rationally believe in the truth of the substantive factual philosophical thesis that »Philosophers cannot rationally believe in the truth of their substantive factual philosophical theses«”.

As far as I can tell, the meta-skeptic can give three responses to the problem of self-defeat. Firstly, he can say that the meta-skeptical argument is not self-defeating — that of all philosophical arguments, it *alone* has compelling force; the *only* substantive factual philosophical thesis which we can rationally believe is that “we cannot rationally believe in any substantive factual philosophical theses”; and the truth-seeking and justificatory tools of philosophy fail in all cases *except* when we use them to show that “the truth-seeking and justificatory tools of philosophy fail in all cases”. This is how Brennan puts it: “It may just be that all philosophy is unreliable except anti-philosophy philosophy [i.e. meta-skepticism]”, and “[I]t may just be that a small set of philosophical issues is answered and that philosophical methodology works reliably on a small set of issues, i.e. just in the areas needed to make the sceptic’s argument” (Brennan 2010, 8–9).

This kind of defense is not convincing at all — it seems a lame excuse and cannot be taken seriously. For *why* on earth it would be the case that the meta-skeptical argument would be immune to premise (2), which says that philosophy’s truth-seeking and justificatory tools are inadequate and unsuitable? *Why* would the epistemic status of our substantive philosophical

beliefs be *that* “philosophical issue” concerning which “philosophical methodology works reliably”? Obviously, the meta-skeptic can say *something* in response — but I’m sure that what he says could only be a contrived ad hoc “explanation”.

According to the second response, the meta-skeptical argument is self-defeating but this doesn’t mean that its premises undermine the truth of its conclusions. At first glance, this may seem a strange maneuver, but it is not at all unprecedented in the history of philosophy. Here is the best-known analogue case.

The young Wittgenstein wrote the *Tractatus*, a work crammed with substantive factual philosophical theses. You can read in it sentences like the following: “The world is the totality of facts, not of things” (*TLP* 1.1); “The logical picture of the facts is the thought” (*TLP* 3); “The sense of a proposition is its agreement and disagreement with the possibilities of the existence and non-existence of the atomic facts” (*TLP* 4.2); “The world and life are one” (*TLP* 5.621); “There is only logical necessity” (*TLP* 6.37); “The sense of the world must lie outside the world” (*TLP* 6.41); “Scepticism is not irrefutable but palpably senseless” (*TLP* 6.51). At the end of the work, Wittgenstein asserts that “The right method of philosophy would be this: To say nothing except what can be said, i.e. the propositions of natural science, i.e. something that has *nothing to do with philosophy*” (*TLP* 6.53, italics mine). He dissolves the evident self-defeat in the following well-known way:

My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes them as senseless, when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them. (He must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it.) He must surmount these propositions; then he sees the world rightly. (*TLP* 6.54)

The meta-skeptic, too, can use a similar maneuver. For example, he may say this: “*After you have seen* the truth of the premises of the meta-skeptical argument, and *accepted* its conclusions (for the deductive steps of the argument are valid), *you don’t need* the meta-skeptical argument itself any more. You can throw it away just as if it were a ladder, so you can see the epistemic status of your philosophical beliefs rightly.”

I don’t know how satisfying you will find maneuvers like this. If you allow Wittgenstein to make this kind of move because you don’t think that what he does is thin and unacceptable

evasion, then you must allow the meta-skeptic to do that as well. But if you don't allow him to make it because you think that what he does is thin and unacceptable evasion, then you must not allow the meta-skeptic to do that either. I agree with the latter view — in my eyes, this defense of meta-skepticism is no more convincing than the previous one.

Thirdly, the meta-skeptic can say the following (and I think this is the best he can do): “*I concede* that the meta-skeptical argument is indeed self-defeating, and *I also concede* that self-defeat is a serious problem that must not be evaded. At the same time, I claim that if you appeal *merely* to self-defeat in thinking that you are done with meta-skepticism once and for all and that you don't have to take the meta-skeptical argument into account any more, then you don't proceed with sufficient intellectual conscience.”

Here is why. Let's suppose that you read the meta-skeptical argument *before* you face the difficulties of those meta-philosophical views which say that philosophers can rationally stick to the truth of their substantive factual philosophical beliefs. In this case, you would have all the reason to think that self-defeat is truly a fatal problem for meta-skepticism. You might as well think that the meta-skeptic would have done better not to start arguing for meta-skepticism because due to the inevitable self-defeat he starts from a very handicapped position, so his argument stands no chance of having even the slightest convincing force.

Nevertheless, if you *have already* realized that *neither* the advocates of the “I'm the only one” view *nor* those of equilibrium give good responses to philosophy's epistemic failure, then you cannot preclude in advance that meta-skepticism could be *the best*, or at least *the sincerest* reaction to it. Thus, if you want to reject meta-skepticism, then you *cannot be content with* this much: “As the meta-skeptical argument is self-defeating, I don't have to take it seriously the challenge posed by meta-skepticism”. It takes *more* than that. You must give reasons why you can rationally stick to the truth of your substantive factual philosophical beliefs, *despite* the fact that neither the “I'm the only one” view nor equilibrium seems promising — not to mention that the objections to the premises of the meta-skeptical argument do seem to be built on less solid ground than the premises themselves.

To put it more sharply, if self-defeat is the *only* thing you can adduce as a reason for rejecting meta-skepticism, and if you think that this immediately lets you get rid of the challenge posed by meta-skepticism, then it reveals that you don't seriously face philosophy's epistemic

failure, nor the failure of the earlier three reactions to philosophy's epistemic failure. Also, you don't seriously face the convincing force of the meta-skeptical argument, in that it says that if philosophy is an epistemically failed enterprise because philosophers have neither solved a single substantive factual philosophical problem nor presented any compellingly justified substantive truths, then *you do have good epistemic reason* to believe that philosophy's truth-seeking and justificatory tools are inadequate and unsuitable. And if philosophers work with such truth-seeking and justificatory tools, then *you do have good epistemic reason* to believe that philosophers cannot rationally believe in the truth of their substantive factual philosophical theses. In other words, it would be "somewhat" displeasing and unconscientious for you to merely say that "Meta-skepticism is untenable because the meta-skeptical argument is self-defeating" — without you being able to give *reasons why* you can rationally stick to the truth of your substantive factual philosophical beliefs.

I don't want to say that self-defeat isn't a major problem for meta-skepticism. All I'm saying is that you need to appeal to *something other* beyond self-defeat so you can rest assured to reject meta-skepticism with clear intellectual conscience.

2 Dialogue with a full-fledged meta-skeptic

I hope two things from the dialogue between Sophie and the full-fledged meta-skeptic. One is that I can bring the meta-skeptic's attitude closer to you and describe it vividly — I can say what the meta-skeptic sees as the error of philosophers sticking to their philosophical beliefs and what "training" he proposes for these philosophers so they can suspend their substantive factual philosophical beliefs in conformity with the epistemic duty of belief suspension. The other is that I can show why meta-skepticism is an inappropriate reaction to philosophy's epistemic failure and why the meta-skeptic doesn't give the right answer to the question "What should we do with our philosophical beliefs in the light of philosophy's epistemic failure?" Accordingly, I will divide the dialogue into two "acts", an elaborative and a critical one.

2.1 Act One: Meta-skepticism close up

Sophie: I concede that the meta-skeptical argument is convincing and that meta-skepticism seems to be the sincerest of all reactions to philosophy's epistemic failure. In other words, I concede that both philosophy's epistemic failure and the failure of those three previous reactions to this failure point in the direction of commitment to meta-skepticism. My first question: what is your explanation for the unpopularity of meta-skepticism as a metaphilosophical vision among philosophers?

Meta-skeptic: I explain it primarily by giving psychological reasons appealing to the frailty of human nature. I'm not naïve so I know that suspending our philosophical beliefs is not an easy thing to do. If a philosopher is in the process of developing arguments for his pet philosophical view, then it comes as no surprise that he is reluctant to suspend his philosophical beliefs.

Yet, that is what I expect him to do because it is his epistemic duty. I'm tolerant of the visceral beliefs of philosophers (if they are *indeed* such beliefs), but I'm not tolerant of their non-visceral philosophical beliefs. I think that philosopher's sticking to their non-visceral philosophical beliefs is a kind of "shit-guarding" when some persons — displaying a major character flaw — are reluctant to press the "Delete" key to get rid of even one sentence from the paper they wrote with utmost diligence and meticulous care. Philosophers aren't brave enough to face philosophy's epistemic failure and draw the proper conclusions about their own philosophical beliefs.

Sophie: Is their cowardness and shit-guarding are the only reasons for philosophers' intransigence?

Meta-skeptic: No, there's more to it. I imagine a philosopher who has put extraordinary intellectual efforts into his research, conscientiously followed the latest developments in the relevant literature for years, produced fairly complex and technically rich lines of reasoning and made subtle conceptual distinctions — and now he encounters the meta-skeptical argument out of the blue. This argument is not sophisticated in the least; what's more, it doesn't contain anything that he wouldn't have known already or shouldn't have known. The philosopher feels sad. Of course, he could make some

random objections, but let's assume that deep in his heart he feels that the argument is spot-on.

This philosopher may feel that the whole scenario is unworthy and unfair. It is just as unworthy and unfair as those medieval knights — who trained their bodies and minds for decades and wrote romantic poems to their ladies — felt it to be unworthy and unfair to be shot by a crossbow of a simple illiterate peasant boy who only practiced for a few minutes. The triumph of this peasant boy, cut off from the world of learning and having neither knightly virtues nor outstanding skills is unworthy indeed — and perhaps the meta-skeptic scores exactly such a “triumph” over the philosopher who stubbornly sticks to his philosophical beliefs. But please don't miss the real point! It's no use for the philosopher to bring up how unworthy and unfair it is to prove the irrationality of his substantive factual philosophical beliefs with the help of the meta-skeptical argument which features the most obviously true premises. It doesn't exempt him from the duty to suspend his beliefs just because he feels it was unworthy of him, in the same way as the knight does rise from the dead after the rusty and unshapely arrowhead tore up his chainmail armor and damaged his organs (liver, lungs, spleen) just because he felt it was unworthy of him and he was killed in an unfair way.

Sophie: Wow! What a graphic description!

Meta-skeptic: I'm just putting myself in the place of those who would be unwilling to abandon their philosophical beliefs even under the compelling force of the meta-skeptical argument. I understand why they think that “If someone can show us that we have to suspend our philosophical beliefs, then his argument should be aesthetically pleasing, elegant, sophisticated and witty. That is, if we are to lose, let's lose nicely, as a hero would!” The above meta-skeptical argument (and all of its variants), however, has none of these properties. Once the self-deception of philosophers sticking to their philosophical beliefs gets unmasked, there's no elegance in it — their downfall can only be nasty and depressing. This circumstance may also explain why many philosophers don't accept the meta-skeptical argument as compelling and why they are unwilling to suspend their philosophical beliefs.

Sophie: It seems that you have a very low opinion of those philosophers who don't

suspend their substantive factual and non-visceral philosophical beliefs.

Meta-skeptic: Are you surprised? Just try to take an unbiased look at the meaning of the history of philosophy! Although they spared no time and efforts, philosophers were striving in vain to solve substantive factual philosophical problems or to come up with a single compellingly justified substantive factual philosophical truth. They should realize that their truth-seeking and justificatory tools are inadequate and unsuitable, *a fortiori* they use such tools to form and justify their philosophical beliefs. And they should also realize that because the tools they use are inadequate and unsuitable for this purpose, they have no good epistemic reasons to stick to their philosophical beliefs — they have the duty to suspend them.

Despite that, both the members of the epistemic tradition (the “I’m the only one” philosophers) and the “human-faced” equilibrists with more modest goals are totally convinced that they can rationally believe in the truth of their substantive factual philosophical theses. When I hear philosophers (who think they are epistemically privileged) say that “My arguments for the truth of p are compelling”; “Without any doubt, I know that p is true”; “My counter-arguments refute, once and for all, those theories which say that p is not true”, then what else should I think of them than that they are wretched people stricken with epistemic blindness? And when I hear the equilibrists say that “I can rationally believe in the truth of p because p is in equilibrium with my fundamental pre-philosophical convictions that essentially belong to my personal-cognitive integrity, and I can show that no objection against p is compelling”, then I’m only waiting for the moment when it dawns on these unfortunate people that it isn’t an appropriate justification and they start showing the painful symptoms of epistemic schizophrenia.

Sophie: I see what you mean. Let me now ask you about the phenomenology of suspending our philosophical beliefs. It is not clear to me what it is like. If at t_1 a philosopher believes in the truth of p , then obviously, he doesn’t believe at t_1 that he should suspend his belief in p . Then “something happens” and at t_2 he no longer believes that p is true nor that *not- p* is true. I cannot imagine it otherwise than, from one moment to the next, the philosopher “finds himself” thinking that “Lo, earlier I believed that p is true but now I no longer believe that p is true nor that p is false”. The act of

suspending our philosophical beliefs doesn't seem to be a mental event under our conscious control. As far as I'm concerned, this is what my experience is like of how certain philosophical beliefs of mine vanished into thin air as time went by.

Meta-skeptic: Indeed, we mostly “sleep through” the act of suspending our philosophical beliefs. What happens is what you say: philosophers “find themselves” no longer to believe in the truth of p nor in the falsity of p , although earlier they believed in the truth of p . However, you forget the most important thing — namely, that if a philosopher at last realizes that he has no good epistemic reason to stick to the truth of p , then from that moment on, *he has the epistemic duty to train himself* to be able to suspend his p -belief.

In other words, speaking about the epistemic duty of suspending philosophical beliefs, I don't merely expect philosophers to take notice of the following: “To be able to rationally believe in the truth of p , my justification must meet certain standards, and since the justification of my belief in the truth of p doesn't meet these standards, I irrationally believe that p is true”. Likewise, I don't merely expect them to stop producing philosophical arguments for p — to restrain themselves from propagating p in any forum, resist the temptation to convince others of the truth of p in debates, and answer that “I don't know whether p is true” whenever someone asks them if they hold p true.

It is not enough for philosophers to shut up and throw into a wastebasket the manuscripts of their arguments for the truth of p . I expect them to do more than not letting their philosophical beliefs “manifest themselves”, because in this case they *continue* having those beliefs — it's just that they don't express them.

As a meta-skeptic, I expect philosophers to act differently. As an advocate of doxastic deontology, here is what I expect them to do: if they cannot fulfil the epistemic duty of suspending philosophical beliefs as a matter of course, then *they should do their best* to achieve it. The meta-skeptical argument itself is just a “springboard”— it doesn't automatically trigger the suspension of their philosophical beliefs. *They have to work hard* to achieve the suspension of their philosophical beliefs. That's why they need to do training or practicing.

Sophie: OK, but what kind of activity do you have in mind? What kind of training? Should philosophers repeat ten, twenty or a hundred times in front of their mirrors “I don’t believe that p is true nor that p is false”, every day in the morning, at noon and in the evening?

Meta-skeptic: I don’t take exception to that if it helps them. It’s just that I don’t believe it to be an efficient practice. But, speaking about training in front of the mirror, here is my proposal instead of it: whenever philosophers “find themselves” holding true a proposition as a result of a spontaneously arising train of thought, for example the proposition “H₂O is a structural universal”, then *they should immediately remind themselves* that they *certainly* arrived at this philosophical thesis with the use of inadequate and unsuitable truth-seeking tools, and consequently they cannot rationally believe in its truth. The obligatory recall of the meta-skeptical argument several times a day can be an effective therapy — it can *erode* their philosophical beliefs.

Sophie: Do you expect all philosophers to start repeating the meta-skeptical argument as a mantra whenever they “find themselves” believing in the truth of some substantive factual philosophical proposition?

Meta-skeptic: That’s not the whole story. Really effective meta-skeptical training consists in practicing self-reflection.

Sophie: What do you mean by self-reflection?

Meta-skeptic: Don’t expect me to give a precise definition. By self-reflection I simply mean that someone sees his activity *from an outside and unbiased viewpoint*. What I mean is a kind of *self-perception* which is free from distortions and biases determining his internal cognitive perspective.

Just think about it. Most of our character flaws — vanity, envy, self-importance, cowardice, intemperance, stinginess, greed, low self-esteem and so on — can usually be judged more accurately from the outside than from a first-person perspective. In contrast to our occurrent mental states to which we have privileged access, the situation

is the opposite with our non-occurrent mental states, in particular our character traits and flaws, because others have better access to them than we do. Just as we are epistemically superior to our dentist with regard to whether it hurts when he drills our tooth, unbiased outsiders are usually more reliable when it comes to judging our character traits and non-occurrent mental states.

Sophie: If I understand you aright, executing self-reflection must be a difficult thing to do. It's not easy to occupy an outside viewpoint and see ourselves from "over there". We may happen to think that we see ourselves in an unbiased manner, whereas in fact we fail to interiorize the unbiased outside perspective and are still enslaved by internal distorting factors.

Meta-skeptic: Indeed, it's not an easy task. We need to practice so we can reliably eliminate all internal distorting factors. We're not so lucky as Socrates was, whose daemon warned him every time he believed something for which he had no proper epistemic reason. So it's hard to do indeed, but *the only way* to the attainment of reliable self-knowledge (and, of course, reliable *philosophical* self-knowledge) is to exercise self-reflection. For us, self-reflection plays the role of Socrates' daemon.

Now let me explain the role of self-reflection — let me elucidate it with an ordinary case. Let's assume that Rachel cheats on her partner with a lot of people. She keeps lying about her nights out. She regularly mocks her partner's sagging breasts to her lovers. She slags her off, because her partner is not willing (or is hardly ever willing) to please her in bed the way she likes it. She badmouths her because her partner spoils their pets. She is often late for their dates, or simply forgets that she has an arrangement to meet her partner.

When it comes to their relationship and her acquaintances criticize her for not loving her partner, Rachel starts explaining vehemently that she does. She tells them with genuine honesty that "Whenever she is quietly snoozing next to me, I feel really touched and warm inside". Or: "When I see that she has made me my favorite meal when I get home from work, I'm overcome with waves of affection". And, if Rachel happens to be a philosopher, she might even say: "When I feel this special warmth for her, this feeling has a definite phenomenal character that differs from the phenomenal

character of other experiences — there is something it is like to be in love with our partner. Love is actually not a dispositional property but an occurrent mental state — it is a conscious experience with a special phenomenal character, and that is all that matters”.

I’d like to emphasize three things about this not too uplifting story. Firstly, Rachel has formed a false belief about herself — she believes that she loves her partner, but she doesn’t. Seen from an unbiased outside viewpoint, Rachel’s defense is unconvincing. On the contrary, it would be considered an unambiguous instance of repulsive and immoral camouflage — and of course, this unbiased outside viewpoint is correct.

Secondly, if Rachel really believes that she loves her partner, then she deceives herself. She gets caught in the trap of the following kind of self-deception. (1) It is an evident fact that if someone continuously does so and so (or continuously doesn’t do so and so), then she has certain character flaws. (2) *S* knows about the truth of these conditionals. (3) Despite the fact that *S*, too, continuously does so and so or continuously doesn’t do so and so, *S* fails to realize her own character flaw and uses every means to deny its existence. That is, *S* is not cognitively closed off from those criteria on the basis of which she *could* realize her own character flaw, yet she *still* doesn’t realize it and *misjudges* herself. Now, Rachel’s self-deception is exactly like this. She knows the criteria on the basis of which she *could* realize that she misjudges herself when she believes that she loves her partner — and *yet* she doesn’t realize it. She is unable to unmask her self-deception.

Thirdly, insofar as Rachel at last realizes that she really doesn’t like her partner, which means that she has a false self-perception, she comes to realize it through self-reflection — she becomes able to see herself from an unbiased outside viewpoint. Her self-reflection unmasks her self-deception. Of course, it’s not impossible that an $n+1^{st}$ argument would also convince her that she deceives herself, but it is an unlikely assumption — for (as you saw) she has always been ready to respond to various arguments with “proper” counterarguments, and very easily convinced herself of her innocence.

Now, the case of philosophers sticking to their philosophical beliefs is relevantly similar

to that of Rachel. Firstly, these philosophers form false beliefs about the epistemic status of their philosophical beliefs — they believe that they can rationally stick to them, but they cannot.

Secondly, like Rachel, the philosophers sticking to their philosophical beliefs deceive themselves. Moreover, they do this in a similar way: they aren't cognitively closed off from realizing that their sticking to their philosophical beliefs has no sufficient epistemic grounds — everything is already there in the meta-skeptical argument as clearly as the sun at noon-day. Nonetheless, they don't realize it, and so they're unable to unmask their self-deception.

Thirdly, when philosophers at long last realize that they have false beliefs about the epistemic status of their substantive factual philosophical beliefs — they falsely believe that they can rationally stick to them although they cannot —, they achieve it through self-reflection. Their self-reflection unmasks their self-deception. It is very unlikely to suppose that an $n+1^{st}$ philosophical argument would convince them of their self-deception. Both the “I’m the only one” philosophers and the equilibrists are ready to respond to it with “proper” counterarguments. The former ones keep saying that “I can rationally believe in the truth of p because I have knock-down arguments for the truth of p ”. The latter ones keep saying that “I can rationally believe in the truth of p because p is in equilibrium with my fundamental pre-philosophical convictions, and I can show that none of the objections against p are compelling”. Nevertheless, when they exercise self-reflection, then the “I’m the only one” philosophers at long last realize that their view is *only one among many*, and as such it has no privileged status, whereas the equilibrists at long last realize that their fundamental pre-philosophical convictions (which they de facto have) are *a matter of chance* and so no such philosophical theory can be constructed on their basis to whose truth they could commit themselves in an epistemically responsible way. In other words, it is through their self-reflection alone that they can *rightly* “see” the epistemic status of their philosophical beliefs and it is through their self-reflection alone that they can gain *reliable* philosophical self-knowledge.

I’m not claiming that philosophers are already successful at their very first attempt. Due to their cowardness and shit-guarding, they tend to stubbornly stick to their

philosophical beliefs, which is a serious obstacle to the unbiased self-reflective monitoring of their philosophical beliefs. Nevertheless, I cannot emphasize enough that the ultimate aim of doing philosophy is *to overcome this sticking point*, and the most effective way for philosophers to achieve it is to keep trying to execute self-reflection in an uncompromising manner. For if they do that, they will “get the whole picture” sooner or later, and realize that their sticking to their substantive factual philosophical beliefs is completely groundless, so they suspend them in cognitive peace to fulfil their epistemic duty.

Sophie: I may be wrong, but I think you’re over-mystifying the role of self-reflection in the story. How is it different from intellectually seeing the compelling (or at least in your opinion compelling) nature of the meta-skeptical argument?

Meta-skeptic: It is different and more than that because what the philosophers have as a result of self-reflection is not merely an intellectual grasp of the truth of a proposition (that is, it is not mere propositional knowledge), but rather *the experience of the futility* of their sticking to their philosophical beliefs.

I’ll try to explain this, too, although it’s not so easy. Think about the Buddhist enlightened ones — if there are any at all. They not only intellectually see the truth of the proposition “All suffering is necessarily caused by our attachment to the objects of our desiring”, but literally *let go of* their desires. I don’t know how it exactly happens, but I assume it goes somehow like this: during their enlightenment, the enlightened ones *experience the complete futility* of their attachment to the objects of their desire. Their enlightenment is a conscious experience during which they come to see *face to face* the causal mechanism which connects their attachment to the objects of their desires to their suffering, and this conscious experience has such a *vivid* phenomenology (*flash*, we could say), that *blows out* their desires once and for all and leads them to *nirvāṇa*, a state in which all suffering is extinguished.

According to the Buddhist tradition, the Buddha describes his enlightenment in the following way: “When my concentrated mind was thus purified, bright, unblemished, rid of imperfection, malleable, wieldy, steady, and attained to imperturbability, I directed it to knowledge of the destruction of the taints. I directly knew as it actually is:

»This is suffering«; [...] »This is the origin of suffering«; [...] »This is the cessation of suffering«; [...] »This is the way leading to the cessation of suffering«; [...] »These are the taints«; [...] »This is the origin of the taints«; [...] »This is the cessation of the taints«; [...] »This is the way leading to the cessation of the taints«. When I [...] *saw* thus, my mind was *liberated* from the taint of sensual desire, from the taint of being, and from the taint of ignorance. When it was liberated there came the knowledge: »It is liberated«.” (MN 36, italics mine)

I’d like to use this parallel to point out that it is one thing to intellectually see — thanks to the compelling nature of the meta-skeptical argument — the truth of the proposition “Philosophers cannot rationally believe in the truth of their substantive factual philosophical theses and have the epistemic duty to suspend these beliefs”. It is, however, another thing to literally *experience* the futility of our sticking to our philosophical beliefs through our self-reflective monitoring.

In other words, no matter how strong the meta-skeptical argument may be, philosophers can fight against it. They’re smart, and are able to convince themselves of the falsity of some of its premises. By contrast, if their self-reflection reveals to them (with the experience of complete certainty whose veridicality they have no reason at all to doubt) that their *p*-belief is just one among many, and that their fundamental pre-philosophical convictions *x*, *y*, *z* (which they de facto have) are *a matter of chance*, then the self-reflective monitoring of their philosophical beliefs (as a conscious experience) may be such a *flash* that “blows out” their sticking to their philosophical beliefs once and for all.

Sophie: I think I see what you mean. However, the mental act of self-reflection cannot be forced.

Meta-skeptic: Indeed. There’s no guarantee that philosophers will carry out a self-reflective act by which they can gain reliable self-knowledge. It’s entirely up to them whether they will develop a proper perception of themselves as epistemic agents thanks to a (really executed) act of self-reflection, and experience the futility of their sticking to their philosophical beliefs. And yet, some philosophers do execute this required self-reflection.

I highly appreciate them. My appreciation is part epistemic, part moral. It is epistemic to the extent that their self-reflection puts them in a *privileged position* — they'll see face to face the epistemic status of their philosophical beliefs. And it is moral to the extent that, having overcome all psychological obstacles, they're able to let go of their non-visceral philosophical beliefs thanks to their experience resulting from self-reflection.

Sophie: The only thing left I'd like to know is this. Let's suppose you're right in everything you say. Self-deception is the only way for us to wriggle out of the compelling force of the meta-skeptical argument, and a really executed act of self-reflection (like enlightenment) is such an experience or flash that can "blow out" our philosophical beliefs. That said, I think that the parallel with Buddhism is inaccurate. While the Buddha promises great benefits (the cessation of all their sufferings) to his followers, meta-skepticism offers no prospects. What could you say to those who argue like this? "Even if I'm defenseless against the meta-skeptical argument and even if I concede that I have no good epistemic reasons to stick to my substantive factual philosophical beliefs, I don't have enough motivation to start doing the exercises proposed by the meta-skeptic. This is because the commitment to meta-skepticism has no benefits at all."

Meta-skeptic: Indeed, many think so. But they're wrong. Commitment to meta-skepticism is the *appropriate* reaction to philosophy's epistemic failure. Meta-skepticism gives the *right* answer to the question "What should we do with our philosophical beliefs in the light of philosophy's epistemic failure?" In a word, meta-skepticism is the *correct* philosophical view.

But if seeing the *truth* were not in itself enough motivation, here's a list of those further benefits that the complete identification with meta-skepticism can offer. Seeing that you cannot rationally believe in your substantive factual philosophical theses, you can get clear on your epistemic-cognitive limits. Thanks to your properly executed self-reflection, you can let go of those of your beliefs in cognitive peace which you now have irrationally, and so you become immune to having false beliefs. Insofar as you were an "I'm the only one" philosopher, you will be cured of your epistemic blindness. Insofar as you were an equilibrist, you won't be threatened by the disease called

“epistemic schizophrenia” any more. The commitment to meta-skepticism gives you access to the Socratic wisdom “The only thing I know is that I know nothing”; “I only know that I don’t know”.

In a word, meta-skepticism presents you with *the virtue of epistemic modesty*, which is nothing else but the main and noblest goal of doing philosophy.

2.2 Act Two: Farewell to meta-skepticism

Sophie: After thinking through what you said and how you said it, I have concluded that you don’t react appropriately to philosophy’s epistemic failure, and don’t give the right answer to the question “What should we do with our philosophical beliefs in the light of philosophy’s epistemic failure?”.

Meta-skeptic: Let me hear your concerns!

Sophie: Before I start, I’d like to state my case clearly. In my opinion, most philosophers reject meta-skepticism for two considerations. One is that the meta-skeptical argument is self-defeating. For if it is self-defeating, then it would be irrational for one to accept its conclusions and commit oneself to meta-skepticism. And, whichever way I look at it, the meta-skeptic cannot give a reassuring response to the problem of self-defeat — at least, he is most certainly unable to whitewash his own argument.

The other is that the meta-skeptic must inevitably commit himself to doxastic deontology — for without doing so, he cannot require philosophers to suspend their substantive factual philosophical beliefs. However, doxastic deontology is not beyond dispute — there is disagreement among philosophers about whether it is a correct view or not, and there are strong arguments against it. Thus, the meta-skeptic should show that the arguments adduced against doxastic deontology are all bad — and to achieve that, he should present philosophical arguments (what is more, knock-down philosophical arguments), although he thinks that all philosophical arguments are inadequate and unsuitable for establishing truths. It follows that either premise (4) of the

meta-skeptical argument remains unjustified, which means that the argument is not compelling, or, if the meta-skeptic attempts to justify premise (4), then — according to his own view — he is bound to do that with inadequate and unsuitable tools, and so he ends up contradicting himself.

Nevertheless, I'd like to distance myself from those philosophers who reject meta-skepticism only for these two considerations. In my opinion, in order to realize that meta-skepticism is an incorrect metaphilosophical view, *beyond* pointing out the above faults or difficulties of the meta-skeptical argument we also need to realize that the meta-skeptic's attitude is *morally* unacceptable and insupportable.

Meta-skeptic: So, you have moral qualms about meta-skepticism. What are these?

Sophie: I have three main concerns. Firstly, it rather irritates me that while you claim that the noblest goal of doing philosophy is that it teaches epistemic modesty, you yourself seem to be the antithesis of modesty. I have the feeling that you think yourself to be infallible like Philonous does. You're just as much complacent and narcissistic as he is — you're an "I'm the only one" philosopher. The only difference between you guys is that whereas he's an "I'm the only one" philosopher in connection with his *first-order* philosophical beliefs, the same goes for you in connection with your *metaphilosophical* beliefs.

You think that everybody who remains unconvinced by the meta-skeptical argument is irrational because they are unable to see its compelling force. You think everybody is irrational who doesn't commit himself to meta-skepticism and hasn't yet suspended all his non-visceral substantive factual philosophical beliefs. Another thing not indicative of epistemic modesty is that you consider those philosophers who don't suspend their non-visceral philosophical beliefs as duty-breaking, cowardly, shit-guarding, unlucky and wretched figures — and consequently as your epistemic and at once moral inferiors. It isn't indicative of epistemic modesty for you to assume, in the first place, that these philosophers are unable to execute genuine and not just faked self-reflection. And I wouldn't call it a sign of epistemic modesty that you generously exempt philosophers from the duty to suspend some of their philosophical beliefs, as if you granted them a favor.

Moreover, your hubris is more displeasing than Philonous'. While he is unable to exercise self-reflection due to his epistemic blindness ("von Haus aus", we could say), and to see his own view as *just one* among many first-order philosophical views, you keep preaching about the significance of exercising self-reflection, although you, too, are unable to see your view as *just one* among many metaphilosophical views.

Meta-skeptic: Come on, Sophie, you're just hurling insults at me. You must surely feel that what you're saying is unfair. Why shouldn't I assert — without reservation, and especially in light of my veridical experiences resulting from my self-reflection — that philosophers cannot rationally believe in the truth of their substantive factual philosophical theses, and consequently they must suspend their corresponding beliefs? This is an entirely different kettle of fish than Philonous' fanaticism.

Sophie: I cannot see in what ways they differ. What I *clearly* see, however, is that you're not epistemically more modest than the equilibrist who doesn't believe that he has compelling arguments, but as he has a personal stake in answering certain philosophical questions and doesn't want to stand defenseless against the objections to his beliefs, he tries to defend them with his philosophical arguments.

I'm not saying that the equilibrist can seriously and sincerely believe that his substantive factual philosophical theses are true, and that his egocentric "justification" entitles him to take epistemic responsibility for his beliefs, but I do say that he is no more epistemically immodest than you are.

Meta-skeptic: Let's move on.

Sophie: In my opinion, you give a *one-sided* description of what self-reflection reveals about our philosophical beliefs. You only emphasize that "aspect" of it which supports your view. You say that if philosophers carry out the self-reflective monitoring of their philosophical beliefs, then *the only thing* they can realize is the futility of their sticking to their substantive factual philosophical beliefs, and this is a kind of flash which can optimally prompt them to suspend them.

Self-reflection, however, reveals more than that to most philosophers. It also reveals that they have a burning (or at least quite strong) *cognitive need* to answer certain substantive factual questions that affect them deeply (or at least engage them intensively) — and the answers to these questions can be found (or at least addressed to get a clear view of them) *only* with the tools of philosophy. I don't mean by this that we don't have any better tools than those of philosophical truth-seeking, but that we don't have any tools *other* than philosophical ones for this purpose. Now, it seems to me that you entirely overlook this indisputably existing cognitive need which is *also revealed* by self-reflection. You act as if it didn't exist.

Meta-skeptic: I exactly know what you're talking about. But, when during his self-reflection a philosopher experiences this "burning" cognitive need in himself, he also experiences that satisfying this cognitive need is *hopeless*. So to speak, the "aspect" of self-reflection described by me (and especially the flash which I spoke about) *overrides* the cognitive needs of philosophers described by you — by revealing, in a very obvious way, the hopelessness of their satisfaction.

Sophie: I don't think it would override them. Rather, the two appear *in parallel* during the self-reflective monitoring of our philosophical beliefs and thereby create *tension*. Let me share my own experience: *on the one hand*, my self-reflection reveals that I have the cognitive need to do something with those substantive factual philosophical questions which are important to me (horrible dictu: those on which the course of my life depends), and which I can only address with the tools of philosophy because there are no other tools. *On the other hand*, self-reflection reveals what you're saying: that I don't have any good epistemic reasons to believe in those propositions which I have arrived at with the use of philosophy's truth-seeking tools.

Meta-skeptic: Sophie, if your self-reflection really reveals this duality and the tension it generates, then it just shows that you haven't finished your job yet. I think I was speaking clearly earlier: according to meta-skepticism, the main goal of doing philosophy is that we *give up on* philosophical truth-seeking *once and for all* by suspending our philosophical beliefs — that the cognitive need in us for seeking answers to philosophical questions be *eradicated* or *blown out* due to the recognition of *its hopelessness*. In other words, a consistent meta-skeptic aims at reaching (at least

partly) the state of cognitive peace or peace of mind by letting go of his substantive, factual and non-visceral philosophical beliefs and thereby resolving the tension described by you.

Sophie: I understand that you must make this claim, but I'm slightly revolted by this vision. Let me return to the phenomenon of epistemic schizophrenia, which was discussed in relation with van Inwagen's confession. On the one hand, he believes in the truth of p , so he believes (because he cannot do otherwise) that his belief in p is rational. On the other hand, he also believes that his belief in p is not rational because he cannot, with a clear conscience, ignore the whisper of Clifford's ghost, which says that there's a good chance that he has obtained his belief in p through considerations that don't track the truth but rather the voice of the "will to believe". The lesson drawn from the story was that the only way for van Inwagen to believe in the truth of p in cognitive peace is to "gravitate back" to dogmatism and become an "I'm the only one" philosopher like Philonous.

Let's now turn to our case. On the one hand, philosophers realize that they cannot use philosophy's tools to arrive at substantive factual theses in which they could believe with epistemic responsibility. On the other hand, they realize that they have the cognitive need to take stances on such and such substantive factual philosophical issues. I think that the only way to resolve this tension — and the only option for your proposed meta-skeptic "training" to bring cognitive peace — is that philosophers sink into *intellectual apathy* as a result of it.

Now, in my opinion none of these ways of achieving cognitive peace are desirable. It is undesirable if someone "changes back" to an "I'm the only one" philosopher, and it is also undesirable if someone lets go of his philosophical beliefs once and for all in such a way that he becomes completely insensitive to the philosophical problems at issue.

All I want to say is that earlier we painted an implausible picture of the phenomenology of suspending our philosophical beliefs. Things are not so simple like this: S believes at t_1 that p is true, and no longer believes at t_2 that p is true nor that $\text{not-}p$ is true. This description leaves out the most important phenomenological feature. Instead, things are like this: at t_1 , S was *sincerely interested* in whether p is true, but at t_2 , S is already *not in*

the least interested in whether *p* is true. That is, suspending his *p*-belief only results in cognitive peace for *S* if the philosophical problem at issue *has already lost all its significance* for *S*. That is, if *S* *no longer cares* if *p* is true or false. And this *is* apathy. In my opinion, apathy is undesirable. It is a bad thing if someone becomes indifferent to the philosophical questions that are important (or even have existential stake) to him. In my eyes, this is nothing else but cognitive deterioration to an alarming extent.

Let me take another approach. I agree with you that the equilibrist cannot give a piece of philosophical advice with epistemic responsibility to someone who turns to him with some substantive factual philosophical problem. For if he does that, then — like we saw earlier in the case of Alex and Sammy — he will mislead them. But now, let me ask you a question. As a meta-skeptic, would you dare to give Alex the following piece of advice *with epistemic and at once moral responsibility*: “To hell with the mind-body problem, don’t deal with it at all, eradicate all your cognitive needs, because no matter what your conclusions are, you’ll bound to be irrational to believe in them, as you arrive at them using philosophy’s inadequate and unsuitable truth-seeking tools!”? Or, would you dare to give Sammy this piece of advice *with epistemic and at once moral responsibility*: “Don’t deal with the questions whether there is a God or there is eternal damnation, eradicate your elemental desire to know these things, because no matter how far you can go using philosophy’s inadequate and unsuitable truth-seeking tools, you cannot rationally believe in them!”? Generally speaking, the question is this: “Would you dare to give *with epistemic and at once moral responsibility* to anyone the piece of advice to follow you and become a meta-skeptic, in the light of the fact that cognitive peace from suspending our philosophical beliefs can only be attained at the cost of sinking into total uninterestedness and apathy?”.

Meta-skeptic: Take care, Sophie, because *you won’t get anywhere* in the end if you choose to go down this road!

Sophie: I’m afraid you’re right on that point. But now it’s time I moved on to my third objection, so let’s see it. I agree with you that the best explanation for philosophy’s epistemic failure is that the tools of philosophy are inadequate and unsuitable for establishing truths. But do you have any arguments for saying that philosophy won’t solve philosophical problems *in the future either*? Can you rule out the possibility that

philosophy (or what will be called philosophy) will have some new and effective truth-seeking and justificatory tools in the future, which will help future philosophers in finding reassuring solutions to philosophical problems?

Meta-skeptic: I was already expecting this question. Of course, the proposition that philosophers have not succeeded in solving a single substantive philosophical problem doesn't entail that they won't succeed in it in the future either. But I have a quite good inductive reason to think so.

Don't ignore the time factor! If an epistemic enterprise is young (a few years or decades old), then, indeed, the fact that it has not yet solved any problems does not mean that it is inadequate and unsuitable for accomplishing its mission in the first place. But philosophy isn't a freshman — it is a *two thousand five hundred* years-old epistemic enterprise. Of course, this isn't decisive in and of itself, but if we add that the new philosophical problems are continuous with the old ones, that is, philosophers have been concerned for centuries with problems that are similar in relevant ways, then our conclusion has a fairly large inductive basis. A considerable amount of time has passed since a few people first devoted themselves to solving philosophical problems, and yet the philosophers haven't managed to come up with a single solution to any of them to the present day — in addition, *there is not even the slightest indication* that a solution to any of the substantive factual philosophical problems would be in the offing.

Now, given what I just said, let me answer your question: I cannot rule out the possibility that philosophers will solve certain substantive philosophical problems in the future, just as I obviously cannot rule out the possibility that a brandy-making apparatus has been orbiting for millions of years around the planet that is furthest away from the Earth. Although I cannot rule out these possibilities, I don't think I should seriously consider them, as they have *nothing* at all going for them.

I admit it would be a cute strategy if you were experimenting with the “rejuvenation” of philosophy and said: “Since philosophy (and, primarily, analytic philosophy within that) has only been going on for 60–80 years in the way it should (that is, at an industrial level and as a quasi-normal science) and all the historical antecedents that had happened before those 60-80 years are mere footnotes, the lack of solutions to philosophical

problems isn't a clear sign of philosophy's epistemic failure". However, this attempt at rejuvenation seems to be an *ad hoc* maneuver — and in fact it is extremely biased and exclusive and is based on unjustifiable ideas. The philosophy of the past 60–80 years (thanks to the work of thousands of philosophers) has been rather successful in formulating philosophical problems more and more precisely and developing different philosophical theories in their strongest possible form, as well as in coming up with newer and newer proposals for solutions to various philosophical problems rather than in presenting the seeds of at least a single genuine solution to any of the classic or contemporary problems of philosophy.

Sophie: There you go. My third objection is precisely related to the line of argument you've just presented. For in fact *you cannot know* how the solution to philosophical problems progresses, and *you're unjustified to claim* that there isn't even the slightest indication that the solutions to philosophical problems would already be in the offing.

Here's the thing. In order to appeal to induction rightly, you should be able to show that your inductive basis is *large enough indeed*. Let's take the problem of universals — one of the oldest philosophical conundrums. For this problem, the inductive basis is its unsolvedness projected on the time interval from its very first formulation to the present (spanning 2500 years). But how large is this inductive basis? In my opinion, you cannot know how large it is. To determine that, you should know a number of factors of which you cannot have the faintest idea. For example, you should know how much time it would take to solve this problem. It is also conceivable that (given the epistemic equipment of the human race) humanity would need 100,000 years to solve the problem of universals, and in this case, the past 2500 years — contrary to what you say — is very little; one could say that its unsolvedness thus far is just an infantile disorder of philosophy. But it is just as easily conceivable that we're only 100 years away from the solution.

In a word, you cannot know whether (given our epistemic equipment) philosophical problems are solvable at all, and you cannot know how much time it would take to solve them insofar as they are solvable. And, given that no substantive philosophical problems have been solved so far, you *cannot even estimate* where we are now on the road to the solution of philosophical problems — provided we are already on that road at all.

Consequently, *you are not justified in believing* that your inference has an appropriately large inductive basis. I'd like to bring to your notice how Chinese President Zhou Enlai reputedly answered a question about the influence of the French Revolution: "Too early to say".

Meta-skeptic: Let's suppose you have convinced me. But what follows from that?

Sophie: Much the same as from my previous objection, namely, that meta-skepticism is an epistemically and morally irresponsible meta-philosophical vision. For think about it sincerely. You expect philosophers to suspend all their substantive factual (and non-visceral) philosophical beliefs, and also their activity of seeking the corresponding truths at issue. However, because — as I just showed — you cannot even estimate where we are now on the road to the solution of philosophical problems, *you cannot rule out* that we're not too far from it. Consequently, your expectation about philosophers is epistemically and morally *irresponsible* — for if we're just (let's suppose) 50 years away from solving the problem of universals, for instance, then it is precisely your expectation that prevents them from achieving the solution.

Let me put it differently. As a meta-skeptic, your greatest error is that you think you know what it is that you don't know. But in fact, you don't know what it is that you don't know. The situation is *worse* than you believe it to be: actually, our ignorance is so great that *we don't even know the extent of our ignorance* — for we cannot give a reliable estimate of *the extent* of it. Consequently, it would only be epistemically and morally responsible for you to expect philosophers to suspend their philosophical beliefs and forever give up on seeking philosophical truths due to its hopelessness in one of the following two cases. Either you should be able to compellingly justify the thesis that philosophical problems are in principle unsolvable for beings with epistemic equipment like humans, or you should be able to compellingly justify that we're so far away from solving philosophical problems that humanity would certainly become extinct before any of them would be solved. You, however, cannot compellingly justify either of these alternatives, which is why you're irresponsible. (Sophie here has argued similarly to Nicholas Rescher [see Rescher 2006, 96-107]).

Don't get me wrong. I'm not saying for a moment that our hope of ever solving

philosophical problems is justified. Nor am I saying — as we cannot know whether we can solve them, and provided we can, we cannot know *when* we can solve them — that our epistemic duty is to hope for it; to stick to our philosophical beliefs and continue with our philosophical truth-seeking activity (see e.g. Matheson 2015). Furthermore, I strongly disagree with reasonings like the following: “Let’s not suspend our truth-seeking philosophical activity because we’ll be very sorry to see somebody else in our place solving this or that philosophical problem in the future”, or “We mustn’t suspend our philosophical beliefs because we’ll be very happy if it turns out in the future that it is precisely our beliefs that have proved to be true”.

All I’m saying is this: you act irresponsibly when you expect philosophers to suspend their philosophical beliefs. As we know woefully little about the future, hopelessness is just as unjustified as hopefulness.

Meta-skeptic: So you’re saying that I would be consistent only if I suspended my philosophical belief that philosophers must suspend their substantive factual philosophical beliefs? That is to say, if I were a pyrrhonist? Or a *meta-meta-skeptic*?

Sophie: I believe so. A really consistent skeptic cannot be a meta-skeptic because all meta-skeptics are necessarily *dogmatists*. And your dogmatism is most conspicuous when someone proves that you think you know such and such, although you certainly don’t know those things. And, you have to concede that this is exactly what just happened.

PART THREE

CHAPTER SEVEN

BREAKDOWN

It is time to take stock of my accomplishments at the end of the dialectical path which I undertook to introduce. What I'm about to say will be strongly confession-like — I'm afraid it must be this way.

1 The case of early Plato

The participants of Plato's early dialogues make attempts to define certain concepts (such as "courage", "friendship", "virtue", "justice", "wisdom" etc.), and are always forced to realize in the end that their enterprise has failed. Here are Socrates' accounts of their failures:

If I had shown in this conversation that I had a knowledge which Nicias and Laches have not, then I admit that you would be right in inviting me to perform this duty; but as we are all in the same perplexity, why should one of us be preferred to another? I certainly think that no one should [...] (*Laches* 200e–201a)

Then, my boys, we have again fallen into the old discarded error; [...] But that too was a position of ours which, as you will remember, has been already refuted by ourselves. [...] Then what is to be done? Or rather is there anything to be done? I can only, like the wise men who argue in courts, sum up the arguments: — If neither the beloved, nor the lover, nor the like, nor the unlike, nor the good, nor the congenial, nor any other of whom we spoke — for there were such a number of them that I cannot remember all — if none of these are friends, I know not what remains to be said. [...] how ridiculous that you two boys, and I, an old boy, who would fain be one of you, should imagine ourselves to be friends — this is what the by-standers will go away and say — and as yet we have not been able to discover what is a friend! (*Lysis* 222d–223b)

But now I have been utterly defeated, and have failed to discover what that is to which the imposer of names gave this name of temperance or wisdom. And yet many more admissions were made by us than could be fairly granted; for we admitted that there was

a science of science, although the argument said No, and protested against us; and we admitted further, that this science knew the works of the other sciences (although this too was denied by the argument), because we wanted to show that the wise man had knowledge of what he knew and did not know; also we nobly disregarded, and never even considered, the impossibility of a man knowing in a sort of way that which he does not know at all; for our assumption was, that he knows that which he does not know; than which nothing, as I think, can be more irrational. (*Charmides* 175b–d)

Here is yet another example. In *Hippias Minor*, Socrates sums up the result of their joint investigation as follows: “Then, Hippias, he who voluntarily does wrong and disgraceful things, if there be such a man, will be the good man” (376b). And he goes on to add:

Nor can I agree with myself, Hippias; and yet that seems to be the conclusion which, as far as we can see at present, must follow from our argument. As I was saying before, I am all abroad, and being in perplexity am always changing my opinion. Now, that I or any ordinary man should wander in perplexity is not surprising; but if you wise men also wander, and we cannot come to you and rest from our wandering, the matter begins to be serious both to us and to you. (376c)

The reason why I’m bringing up the aporetic ending of Plato’s early dialogues (see also: *Euthyphro* 15c–16a; *Protagoras* 361a–e; *Hippias Major* 303d–304e) is that I feel as if I had been dropped into the world of these dialogues. My experience is eerily similar to Plato’s at the dawn of philosophy. Just as Socrates and his interlocutors conclude that *they’ve come up against aporias in the end*, I also conclude *that I’ve come up against an aporia — my intellect has broken down*.

2 A footnote to Plato

My starting point was that the followers of philosophy’s epistemic tradition made attempts to assert compellingly justified substantive philosophical truths and to solve philosophical problems, but their enterprise has failed. The community of philosophers doesn’t have substantive philosophical knowledge. For this reason, all philosophers have an epistemic and moral duty to react to philosophy’s epistemic failure, and insofar as they have any substantive

philosophical beliefs, to account for their epistemic status. They have to face the unnerving thought that “If philosophy is a failed epistemic enterprise, then my philosophical beliefs are the beliefs of a member of a failed epistemic enterprise”, and they must ask themselves the question: “What should I do with my philosophical beliefs in the light of philosophy’s epistemic failure?”.

How can they answer this question? I think there are four possible answers which make up the logical space. (1) “I can believe in the truth of my substantive philosophical theses — I can justify them with knock-down arguments.” (2) “I can believe in the truth of my substantive philosophical theses — although I cannot justify them with knock-down arguments.” (3) “I cannot believe in the truth of my substantive philosophical theses — I have to suspend my beliefs.” (4) “I cannot believe in the truth of my substantive philosophical theses — they are meaningless.”

I’ve analyzed these answers as metaphilosophical visions in detail. I think that I’ve successfully expounded all of them in their considered and consistent forms. And what was the upshot of all this? It was that *I cannot identify with any of them* with a clear intellectual conscience. And this being so, it means that I cannot give a reassuring account of the epistemic status of my substantive philosophical beliefs. I cannot stick to them with epistemic responsibility, but I cannot, either, suspend them and consider them meaningless — which means that I’ve run out of options. Like the participants of Plato’s early dialogues, *I’ve come up against an aporia — my intellect has broken down.*

3 The experience of breakdown

Like the followers of the epistemic tradition, I’d like to know the right answers to certain philosophical questions. I’d like to know the corresponding substantive truths. What’s more, there are some philosophical questions I’d *very much* like to know the right answers to — questions in which I have an existential stake.

I have philosophical beliefs concerning all philosophical questions that interest me. Besides, I have more or less elaborate philosophical arguments for them. If you were to ask me why I believe in the truth of this or that philosophical thesis, view or theory, I could give grounds for

it by adducing philosophical considerations.

However, I don't think that my philosophical arguments have compelling force. I don't believe that it is precisely me who has succeeded in formulating knock-down philosophical arguments for my philosophical beliefs. Like the "human-faced" equilibrists, I consider my philosophical views as elaborate versions of my fundamental pre-philosophical convictions. But unlike them, I don't think that their equilibrium with my fundamental pre-philosophical convictions and my ability to show that no knock-down objections can be brought up against them would constitute appropriate justification for my philosophical views. For this reason, I feel that *I cannot take epistemic responsibility* for the truth of my philosophical views. So, instead of reaching my destination and being able to seriously and sincerely believe in the truth of my philosophical views — that is, instead of being able to seriously and sincerely believe that I've come to possess philosophical truths — my philosophical beliefs are pervaded by tormenting uncertainty.

But this is not the whole picture. I can only interpret the fact of permanent disagreement in all areas of philosophy in the way the meta-skeptic does. This is that philosophy's truth-seeking tools are inadequate and unsuitable for establishing truths — philosophy's justificatory tools are inadequate and unsuitable for the compelling justification of substantive factual philosophical views. Now, since (1) I'd like to avoid forming false beliefs concerning philosophical questions that are important to me *at all costs*, and since (2) I think that I have no good epistemic reasons to stick to the truth of my substantive factual philosophical beliefs, I feel that the right thing to do would be to suspend my philosophical beliefs at issue — independently of my unwillingness to consider the argument for meta-skepticism as having compelling force.

Nevertheless, in spite of there being strong epistemic reasons to suspend my philosophical beliefs, *I am unable* to do it. And in spite of thinking that I'm unable to use philosophy's truth-seeking tools to find substantive factual philosophical beliefs for whose truth I could take epistemic responsibility, *I am unable* to give up on seeking philosophical truths and to *continue* taking stands on philosophical issues that are important to me. So, instead of reaching my destination and being able to suspend my philosophical beliefs with a clear conscience, I continue to have philosophical beliefs that are — look, I've come full circle here — pervaded by tormenting uncertainty.

But this is still not the whole picture. As it seems that I have not succeeded in recovering from my chronic epistemic schizophrenia, which is undoubtedly a nasty and painful state to be in, I must confess that I long for cognitive peace. I long for the above-described and experienced tension to go away. My craving for cognitive peace is quite strong — sometimes I feel I could do *almost anything* to achieve it.

Let's suppose there is a pill, taking which would change my beliefs about my philosophical beliefs. From the moment the pill takes effect, I would see my philosophical arguments as compelling, and I would judge with complete certainty that my opponents' arguments miss their target. Also, while constructing philosophical theories, I would be filled with a pleasant and reassuring feeling that my fundamental pre-philosophical convictions carve reality precisely at its joints, so the nature of reality “gives its blessing” to my every step in my reasoning. Needless to say, after taking this pill, I would forget taking it right away.

However ashamed I am to admit it, I would be *strongly tempted* to seize this opportunity. I would be insincere to myself if I denied that it would be good to live in my philosophical cave knowing for sure that things are as I believe them to be. I would deceive myself if I denied that deep in my heart, I envy Philonous.

Well, but... I don't want to be a man like Philonous and the “I'm the only one” philosophers. In the light of the pervasive and permanent dissensus in philosophy, I feel it would not be right for me to become a man who thinks of himself as being in an epistemically privileged position; who thinks that it is precisely he (and the other philosophers sharing his view) who has a theory that carves reality at the joints; and who considers his interlocutors as his epistemic inferiors, saying that they're unable to recognize the compelling force of his philosophical arguments. Thus, I think it would be morally wrong (in fact, very wrong) to take the pill. As it happens, now I think that I could resist the temptation. At the same time, I'm also certain that later in life, there would be some moments when I would sorely regret my decision and curse myself for not having been able to overcome my moral qualms.

Alternatively, let's suppose there is a pill whose effect (like cases of phenomenal sorites) would be the gradual and imperceptible fading away of my philosophical beliefs and the slow disappearance of my cognitive need for taking stands in philosophical questions I now

consider important. Needless to say, after taking this pill, I would forget taking it right away, and would wake up in the morning as a full-fledged meta-skeptic.

Once again, I would lie if I said I wouldn't be tempted to seize this opportunity. I fancy that it would be an intoxicating feeling to be set free from the compulsion of philosophical truth-seeking. The reason is that — unless you're an "I'm the only one" philosopher who believes to have knock-down arguments for his philosophical beliefs — this compulsion is primarily (or rather, exclusively) a *damnation*, because it is inevitably accompanied by constant and tormenting cognitive uncertainty.

Well, but... just as I don't want to become a kind of man like Philonous, I don't want to become someone like the full-fledged meta-skeptic, either. He's a man whose need for philosophical truth-seeking has been eradicated once and for all, who has become indifferent to all philosophical problems (especially those in which he had an existential stake), and who is unimpressed by those philosophical questions the answers to which he had earlier longed to know. In short, he's a man who has sunk into intellectual apathy. As it happens, now I think I could resist the temptation to take the pill. At the same time, I'm certain that in the future I would often feel that I made a grave mistake and — motivated by my moral qualms — made a silly and self-destructive decision.

So what is the phenomenology of my breakdown experience like? "At first go", I can describe it like this: *on the one hand*, I'm inexorably motivated to give reassuring answers to philosophical questions that are important to me. *On the other hand*, however circumspect I am in doing my best to appropriately justify my philosophical beliefs, I cannot seriously and sincerely commit myself to the truth of propositions that I obtained using philosophy's truth-seeking tools. "At second go", it would look like this: *on the one hand*, I would do almost anything to get rid of my epistemic schizophrenia and achieve the desired state of cognitive peace. *On the other hand*, I think that my epistemic schizophrenia could only go away and I could only achieve the desired cognitive peace if I became a kind of man that I don't feel it is right to become.

4 No belief, no cry

According to some philosophers, there is a way out. Here is their proposal:

The situation doesn't look so rosy indeed — still, the confession you've just made is a “little bit” melodramatic. Instead of monitoring your own soul and troubling yourself about the tensions you claim to feel, and instead of posing as someone cast into the depths of the hopelessness of making the right choice (as sung by Kierkegaard), don't be lazy and make a quick cost-benefit calculation.

Here is the thing. We understand that you cannot give a reassuring account of your philosophical beliefs in light of philosophy's epistemic failure. Your misgivings seem well-founded indeed — we cannot put a finger on any point in your phenomenological account of the experience of breakdown which we could consider as unreasoned, ungrounded or exaggerative. At the same time, we suppose that you love philosophy. You like thinking about philosophical problems, construct arguments for and against philosophical views, and debate over philosophical issues with others. That is, you would prefer to continue doing philosophy if there is a way.

Now, you should see that the *only* way out for you is what the “no belief, no cry” version of equilibrism offers. In the spirit of this vision, you may continue to participate in the work of the community of philosophers, which is exciting and rich in intellectual challenges. And the only price you must pay in exchange for this benefit is that you set aside your philosophical beliefs while doing philosophy. In other words, you should be working to develop and defend philosophical equilibria whose truth you don't believe in, for you just accept them as working hypotheses; and in conformity with the rules of rational argumentation, you do your best to squeeze the greatest possible amount of philosophical juice out of them.

In brief, you have a choice: either you get bogged down in the experience of breakdown, or you move forward and commit yourself to the “no belief, no cry” version of equilibrism.

I am not saying that it would be easy to make this decision, but I think I cannot and wouldn't

like to pay the cost of commitment to the “no belief, no cry” version of equilibrium. My first reason is that I, for the life of me, cannot abstract from the circumstance that I *believe* in the truth of such and such philosophical propositions, and that I have a personal stake in certain of my beliefs. My second reason is that in my eyes, there is no special value in our getting an ever-clearer picture of how we can consistently think about various philosophical problems in an increasingly sophisticated way, thanks to doing philosophy, *if we actually don’t and wouldn’t like to believe* in the truth of any philosophical thesis, view or theory. My third reason is that I can hardly consider doing philosophy with a complete neglect of philosophical beliefs other than *a mere intellectual game* — a game which doesn’t have any value except for the participants’ pleasure caused by intellectual challenges.

I may see it wrongly, and actually, there’s more to it. It may be that my reluctance is idiosyncratic and I feel this vision to be a superficial and unprincipled opportunism because of my personal or epistemic character. It may be that what others see as “epistemic Eden” is just a horrible dystopia for me. And it is not impossible either (what’s more, even probable) that the ethos of philosophy, as it is done in the contemporary academic ghetto, precisely supports the metaphilosophical vision of the “no belief, no cry” equilibrium — and it is just that I’m a stubbornly untimely man.

Although it is bad for me to think about it and even worse to imagine it, in this case after my death, I should be placed in the murky basement of a building to be demolished, inside a large, translucent formaline vat, having a small copper plate at the bottom of it with the indistinct inscription: “Ecce hominem who frustrated himself with his inability to account for the epistemic status of his philosophical beliefs, but to his own detriment, he did not realize that his qualms and doubts were behind the times.”

5 Beyond the breakdown

What is *beyond* the experience of breakdown? Obviously, *nothing*. The experience of breakdown is just the experience of “this ends here.”

Nevertheless, you may think that an important part is still missing from my confession. You may argue like this:

I understand that the experience of breakdown is the experience of “this ends here”. But, the experience of breakdown *doesn't last forever* — like every experience, it has a temporal beginning and an end. Consequently, after experiencing breakdown, *you must react* to the experience of breakdown itself. You cannot avoid *repeatedly* asking and answering the questions: “What should I do with my philosophical beliefs?” and “In the spirit of which metaphilosophical vision should I do philosophy?”. In other words, there is a *future* past the breakdown — and you must say something about this future as well.

Indeed, life will go on after the experience of breakdown. At the same time, the experience of breakdown or of “this ends here” isn't something that one could (in)appropriately react to. Thus, whatever I can say about the future has no special significance. The most I can tell you about is how it feels *to me* personally to undergo the breakdown.

I can say that after the experience of breakdown, the questions “Well, *but* what should I do with my substantive philosophical beliefs now?” and “Well, *but* in the spirit of which metaphilosophical vision should I do philosophy now?” seem *inconsequential and insubstantial* to me.

Let me explain why. Although this kind of breakdown of the intellect — so to speak — is a conscious experience with “discomforting” phenomenological features, it is a rather *clear* moment at that. During the experience of breakdown, I realize *why I cannot* identify in good intellectual conscience with any of the reactions given to philosophy's epistemic failure — this is when I realize *why I'm unable* to seriously and sincerely commit myself to any metaphilosophical vision. During the experience of breakdown, I see *more clearly* than ever the nature of my inability to answer the question “What should I do with my philosophical beliefs in the light of philosophy's epistemic failure?”; and, provided that my qualms about various metaphilosophical visions don't stem from self-deception, then perhaps I understand it *in its entirety*.

All this means that after the experience of breakdown, *no matter which* metaphilosophical vision I choose as the one in whose spirit I continue doing philosophy (most probably, it would be the “human-faced” version of equilibrium), all the considerations I could bring up in support of my chosen metaphilosophical vision would be such that they would be *cancelled*

out by other considerations that are just as strong as the ones adduced by me, as I have already realized it during the experience of breakdown. To put it more sharply, after the experience of breakdown, *no matter which* metaphilosophical vision I choose to commit myself to — and no matter what future I imagine for myself —, *the epistemic position in which I could take sides would inevitably be worse* than the one I was in during the experience of breakdown. And as everything relevant has already been said *including* the experience of breakdown, I would simply come full circle *again and again*. Now, that is why I feel that the questions put to me after the experience of “this ends here” are all inconsequential and insubstantial.

Let me approach it differently. In my book, Sophie has impersonated my daemon. She was not constructive, and never gave positive advice. Her activity was confined to warning me about *what I must not* believe and *why I must not* believe it. So, I cast her as somebody in a rhetorical-dialectical role similar to the one Socrates attributed to his daemon: “It is a voice, and whenever it speaks it turns me away from something I am about to do, but never encourages me to do anything” (Plato *Apology* 31d).

Now imagine that Sophie sees the following. There’s a philosophical essay on the ethics of philosophical beliefs whose author encounters the “moment of truth” when he experiences the breakdown of his intellect; that is, when it becomes clear to him why he is unable to reassuringly account for the epistemic status of his philosophical beliefs. Then, Sophie sees that after the experience of “this ends here”, the author of this philosophical essay mulls over the question absorbedly and in the deepest of his thoughts: “Very well, but then in what spirit should I do philosophy *in the future?*”.

Do you think that Sophie could see the newly arisen zeal of the author of this philosophical essay with anything but *irony*? What I have in mind is not necessarily incisive, raw, passionless and distancing irony, but — if there’s such a thing — irony with *a tinge of pity and compassion*, which is, at bottom, still irony.

To conclude my essay a bit pathetically but perhaps without a kind of encroaching pathos, I would like to say that I could see myself *only* with irony if I was to forget the painful inconsequentiality and insubstantiality of the question “Very well, but then in what spirit should I do philosophy in the future?”, and catch myself thinking about “survival strategies”

after the experience of “this ends here”.

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