

Dos concepciones del escepticismo radical

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Resumen:

Se ha defendido que en el debate contemporáneo sobre el escepticismo radical a propósito de nuestro conocimiento perceptivo del mundo externo se pueden delinear dos formas de escepticismo radical. Si bien son similares superficialmente y puede parecer que produzcan el mismo resultado escéptico, aquí argumentamos que estos tipos de escepticismo difieren fundamentalmente en términos del desafío que plantean a la posibilidad del conocimiento perceptivo racionalmente fundamentado. Mientras que una de las formulaciones de escepticismo radical, que resulta del principio de cierre, se ocupa de la aparente transitividad de las razones, la otra formulación, que resulta del principio de indeterminación se ocupa de la aparente *insularidad* de las razones. Se defiende aquí que entender las diferencias entre estas dos formas de escepticismo radical es clave para reconocer cómo dos variedades muy influyentes de anti-escepticismo que a menudo se caracterizan como competidoras –debido a Wittgenstein y John McDowell– puede que deban reconsiderarse como de apoyo mutuo.

Palabras clave:

Principio de cierre, epistemología, conocimiento, McDowell, escepticismo radical, principio de indeterminación, Wittgenstein.

Two conceptions of radical scepticism

Abstract:

It is argued that in the contemporary debate about radical scepticism regarding our perceptual knowledge of an external world one can delineate two forms of radical scepticism. While superficially similar, and generating the same sceptical upshot, it is argued that they nonetheless fundamentally differ in terms of the challenge they offer to the possibility of rationally grounded perceptual knowledge. Whereas the one formulation of radical scepticism, which turns on the *closure principle*, concerns the apparent *transitivity* of reasons, the other formulation, which turns on *underdetermination principle*, concerns the apparent *insularity* of reasons. It is argued that understanding the differences between these two forms of radical scepticism is key to recognising how two influential varieties of anti-scepticism which are often characterised as competing –due to Wittgenstein and John McDowell– might be instead reconceived as mutually-supporting.

Key words:

Closure Principle, Epistemology, Knowledge, McDowell, Radical Scepticism, Underdetermination Principle, Wittgenstein.

1. TWO CONCEPTIONS OF RADICAL SCEPTICISM

In the contemporary literature on radical scepticism about our perceptual knowledge of the external world, there tends to be two completely different conceptions of radical scepticism in play, with discussions of each running to a large degree orthogonal to one another. While the first conception of radical scepticism makes essential use of an ‘closure’ principle regarding the knowledge-generating powers of competent deduction, the second conception makes essential use of an ‘underdetermination’ thesis regarding the rational epistemic standing afforded to us by perceptual experience.¹

Despite their significant structural differences, the two conceptions of radical scepticism both have some important commonalities. For example, both conceptions of radical scepticism appear to present us with a *paradox*, in the sense that they expose a profound tension within our own epistemological concepts, one that cannot be resolved without denying some claim which is deeply intuitive.² Moreover, both conceptions of radical scepticism also make essential play with the notion of a *radical sceptical hypothesis*, where this is a scenario subjectively indistinguishable from a paradigm case of perception, but where one is in fact massively deceived. For our purposes, we can take the so-called ‘brain-in-a-vat’ (BIV) radical

Recibido: 19-X-2012. Aceptado: 23-XI-2012.

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¹ Note that, for the sake of simplicity, I’m here bracketing contemporary treatments of Pyrrhonian scepticism. Even though there is a rich vein of contemporary philosophical work on this problem, for reasons I have not the space to expound here it seems to me that it is a very different kind of philosophical beast to the two forms of scepticism presently under discussion. For some representative recent work on Pyrrhonian scepticism, see the papers collected in MACHUCA (2011).

² See Stroud (1984) for a seminal contemporary discussion of the problem of radical scepticism *qua* paradox.

sceptical scenario as representative, where this concerns an agent who from her point of view reasonably supposes herself to be in paradigm perceptual conditions, but who is in fact not perceiving a world around her at all, her beliefs being in response to fake ‘perceptual’ stimuli offered by supercomputers wired up to her brain (which is floating, disembodied, in a vat of nutrients).

With the BIV sceptical hypothesis in mind, let us characterise our first, closure-based, conception of radical scepticism. The initial plank in this case for scepticism is that one cannot know that one is not a BIV. Such a claim seems entirely compelling. After all, since the BIV scenario is *ex hypothesi* subjectively indistinguishable from normal perceptual conditions, it is hard to see how one might come to know such a thing. What kind of rational basis might one have for such a belief, for example, given that there is no subjective basis on which one can discern that one is not in a radical sceptical scenario?

We thus have (S₁1):

(S₁1) I cannot know that I am not a BIV.

The idea now is to demonstrate that this claim is in tension with our conception of ourselves as perceptually knowing a great deal about a world external to ourselves. We can bring this out by considering a paradigmatic case of perceptual knowledge, the kind of case of perceptual knowledge such that, if one knows anything about the external world, then one know this. In my case, for example, this might be that I am presently sitting at my desk, typing on my laptop computer:

(S₁3) I know that I am sitting at my desk.

On the face of it, of course, there is no immediate tension between (S₁1) and (S₁3), in that there seems no obvious reason why it cannot be the case both that one lacks the knowledge at issue in (S₁1) and that one possesses the knowledge at issue in (S₁3). This is where the closure principle for knowledge comes in.

Various formulations of this principle have been offered, but rather than review them all we will focus on that formulation which is widely regarded to be the most compelling (and thus the most difficult to deny):

The Closure Principle

If *S* knows that *p*, and *S* competently deduces from *p* that *q*, thereby forming a belief that *q* on this basis while retaining her knowledge that *p*, then *S* knows that *q*.³

The basic idea behind the closure principle is that competent deduction from known premises (and which

continue to be known) can generate knowledge of the conclusion of this deduction. So stated, how could matters be otherwise? That is, how could one draw a competent deduction from one’s knowledge without thereby coming to know the deduced conclusion?

But with the closure principle in play, and assuming that our agent knows full well that the subject in the BIV case can hardly be thought to be in any sense seated at a desk (since the disembodied brain in question is floating), it follows that if one did know that one were seated at a desk, then one could, via closure, come to know that one was not a BIV. Conversely, if one cannot know that one is not a BIV, it follows that one does not³indeed cannot³know that one is seated at a desk:

(S₁2) If one cannot know that one is not a BIV, then one cannot know that one is seated at a desk.

The nub of the matter is that knowledge of something so mundane as that one is seated at a desk, can lead, via closure, to knowledge that one is not the victim of a sceptical hypothesis, like the BIV hypothesis. Moreover, it ought to be clear that the problem here is not the specific quotidian proposition chosen to indicate one’s everyday knowledge (i.e., that one is seated at one’s desk), since just about any quotidian proposition which we typically take ourselves to know will do (we would just need to vary the radical sceptical hypothesis to suit).

What we have here is thus a putative paradox, in that a series of claims which have been shown to either be intuitive, or be immediate consequences from intuitive claims (like the closure principle), are in fact in logical tension with one another, such that one of them must be denied:

(S₁1) I cannot know that I am not a BIV.

(S₁2) If one cannot know that one is not a BIV, then one cannot know that one is seated at a desk.

(S₁3) I know that I am seated at a desk.

Clearly, at least one of the claims that make up this triad must be false, since they cannot all be true on pain of contradiction. But given the intuitiveness of each claim, this means that radical scepticism appears to call on us to claim something deeply counterintuitive.

Compare this closure-based contemporary conception of radical scepticism with one which instead directly focuses, with one eye on radical sceptical scenarios, on the paucity of the rational basis we have for our perceptual beliefs in external world propositions. In particular, according to ‘underdetermination’-based radical scepticism, the sceptical problem facing our perceptual knowledge of the external world does not turn on the closure principle, but instead is a direct consequence of the fact

³ This is essentially the formulation of the closure principle put forward by Williamson (2000, p. 117) and Hawthorne (2005, p. 29).

that the rational support provided by our perceptual experiences does not epistemically favour our ordinary perceptual beliefs over the kind of scenarios depicted by radical sceptical hypotheses.

Let's start with the claim that the rational support we possess for our perceptual beliefs in external world propositions is never such as to epistemically favour the truth of these beliefs over radical sceptical alternatives. So, for example, one's rational basis right now for believing that one is seated at one's desk, no matter how epistemically propitious the conditions for one's belief in this regard, is never such as to give one more reason to think that one is seated at one's desk than that one is a disembodied BIV who merely falsely supposes that she is seated at her desk. In short, one's rational support for a perceptual belief is *underdetermined* with respect to radical sceptical scenarios. We can express this point as follows, using the quotidian proposition that one is seated at one's desk as representative of an epistemically 'best case' of perceptual belief:

(S₂1) One does not have better rational support for believing that one is seated at one's desk than that one is a disembodied BIV.

This claim seems undeniable. For given that the experiences had by the subject in the BIV case are subjectively indistinguishable from everyday experience, then how is one to come by rational support for an everyday perceptual belief which epistemically favours this belief over a radical sceptical alternative?

As before, the challenge facing the sceptic is to show that this claim is in tension with our everyday knowledge. That is, the challenge is to show that (S₂1) is in tension with a relevant claim about one's paradigmatic perceptual knowledge:

(S₂3) I know that I am seated at my desk.

How is this done? Well, as with the closure-based radical sceptical argument, a general connecting principle is required. Consider the following principle:

The Underdetermination Principle

If *S* knows that *p* and *q* are incompatible, and yet lacks a rational basis for preferring *p* over *q*, then *S* lacks knowledge that *p*.⁴

This principle seems compelling, at least as regards perceptual knowledge (which is what interest us here), and

insofar as one holds that perceptual knowledge must always have a rational foundation. On the latter point, how could it be that one has an adequate rational foundation for one's perceptual belief if one grants that it is incompatible with a scenario which one cannot rationally exclude? Accordingly, insofar as one holds that perceptual knowledge has a rational foundation, then it seems that perceptual knowledge must conform to this principle.

With the underdetermination principle in play, we can now formulate our bridging claim between (S₂1) and (S₂3) as follows:

(S₂2) If one lacks a rational basis which favours one's belief that one is seated at one's desk over the alternative BIV scenario, then one does not know that one is seated at one's desk.

(S₂2) is clearly a manifestation of the underdetermination principle, at least where we assume, as is reasonable, that the subject in question knows full well that being seated and being a disembodied BIV are incompatible propositions. With (S₂2) and (S₂1) in play, however, the logical tension with (S₂3) is clear:

(S₂1) One does not have better rational support for believing that one is seated at one's desk than that one is a disembodied BIV.

(S₂2) If one lacks a rational basis which favours one's belief that one is seated at one's desk over the BIV scenario, then one does not know that one is seated at one's desk.

(S₂3) I know that I am seated at my desk.

As before, we have a putative paradox, in that we have three claims which are either directly highly intuitive or which rest on further claims which are highly intuitive, but where not all of these three claims could be true together. The challenge is thus to demonstrate which of these three claims should be rejected.

There are various ways that one might respond to the two sceptical challenges just set out. As regards the closure-based sceptical challenge, for example, one might reject the closure principle on which it depends, or else argue that there is an epistemic basis on which one can know the denials of radical sceptical hypotheses.⁵ As regards the underdetermination-based sceptical challenge, for example, one might reject the underdetermination principle.⁶

⁴ Note that the incompatibility in play here is not one of contradiction, but rather concerns contraries. That is, it is not that *p* and *q* must be such that if one of them is true then the other is false, but rather that *p* and *q* are incompatible in the sense that they cannot both be true. For a key recent discussion of the underdetermination principle, see Brueckner (1994). See also Pritchard (2005a, part one; 2005b).

⁵ Famously, Dretske (1970) and Nozick (1981) denied a version of the closure principle, though it is unclear whether their original grounds for denying this principle carry over to the more nuanced formulation offered here. For a recent discussion of the merits of the closure principle, see the exchange between Dretske (2005a; 2005b) and Hawthorne (2005). One style of anti-scepticism which involves arguing that we can know the denials of radical sceptical hypotheses is *neo-Mooreanism*. See, for example, Sosa (1999) and Pritchard (2002b; 2005a). For a general overview of the contemporary debate regarding radical scepticism, see Pritchard (2002a).

⁶ We will be considering a style of anti-scepticism which involves rejecting the underdetermination principle below.

Moreover, one might further argue that whatever response one offers to the one radical sceptical challenge can be adapted to deal with the other radical sceptical challenge, and present the further argumentation to buttress this claim.⁷

Rather than considering all the possible ways of responding to these two styles of radical scepticism, I want to instead try to diagnose just what it is about these approaches to radical scepticism that make them distinct. For while the ultimate sceptical-cum-paradoxical upshot of these arguments is the same, and while they both make use of radical sceptical hypotheses, they concern two very different apparent limitations on the rational support we have for our external world beliefs. In particular, I want to suggest that while underdetermination-based radical scepticism highlights what I will be calling the *insularity* of this rational support, closure-based radical scepticism concerns instead what I will be calling its *transitivity*.

2. THE INSULARITY AND TRANSITIVITY OF REASONS

Let's start with closure-based radical scepticism. Given that this form of sceptical argument as described above didn't even mention reasons, we will need to do some work to show that any general issue about the nature of reasons is being exposed by this form of argument.

The connection to reasons can be brought about by supposing that knowledge is, if not universally, then at least typically, rationally grounded. That is, when one knows one is in possession of a solid rational basis for the target belief. Even epistemic externalists, who question the necessity of rational support for knowledge, may well be willing to grant that human knowledge at least is typically rationally grounded in this way. But imagine now that one has rationally grounded knowledge regarding some external world proposition and one competently deduces, on this basis, that one is not the victim of a sceptical scenario which is incompatible with this external world proposition. Given that competent deduction is itself a rational process, how could one's belief in the entailed proposition be any less rationally grounded than the original belief in the entailing proposition?

But even if we can make some sense of the idea that, in some brute epistemic externalist fashion (e.g., by having a belief which is reliably formed, or which meets

some other externalist epistemic condition, like the safety principle), one could know the denial of a radical sceptical hypothesis, it is hard to fathom how such knowledge can be rationally grounded. Here we come up against the apparent transitivity of reasons, in that it seems reasons must transfer across competent deductions in this way, even though it is hard to square this claim with the kind of anti-sceptical inferences in play in this case.

In recasting the closure-based radical sceptical argument in these terms, we are effectively appealing to a slightly amended version of the closure principle, which we can formulate as follows:

The Closure Principle*

If *S* has rationally supported knowledge that *p*, and *S* competently deduces from *p* that *q*, thereby forming a belief that *q* on this basis while retaining her rationally supported knowledge that *p*, then *S* has knowledge that *q* that is no less rationally supported than her knowledge that *p*.

In a nutshell, while the closure principle ensures that knowledge is generated by a competent deduction from a known premise, the closure* principle ensures that *rationally supported knowledge* is generated by a competent deduction from a rationally supported premise. As noted above, the latter claim, while more specific, is no less plausible. For given that competent deduction is itself a paradigmatically rational process, how could the knowledge that results from such a deduction be any less rationally grounded than the knowledge on which this deduction is based?

With the closure* principle in play, however, we can re-run the closure-based radical sceptical argument set out above to generate the more specific conclusion that we do not have rationally grounded knowledge of a world external to us. After all, if I did have rationally grounded knowledge that I am sitting at my desk right now, then I could, via closure*, come to have rationally grounded knowledge that I am not a BIV. Since the latter is, it seems, unavailable, it follows that I cannot have rationally grounded knowledge that I am sitting at my desk right now (and, by parity of reasoning, much else besides).⁸

Closure*-based radical scepticism thus exposes the apparent sceptical consequences of the *transitivity* of reasons, where this concerns the manner in which rational

⁷ This point depends on the logical connections between the two types of radical sceptical challenge. For the main recent discussions of this issue, see Brueckner (1994), Cohen (1998), Pritchard (2005*b*; cf. Pritchard 2005*a*, part one).

⁸ In the contemporary literature the closure principle is often contrasted with the so-called 'transmission' principle -see, e.g., Davies (2004) and Wright (2004)- and one might think that the latter is effectively identical with the closure* principle here formulated. There is a subtle difference, however. For whereas the closure* principle merely demands that competent deductions from rationally grounded knowledge generate rationally grounded knowledge, the transmission principle demands in addition that *the very same* rational basis for knowledge of the entailing proposition should be a rational basis for the entailed claim. This is a more specific thesis. For our purposes, however, all that matters is that the subject's knowledge of the deduced proposition is no less rationally grounded, and we can bracket the issue of whether a particular rational basis has been 'transmitted' across the competent deduction. It could be, for example, that the competent deduction itself transforms the rational basis for the agent's knowledge of the entailing and entailed proposition. For more on this issue, see Pritchard (*forthcoming*).

support for one's knowledge appears to be preserved when one extends one's knowledge via competent deduction. In contrast, underdetermination-based radical scepticism is concerned with how the rational support we have for our external world beliefs is troublingly weak, in that it does not favour our quotidian beliefs over radical sceptical alternatives. This is what I mean when I talk of underdetermination-based radical scepticism exposing the *insularity* of reasons.

That the rational support we have for our perceptual beliefs is insular in this way is often taken to be a core epistemological datum which requires explanation. Indeed, it is the backbone of the so-called 'new evil genius' intuition.⁹ This can be summarised as the claim that the rational support we have for our perceptual beliefs even in optimal perceptual conditions can be no better than the rational support our envatted counterpart (whose experiences are indistinguishable from our own) has for her equivalent beliefs, even though her beliefs are of course radically false. The rational support we have for our perceptual beliefs are thus insular to the degree that even in the best case they are compatible with massive falsity in our external world beliefs.

It should be clear that underdetermination-based radical scepticism buys into the insularity of reasons thesis without question. After all, the key element in this argument is the effective granting of the new evil genius intuition, for without this component one could not derive (S_21) in the first place, and the appeal to the underdetermination principle in (S_22) would be idle. Underdetermination-based radical scepticism is thus essentially wedded to the insularity of reasons thesis.

Although the ultimate sceptical import of the transitivity and insularity of reasons is the same, it is important to note that they pose distinct epistemological challenges. Suppose, for example, that one rejected the transitivity claim and argued that rational support, properly conceived, does not transfer across competent deductions in the fashion set out above. In this way, one could block the closure*-based radical sceptical argument. It is far from obvious how that would help one resolve the problem posed by the insularity of reasons, however. That one can have rationally grounded knowledge of mundane external world propositions while lacking rationally grounded knowledge in the denials of radical sceptical hypotheses is one thing; that one can have adequately rationally grounded knowledge of mundane external world propositions when that rational basis is (one is aware) entirely compatible with the truth of radical sceptical hypotheses quite another.

The same is true in the other logical direction, in that merely denying the insularity of reasons does not appear to

guarantee you a satisfactory response to the sceptical problem posed by the transitivity of reasons. For suppose that one argues that one's rational support can, in optimal cases say, epistemically favour your everyday beliefs over radical sceptical alternatives. The insularity thesis would thus be rejected. But can one straightforwardly generate on this basis a response to the sceptical problem posed by the transitivity of reasons? Alas, no. For it is one thing to say that one has better rational support for one's knowledge of everyday external world propositions than for radical sceptical alternatives, and quite another to say that one has rationally grounded knowledge that these sceptical alternatives are false which is *no less* rationally grounded than one's knowledge of everyday external world propositions. After all, we presumably wish to hold that our knowledge of everyday external world propositions enjoys an excellent rational basis. Is it plausible that our beliefs in the denials of sceptical hypotheses could also enjoy such an excellent rational basis? Put another way, it is compatible with the denial of the insularity thesis that one has a very weak rational basis for one's knowledge of the denials of radical sceptical hypotheses, and with the transitivity thesis in play this would suffice to demonstrate that we thereby have a very weak rational basis for our knowledge of everyday external world propositions too, thereby blunting somewhat the anti-sceptical import of rejecting the insularity thesis.

The upshot of the foregoing is that a fully adequate response to the problem of radical scepticism may well need to be sensitive to the particular challenges posed by *both* of the two formulations of this problem that we have examined. As we will see in the next section, this conclusion is potentially important in terms of our understanding of two prominent styles of anti-scepticism which can appear to be in competition with one another. In particular, it invites the thought that these two responses to the problem of radical scepticism may well be responding to different versions of the radical sceptical challenge such that they are on closer inspection mutually-supporting.

3. WITTGENSTEINIAN AND McDOWELLIAN ANTI-SCEPTICISM

We noted in the last section that the two forms of radical scepticism we have set out trade on two distinctive claims about reasons, and that denying any one of these claims did not provide one with a straightforward route to evading the form of radical scepticism which rested on the other. Suppose, however, that one had the dialectical resources to resist *both* claims about reasons, each on an individually motivated basis, but where the two motivating bases were nonetheless compatible with one another. Wouldn't this be an ideal way to deal with the sceptical problem? Interestingly, I think such a dual response to the

⁹ The *locus classicus* in this regard is Lehrer & Cohen (1983).

problem of radical scepticism is indeed available, at least so long as we bring together two styles of anti-scepticism which are often characterised as alternatives to one another, and which are certainly very different. These two styles of anti-scepticism are those credited to the later Wittgenstein (1969) and to John McDowell (e.g., 1995). We will take them in turn.

One of the guiding ideas of Wittgenstein's final notebooks, published as *On Certainty* (Wittgenstein 1969), is that we should recognise the essential locality of rational support, where this means that the very idea of a fully general rational evaluation of our beliefs, whether positive (as in an anti-sceptical evaluation) or negative (as in a radical sceptical evaluation) is simply incoherent. Wittgenstein argues instead that all rational evaluation, as a matter of logic, presupposes certain arational «hinge» commitments which cannot themselves be rationally assessed (as it is these commitments which enable rational evaluations to occur in the first place). As he famously put the point:

«[...] the *questions* that we raise and our *doubts* depend upon the fact that some propositions are exempt from doubt, are as it were like hinges on which those turn.

That is to say, it belongs to the logic of our scientific investigations that certain things are *in deed* not doubted.

But it isn't that the situation is like this: We just *can't* investigate everything, and for that reason we are forced to rest content with assumption. If I want the door to turn, the hinges must stay put.» (Wittgenstein 1969, §§341-3).

It follows that the rational support we have for our beliefs is essentially local, in the sense that we cannot extend this rational support from our everyday beliefs to other beliefs via competent deduction without restriction. In particular, we cannot, through competent deduction, gain rationally grounded knowledge of the hinge commitments relative to which we have rationally grounded knowledge of everyday propositions. Wittgenstein is thus rejecting the transitivity of reasons, and in doing so is specifically attacking the closure*-based radical scepticism which exploits this thesis.¹⁰

In contrast, the McDowellian form of anti-scepticism that we are interested in is not concerned with the transitivity of reasons but rather the potential for perceptual reasons to be world-involving in a sense which excludes underdetermination-based scepticism. That is, McDowell advances a form of epistemological disjunctivism on which the rational support one enjoys for one's perceptual beliefs

in paradigm cases of perception is far superior to the rational support one enjoys for one's perceptual beliefs in corresponding (and subjectively indistinguishable) cases of radical deception. McDowell thus denies outright the new evil genius intuition. Such a proposal is directly in opposition to the underdetermination principle and the insularity of reasons thesis on which this principle turns.

In particular, according to this form of epistemological disjunctivism, one's rational support for believing an external world proposition in paradigm conditions can be that one *sees that* such-and-such is the case. So one's rational support for believing that there is a cup in one's hand in suitable conditions can be that one sees that there is a cup in one's hand. Seeing that *p* entails *p*, however, so one thereby has a rational support for one's external world belief which excludes radical sceptical hypotheses in a fairly immediate fashion. If one sees that there is a cup in one's hand, then there is a cup in one's hand, and hence one is not a (handless) brain-in-a-vat who merely thinks that he has a cup in his hand.¹¹

Given how different these treatments of radical scepticism are, it is tempting to think that they must be competing responses to this philosophical difficulty. But by disentangling the two types of radical scepticism in play here, and by disentangling how these two formulations of radical scepticism effectively trade on distinct claims about the nature of reasons, it ought to be clear that one does not have to regard them as such. Indeed, I want to close by tentatively suggesting that these two anti-sceptical theses are in fact mutually-supporting.

Take first the Wittgensteinian response to the problem of radical scepticism. The big difficulty that this response faces is that it seems to accentuate rather than resolve the problem in play. We wanted to know what our rational basis for our knowledge was, and to be told that this rational basis ultimately trades on essentially arational hinge commitments, such that the rational support our beliefs enjoy is essentially local, can easily sound like a capitulation to radical scepticism rather than a response to it. We can bring this point into sharper relief by considering how the Wittgensteinian response to radical scepticism deals with underdetermination-based radical scepticism. For how does saying that the rational support we have for our beliefs is essentially local offer a response to this form of radical scepticism? The short answer is that it simply doesn't. If anything, to say that such rational support is inherently local simply *invites* the further underdetermination-based sceptical challenge.

¹⁰ Whether the Wittgensteinian position is committed to denying the closure* principle is a moot point, as I explain in Pritchard (2011a; forthcominga; forthcomingb). In particular, if one interprets this proposal as claiming that we cannot even be thought to have beliefs in hinge propositions, much less beliefs in these propositions acquired through a rational basis, then one can argue that one's lacking a rational basis for believing the hinge propositions is not in tension with the closure* principle (which demands that one's *belief* in the entailed proposition be the product of the *rational process* of competent deduction). For more on Wittgenstein's approach to radical scepticism in *On Certainty*, see McGinn (1989), Williams (1991), Stroll (1994), Moyal-Sharrock (2004), and Coliva (2010). For a survey, see Pritchard (2011b; cf. Pritchard 2005b).

¹¹ I offer a book-length defence of this form of epistemological disjunctivism in Pritchard (2012). See also Pritchard (2008).

But suppose one combined the Wittgensteinian claim that rational support is essentially local with the McDowellian rejection of the underdetermination thesis, such that the rational support one has for one's perceptual beliefs in epistemically good conditions can be factive. Wouldn't this go some way towards removing the concern that the Wittgensteinian response to the sceptical problem concedes too much? Moreover, notice that one would have a response to radical scepticism which dealt with both formulations.

Similarly, the McDowellian response to radical scepticism can be strengthened by combining it with the Wittgensteinian response. The McDowellian view offers one a direct response to the underdetermination-based radical scepticism argument by straightforwardly rejecting the insularity of reasons thesis which is motivating it. But if one now applies the McDowellian proposal to the closure*-based radical sceptical argument the view seems to be committed to the heroic claim not just that we have better rational support for our perceptual beliefs in suitable conditions than for their sceptical alternatives, but that we can have knowledge that radical sceptical hypotheses are false which is no less rationally grounded than our everyday perceptual knowledge (which, recall, is based on *factive* reasons on this view). Insofar as the proposal has this consequence it will jar with our intellectual sensibilities. Can our rational basis for excluding radical sceptical hypotheses really be this robust?

If one combines the McDowellian proposal with the Wittgensteinian proposal, however, then one need not take this heroic route. One can instead claim that the factivity of reasons need not have the consequence that our hinge commitments are ever the subject of rationally grounded knowledge, on account of the essential locality of reasons. In short, just as in holding that reasons are essentially local one can still nonetheless claim that they can be factive; so in holding that reasons can be factive one can still nonetheless claim that they are essentially local.

Of course, I haven't offered anything like a full defence of the compatibility of these two anti-sceptical theses, much less have I demonstrated that they are mutually supporting in the final analysis. But the foregoing should suffice to show that there is an anti-sceptical possibility available here which demands further scrutiny. Furthermore, what is key to showing this is to recognise that there are two distinct formulations of radical scepticism in play in the contemporary debate, which turn on two distinct conceptions of the nature, and limitations, of reasons.¹²

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¹² Thanks to Cameron Boulton and Chris Ranalli for discussion of topics central to this paper. Thanks also to Manuel Bermudez for inviting me to write this piece in the first place.

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