

PHILOSOPHICAL LECTURE

Two Types of Naturalism

T. R. BALDWIN

University of Cambridge

A PROMINENT THEME of current philosophy is that of the ‘naturalisation’ of philosophy. Daniel Dennett has written that ‘One of the happiest trends in philosophy in the last twenty years has been its Naturalisation’.¹ But anyone with even a slight acquaintance with the history of philosophy will know that, by itself, the invocation of ‘Nature’ is highly indeterminate. The situation is similar to that which is all too familiar from disputes about ‘realism’, and we may well be inclined to apply to the term ‘natural’ Austin’s thesis concerning the term ‘real’, namely that ‘it is the *negative* use that wears the trousers’.² Admittedly, it is equally indeterminate what is to count as ‘unnatural’ if we consider the matter just by itself; but the content of claims about what is ‘natural’ or not is given through a specification of the natural/unnatural distinction, and this is in fact often achieved by a specification of the negative term as, say, the *conventional*, the *social*, or even the *perverted*. Hume saw this clearly when, in his *Treatise of Human Nature* he wrote that ‘when I deny justice to be a natural virtue, I make use of the word *natural*, only as oppos’d to *artificial*. In another sense of the word; as no principle of the human mind is more natural than a sense of virtue; so no virtue is more natural than justice . . . Tho’ the rules of justice be *artificial*, they are not *arbitrary*.’³

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¹ Foreword to R. Millikan *Language, Thought, and Other Biological Categories* (MIT Press, London: 1984) p.ix. Other manifestations of the same trend include Sir. P. F. Strawson *Skepticism and Naturalism: Some Varieties* (Methuen, London: 1985), and S. Hurley *Natural Reasons* (Oxford University Press, Oxford: 1989).

² J.L. Austin *Sense and Sensibilia* (Clarendon, Oxford: 1962) p. 70.

³ D. Hume *Treatise of Human Nature* ed. Selby-Bigge (Clarendon, Oxford: 1888) p. 484.

I shall propose that there are two different types of naturalism at work in current philosophy—what I shall call *metaphysical* and *epistemic* naturalism; they are not, I think, in conflict, and my chief aim is to discuss how they fit together. There may well be further interesting types of naturalism in philosophy—for example, in ethics (as in Hume's thesis that justice is not a natural virtue); but I shall not pursue such questions here. Central to the type of naturalism Dennett has in mind when he celebrates the 'naturalisation' of philosophy is the thought that 'since we human beings are a part of nature—supremely complicated but unprivileged portions of the biosphere—philosophical accounts of our minds, our knowledge, our language must in the end be continuous with, and harmonious with, the natural sciences'.⁴ Thus understood, naturalistic explanations contrast not only with 'supernatural' ones, such as those provided by traditional theology, but also with some 'Platonist' explanations, such as Frege's thesis that at a fundamental level we have cognitive access to abstract senses. For, at least as presented by Frege, such this hypothesis is not 'continuous with' those advanced by the natural sciences.⁵ But it remains to be clarified just what this amounts to, and indeed, what the 'natural' sciences are.

Dennett's reference to philosophy's continuity with the natural sciences suggests a family tree of explanations: physics occupies the fundamental level because it deals with the most general properties of things; then other sciences offer higher level explanations which, because they invoke properties, such as environmental and historical properties, that do not occur at lower levels of explanation, are not necessarily reducible to them (and thus to physics), but which are nonetheless such that the processes involved are 'harmonious with' those described by lower level sciences. What, though, is this harmony? One interpretation will be just consistency. This may seem too weak—Cartesian psychology was supposed to be consistent with Cartesian physics. But the consistency requirement becomes more demanding if it is also assumed that processes explained by higher level sciences always involve changes to parts which can be described in terms appropriate to lower level sciences, and that under these latter descriptions, the changes must be explicable in terms of the lower level

⁴ Dennett (1984) op. cit. p. ix

⁵ Frege writes in his Logic manuscript of 1897 that grasping a thought such as Newton's law of gravitation 'is a process which takes place on the very confines of the mental and which for that reason cannot be completely understood from a purely psychological standpoint. For in grasping the law something comes into view whose nature is no longer mental in the proper sense, namely the thought; and this process is perhaps the most mysterious of all'—*Posthumous Writings* (Oxford, Blackwell 1979) ed. H. Hermes et al., translated by P. Long & R. White, p. 145.

sciences alone. Descartes' pineal gland would not satisfy this requirement. Yet this assumption is itself plausibly justified by the hypothesis that lower level processes should provide a 'mechanism' whereby higher level changes are accomplished in a given context, and this hypothesis is itself a better interpretation of the 'harmony' requirement. Although this hypothesis implies that all fundamental forces are physical, it is not a reductive position, since there can be an indefinite variety of mechanisms, not accommodated under a single bridge law, for accomplishing a single type of higher level change; furthermore higher order properties retain an autonomous causal role in setting up the contexts for changes which are accomplished by lower order mechanisms. I shall therefore adopt this account of the harmony requirement as a specification of 'naturalisation' in the sense suggested by Dennett. Since the underlying hypothesis here is metaphysical—it postulates a hierarchy of causal processes—I regard this position as a form of *metaphysical naturalism*.

On this account a naturalised philosophy of mind should abjure explanations of our abilities that are detached from the great chain of physical being; to be thus detached is to be, in this sense, unnatural. So a philosophy of language which postulates that we have the capacity to grasp abstract Fregean senses is suspect since such a capacity seems detached from any psychology that is harmonious with the other natural sciences. This case indicates the prime reason for accepting this kind of naturalisation—namely that the postulation of detached abilities threatens the unity of the self. Such a postulate seems bound to point in a dualist direction, whereby those abilities that are detached from our natural embodiment are held to be exercised by a non-physical subject—reason, perhaps, or a radically free will; and the *aporiai* of such dualist positions are too well known to need elaboration here. So it is not a crass 'scientific' prejudice that motivates this kind of naturalisation of philosophy; it is instead the worthy motive of attaining a unified self-understanding that respects the fact of our existence as animals.

I

Quine made the idea of a naturalisation of philosophy famous with his paper 'Epistemology Naturalised'.⁶ But where Quine's hostility to the reality of mental content led him to maintain that naturalised epistemology can only be a branch of behaviourist psychology, other philosophers have sought

⁶ W.V. Quine 'Epistemology Naturalized' in *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays* (Columbia University Press, London: 1969).

to provide an understanding of knowledge within a naturalistic context which is more receptive to mental states with content. Such an approach leads readily to the adoption of an *externalist* conception of knowledge, according to which what makes a true belief a case of knowledge is (to quote Armstrong) 'some natural relation which holds between the belief-state . . . and the situation which makes the belief true'.⁷ This is rather vague, but Armstrong remarks that reliabilist theories are externalist in his sense, and that is enough to go on in the present context: for in their explanations of knowledge these theories rely on the existence of underlying causal processes of perception and inference to expedite the acquisition of beliefs.⁸ By contrast, on the alternative *internalist* conception, according to which true beliefs are only knowledge where the subject recognises that she has evidence which justifies them, the notion of justification is not integrated into a broader understanding of the subject's psychology; so the resulting conception of knowledge is of a state whose explanation is detached from naturalistic explanations. As a result this conception is liable to give rise to accounts of knowledge which are either dogmatic, where some fundamental propositions are held to be inherently self-evident, or sceptical, if the claims to self-evidence are weakened.

Externalist accounts avoid this dilemma by permitting causal considerations to enter into the justification of claims to knowledge. Yet it remains unclear just what the implications of the adoption of an externalist conception are for traditional sceptical arguments. Where knowledge is regarded as (in Armstrong's phrase) 'a certain natural relation holding between the believer and the world', it looks as though sceptical arguments must be directed to raising doubts whether this relation really obtains. For example, perhaps the subject is hallucinating and her perceptual beliefs (even if correct) do not stand in the appropriate causal relation to the world. Yet it is not at first clear in what context a doubt of this kind is supposed to be being raised. Concerning any, or almost any, judgments a doubt can be raised: one *can* doubt whether snow is really white—but unless one has in mind a thesis about secondary qualities a doubt of this kind seems perverse, or neurotic, in the face

⁷ D.M. Armstrong *Belief, Truth, and Knowledge* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge: 1973) p. 157.

⁸ As Edward Craig has recently shown, the notorious Gettier problem continues to plague many proposals of this kind—cf. *Knowledge and the State of Nature* (Clarendon, Oxford: 1990) section IX. But I remain hopeful that something can still be salvaged here—cf. the position developed by C. Peacocke in *Thoughts* (Blackwell, Oxford: 1986) ch. 9. The 'Gettier problem' comes from E. Gettier 'Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?' *Analysis* 23 (1963) pp. 121–3.

of massive evidence to the contrary. Similarly, one can doubt whether a subject stands in the appropriate relation to the world, e.g. whether her beliefs have been caused in the right way, or whether they have been acquired by reliable methods, with no false lemmas etc.; but in the face of evidence that she does stand in the right relation, doubt seems no more in place in this context than any other. If, as the externalist maintains, knowledge is just a natural relationship between subject and world, then doubts concerning it would seem to have just as much, or as little, contextual propriety as doubts concerning any other natural state of affairs.

Thus at first sight it appears that an externalist conception provides little space for traditional sceptical arguments. This is not, I think, an altogether welcome result. For although we do not want to end up committed to a scepticism we cannot live, a satisfactory account of knowledge should not imply that sceptical doubts are just perverse or neurotic. However, there is a response available to the externalist at this point. He may observe that although any particular case of knowledge is just constituted by a natural relation between believer and world, the significance of describing that relation as a case of *knowledge* is that those who recognise it as such treat the subject as an *authority* on the matter; they regard themselves as *entitled* to act as if her opinions are true.⁹ This normative aspect of the concept of knowledge is of course enshrined in the traditional account of it as true *justified* belief, and this normativity is quite compatible with naturalism. The externalist just takes the justification, where it exists, to be grounded in the reliability of the processes by which the relevant beliefs are formed.

The normativity of the concept of knowledge implies that there is a contextual element to the application of the concept: the standard of reliability we employ in one set of circumstances may not be acceptable in another: the standards appropriate to the public bar are not those appropriate to the court of law. As a result one can legitimately call into question a claim to knowledge on the grounds that the wrong standards are being applied, and this provides a way in which the externalist can seek to accommodate sceptical arguments. Hence even for the externalist there will be a difference between doubts about ordinary natural states of affairs and doubts about claims to knowledge; it is because knowledge is a normative concept that one can sensibly press doubts about knowledge in the face of evidence to the contrary in a way in which similar doubts about whether snow is white seem just just perverse.

⁹ This aspect of the concept of knowledge is central to Craig's recent 'practical explication' of the concept (op. cit.).

This conclusion represents the philosophical sceptic as someone who, having raised the standards for knowledge to that ideal level which excludes the possibility of error, concludes that human beings have little, if any, knowledge at all. But it remains unclear what purpose is served by raising the standards for knowledge in this way, what context is being assumed which renders legitimate this kind of move. There are, certainly, contexts within which we rightly demand high standards for knowledge—criminal trials, for example. But the standards in these cases are high because we recognise that much depends on judgments reached in the light of the evidence presented. The attempt to represent philosophical scepticism as the result of pressing the standards for knowledge still higher, to the limit, would, therefore, seem to require that yet more serious implications should be attached to the results of philosophical deliberations concerning the limits of human knowledge. Yet, as we all know, the future of the human race, or the universe, does not hinge on the outcome of such deliberations. Hence, from this perspective, although philosophical scepticism is intelligible, it appears eccentric; it employs an absolute context for raising questions about human knowledge which has no place within the concerns of human life.

At this point externalists may be losing patience: if the externalist conception does not provide a context within which philosophical scepticism touches on serious concerns, then, it will be said,¹⁰ so much the worse for the traditional philosophical sceptic. He can still have the role of pointing out the snares inherent in internalist approaches to knowledge; but once externalism itself has been embraced, he can be dismissed from the company of serious philosophers. Yet this is, I think, too quick. A distinctive feature of traditional philosophical scepticism is that, in the first instance, it concerns itself with doubts concerning first-person claims to knowledge. The significance of this is that where a doubt is raised concerning a third-person claim to knowledge, e.g. whether Moore knows that there is a hand before him, and we apply to this claim an externalist account of knowledge, the doubt is typically focused on the issue as to whether Moore's belief stands in the appropriate causal relation to the situation in question—the presence of his hand before him. There is no need here to doubt that things are as Moore thinks them to be, that there is a hand in front of him. But if I doubt whether I know that there is a hand before me, my doubt concerns not only whether I am appropriately related to the presence of a hand before me; it brings with it a doubt

¹⁰ cf. G. Stine 'Skepticism and Relevant Alternatives' *Philosophical Studies* 29 (1976) p.254; A. Goldman *Epistemology and Cognition* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge Mass.; 1986) ch.2.

about the presence of a hand before me. If I have reason to doubt the reliability of my belief, then I have reason to doubt its truth. Thus if I have reason to doubt whether I know that there is an external world, I have reason to doubt that there is an external world, and I cannot appeal to my convictions about the external world and my place within it in order to set aside my initial doubt without apparently begging the question. For my doubt concerns these beliefs as well as my belief that I have knowledge of the external world. So once a first-person perspective is adopted, it seems that the adoption of an externalist conception of knowledge does not by itself provide an immediate response to sceptical doubts. Furthermore, although the proponents of sceptical arguments press the implications of their arguments with greater rigour than we employ in ordinary life, once they adopt the first-person strategy they need not invoke any specially demanding standards concerning the vindication of claims to knowledge; their arguments do not presuppose the demand for absolute certainty which, I suggested, renders scepticism intelligible, but without providing any apparent motivation for it.

But why should one doubt whether one knows in the first place? Our own experience of our own fallibility certainly raises some such doubts in ordinary life. We typically banish them by considerations of coherence—by introducing other beliefs, beliefs both about the world and about our place within it, by reference to which we are able to exhibit the doubt as unreasonable. As I have indicated, if a doubt is sufficiently general, this procedure becomes questionable; for the beliefs by reference to which we may seek to banish it may themselves be called into question by the doubt. But what if I do not, in fact, have any such general doubts? Does the applicability of sceptical arguments depend upon a contingent proneness to such doubts? In order to provide us with reasons for general doubts the proponents of sceptical arguments typically describe possibilities which imply that our beliefs of some general kind, e.g. perceptual beliefs, do not stand in the right relationship to the world. But even as we recognise that it is not easy to find reasons for dismissing these possibilities, we also feel that they are themselves incredible (e.g. that our consciousness is just that of a brain in a vat). So it still needs to be explained why we should take these possibilities seriously, why they do not just give rise to intriguing puzzles with which we can amuse ourselves when we have nothing more serious to attend to.

I think the answer to this comes from the broader philosophical enterprise of attaining a reflective understanding of our place within the world (to which a commitment to the naturalisation of philosophy itself belongs). Once the normativity of the concept of knowledge is recognised, this enterprise will be seen to include the task of legitimating to oneself

the possession of the kinds of knowledge one takes ourselves to possess; and once embarked upon this task the epistemologist can no more dismiss reasons for doubt fuelled by sceptical possibilities than can a political philosopher dismiss anarchist hypotheses without argument. In both cases the intellectual project requires one to extend serious consideration to relevant hypotheses whatever one's antecedent sympathies. An externalist who refuses to take sceptical arguments seriously because he finds sceptical possibilities incredible is a dogmatist who has turned his back on reason in order to protect his common sense faith.

Thus although the externalist is quite right to insist that his conception of knowledge implies that claims to knowledge need not run the gauntlet of sceptical argument, the broader context of reflective epistemological inquiry necessitates attention to these arguments even when it is conducted with an externalist conception of knowledge.¹¹ So there remains here a residue of Descartes' insistence upon the distinctively *theoretical* nature of philosophical scepticism even after one has abandoned his goal of finding absolutely certain foundations for knowledge.¹² The externalist might respond that this just confirms his suspicion that there is a lingering 'internalist' element within the philosophical project of attaining a reflective and critically coherent self-understanding that needs to be extirpated. But I think we can, and should, resist the demand that this reflective dimension in philosophical understanding should be abandoned. Such a demand is not implied by Dennett's naturalisation of philosophy; on the contrary, that is precisely the attempt to gain a reflective understanding of the way in which we ourselves, including our own thoughts and language, fit into the rest of nature.

It may seem that this adoption of a first-person epistemological perspective has produced a situation which is equivalent to the adoption of an internalist conception of knowledge. This is, however, not the case: since the internalist makes it a condition for the truth of a claim to knowledge that one should be able to justify to oneself what one claims to know, unless he can eliminate the sceptical possibilities which undermine such a claim, reflecting on his situation, he should judge that he does not know. The externalist, by contrast, does not make it a condition of the truth of claims to knowledge that sceptical doubts be silenced; for him, the truth of such a claim depends only on whether one's belief has been

¹¹ Here, therefore, I disagree with Marie McGinn who argues in chapter one of *Sense and Scepticism* (Blackwell, Oxford: 1989) that the significance of sceptical arguments requires nothing more than assumptions inherent in our ordinary conception of knowledge. McGinn's argument incorporates an internalist conception of knowledge.

¹² cf. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes* vol.II transl. J. Cottingham, R. Stoothof, & D. Murdoch (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge: 1984) p.243.

formed by an appropriately reliable method. Sceptical argument gets its purchase here only by suggesting reasons for believing that one's belief might after all not have been formed by such a method. In this context it will suffice if one can demonstrate that these doubts are, in fact, unreasonable.

This shows that, in vindicating claims to knowledge, the externalist has an easier task than the internalist, and thus that the adoption of an externalist conception of knowledge is an essential element in an anti-sceptical strategy. But given the scope of sceptical hypotheses, establishing that sceptical doubts are unreasonable is not a straightforward matter. Because these hypotheses call into question all the obvious counter-evidence, it is not easy to understand what one can appeal to without joining the ranks of those who have begged the question against the sceptic. Let me illustrate this point by considering a currently popular approach to the problem of induction, well exemplified by Hugh Mellor's recent discussion of 'The Warrant of Induction'.¹³ Mellor takes knowledge to be true belief that is warranted by the believer's situation and evidence; but he insists that the facts which thus warrant belief do not have to be known by the believer in order to function as such. Thus, in the case of inductive beliefs, such a belief is warranted where it is prompted by an inferential habit that is, in fact, reliable—i.e. such that the believer's evidence does in fact give a high chance of truth to the belief to which it gives rise. This is an externalist account of inductive knowledge, and I have no quarrel with it. My disagreement with Mellor concerns his treatment of inductive scepticism.

The inductive sceptic introduces the possibility that the future will be entirely unlike the past; this hypothesis implies that our present inferential habits are unreliable, and thus, on Mellor's account of inductive knowledge, that we have no such knowledge. As I have argued, even if we find it difficult to take this hypothesis seriously, when we reflect critically on our epistemological situation we cannot dismiss it out of hand; and yet, as Hume observed, it is not easy to find any reason for rejecting it which does not assume its falsehood. It is clearly useless in this context to rely on the fact (supposing it to be such) that the future will resemble the past and thus that my evidence does in fact give a high chance of truth to my beliefs about the future. What I require is a non-question-begging reason to believe this. A better strategy is to appeal to the memory that up to now past futures have resembled past pasts; but, unless one wants to hold out for the *a priori* reasonableness of inductive inferences, the merit of any

¹³ cf. D.H. Mellor *Matters of Metaphysics* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge: 1991) pp. 254–68.

inductive inference from this to the nature of future futures is called into doubt by the sceptical possibility itself.¹⁴

Mellor, of course, recognises these familiar dialectical twists. But he takes it that he can avoid the need to grapple with them by his externalist treatment of knowledge; for he implies that it is only those who think that, if we know something, we know that we know it, who are caught within these snares.¹⁵ If the argument of the earlier part of this lecture is correct, this is a mistake. As I reflect on my current situation, the thought that I might after all have knowledge of the future is no comfort to me if I can find no way to set aside my current reasons for doubt whether I have it. So although we may allow that Mellor's external warrants suffice for inductive knowledge, his appeal to them is either question-begging or fails to take account of the context within which the sceptic's argument is advanced.

II

How, then, should one respond to sceptical arguments? I favour the Humean response, that 'Nature, by an absolute and uncontrollable necessity has determin'd us to judge as well as to breathe and feel'.¹⁶ Hume's thesis that many of our beliefs are, in the first instance, spontaneous provides, I suggest, the first step in a response to the kind of scepticism I have been considering. The continuous, involuntary, gushing up within us of beliefs concerning the external world, the future, and so on, provides us with a way of breaking into the circle of argument which seemed to be closed off once the sceptical possibility was entertained. I can entertain the hypothesis that I might now be dreaming, and I can acknowledge that there is no way in which my experience alone enables me to eliminate this hypothesis; but the fact that I find myself, willy-nilly, believing that I am standing up and talking makes it impossible for me to sustain the sceptical hypothesis. My current perceptual beliefs provide me with ever new reasons for rejecting it, and although the sceptic within, my cognitive super-ego, may seek to dismiss these new beliefs as question-begging, the fact that they are spontaneous implies that, initially, I do not have the opportunity to do so. The initial spontaneity of belief, therefore, challenges sceptical doubt, by furnishing us with beliefs which give us reason to reject sceptical hypotheses without our acquisition of these beliefs being grounded in lines

¹⁴ cf. C. Wright 'Facts and Certainty' *Proceedings of the British Academy* 71 (1985) p.447.

¹⁵ Mellor op. cit. p. 266.

¹⁶ Hume op. cit. p. 183

of argument that it has called into doubt.

We can, of course, modify our beliefs through reflection, and the initial spontaneity of a belief does not by itself establish the unreasonableness of sceptical doubt. Someone with paranoid beliefs about others will, it is to be hoped, find good reasons for rejecting them. It is at this point that considerations of coherence come into play, and the rejection of the conclusions of sceptical arguments requires a good degree of coherence. We need to be able to incorporate our spontaneous beliefs into a reflectively coherent conception of the world and of our cognitive relationship to it, albeit an inevitably incomplete and, in some degree, fragmented conception. In particular we need to be able to frame an understanding of the ways in which our own beliefs arise within the world, so that we can appreciate the causes of error on our own part and thus allow for our own fallibility instead of simply rejecting beliefs which do not cohere in a question-begging way. Nonetheless considerations of critical coherence are not by themselves sufficient to refute scepticism: if, in the light of a sceptical hypothesis, one were able to suspend judgment on all the matters concerning which the sceptical hypothesis gives one reasons for doubt, there need be no incoherence in one's resulting cognitive situation. Incoherence only enters when one finds that, however much one attempts to suspend judgment, one cannot prevent the arrival upon one's cognitive scene of fresh beliefs which conflict with the sceptical hypothesis.

This Humean strategy for responding to sceptical argument is by now familiar. In fact because of his commitment to the theory of ideas Hume remained a sceptic of sorts: 'if we are philosophers', he writes, 'it ought only to be upon sceptical principles'.¹⁷ Thus the position I am proposing is closer to that of Hume's great critic Thomas Reid, who grasped the implications of Hume's position and presented a naturalised epistemology freed from Hume's commitment to the theory of ideas. Our natural *common sense* is, for Reid, the core of such a naturalised epistemology; he expressed its role in the following terms:

Such original and natural judgments are therefore a part of that furniture which nature hath given to the human understanding . . . They serve to direct us in the common affairs of life, where our reasoning faculty would leave us in the dark. They are a part of our constitution, and all the discoveries of our reason are grounded upon them. They make up what is called *the common sense of mankind*.¹⁸

¹⁷ Hume op. cit. p. 270

¹⁸ *An Inquiry into the Human Mind* ed. T. Duggan (Chicago University Press, Chicago: 1970) p.268. It is arguable that Reid modifies his conception of common sense in his later *Essays on the Intellectual Powers*.

The concept of nature is explicit in both Hume's and Reid's formulation of this position, and it is common to describe it as a form of 'naturalism'. But is it just a further instance of the naturalisation of philosophy from which I started? Certainly, I think, it can be fitted in alongside the thesis of metaphysical naturalism. For it is important to the Humean position that it should include an account of beliefs and their content which is continuous with its account of the rest of the world. Were one to take the view that belief is a phenomenon quite detached from the rest of our animal nature it would no longer be clear how to fit the appraisal of one's own beliefs into the broader understanding of the natural world with which our beliefs furnish us. Thus the coherence condition of the Humean position suggests a commitment to a naturalised epistemology and, more generally, the theme of metaphysical naturalism; and I shall say more about this commitment below. Nonetheless the position is not just an instance of this theme. Instead it manifests a different type of naturalism, whose focus is not metaphysical, but epistemological: its primary concern is not with our continuity with the great chain of physical being but with the spontaneous availability to us of common sense beliefs which conflict with sceptical possibilities. Thus the sense of 'natural' in the description of the Humean position as a form of naturalism has the connotation of unreflective spontaneity; in this sense beliefs are unnatural where they are the outcome of reflective reasoning.

I shall mark this distinction by describing this second type of naturalism as *epistemic naturalism*. The existence of two such types, or varieties, of naturalism was proposed some years ago by Strawson.¹⁹ Strawson, however, presented the situation as one in which, as theorists, we face a choice between a liberal accommodating naturalism whose perspective is essentially epistemological and a hard reductive naturalism whose perspective is essentially scientific and metaphysical. When the matter is put that way we are bound to favour the first alternative; but the protagonist of metaphysical naturalism will, I think, rightly protest that his position is not necessarily reductive, and thus that his variety of naturalism has not been accommodated within Strawson's categories. And the important point here is that there need be, and should be, no conflict between metaphysical and epistemic naturalism. I have been arguing, in effect, that the metaphysical naturalist needs epistemic naturalism in order to handle sceptical arguments;²⁰ and metaphysical naturalism equally

¹⁹ Strawson *op.cit.* pp.1–2, 38–41.

²⁰ Perhaps this puts the point too strongly. I have only argued that metaphysical naturalism needs some further resource to handle sceptical arguments, and that epistemic naturalism suffices to meet this need. But there are other familiar strategies for handling sceptical arguments, e.g. transcendental arguments. Yet it may be doubted whether these are available to a metaphysical naturalist.

provides a way in which the epistemic naturalist can achieve a reflectively coherent understanding of his own epistemological situation.²¹

This latter thesis needs further development, and I should like to do this by looking briefly at the position Wittgenstein advances in *On Certainty*.²² The broad similarities between some features of Wittgenstein's position and the Humean position I have called epistemic naturalism will be familiar.²³ But before myself discussing these I want to bring out a further feature of the epistemic naturalist's response to sceptical arguments. His reliance on spontaneous common sense beliefs concerning particular matters of fact implies that he offers no reasons independent of common sense belief for belief in the general conditions (concerning the reliability of the senses, the uniformity of nature and so on) whose obtaining would be required by his method of acquiring common sense beliefs were he to attempt to justify these beliefs by a process of non-circular reasoning from independent evidence. Thus there is a sense in which, according to the epistemic naturalist, these general convictions should strike us, when we reflect on ourselves, as ungrounded. For the only reasons we can offer for them are particular beliefs our acceptance of which would depend upon them were we to acquire these particular beliefs by a process of reasoning from evidence that does not include beliefs of the same type. So the best we can do is to say that the truth of these general convictions, which are not spontaneous, is implicated in the truth of particular beliefs which, in the first instance, we accept for no reason.

It is easy to see the similarity between this account and that which Wittgenstein offers of the status of 'Moorean propositions':²⁴

136. When Moore says he *knows* such and such, he is really enumerating a lot of empirical propositions which we affirm without special testing; propositions, that is, which have a peculiar logical role in the system of our empirical propositions.

According to Wittgenstein these propositions are not a priori principles from which we reason. Instead they are implicit in our ways of forming particular beliefs, and our commitment to them derives from our attachment to the general picture of the world that we thereby form, an attachment

²¹ Although Quine has, I think, much too restricted a conception of the naturalisation of epistemology, he gets this point right: 'There is thus reciprocal containment, though containment in different senses: epistemology in natural science and natural science in epistemology' op.cit. p.83.

²² L. Wittgenstein *On Certainty* transl. G.E.M. Anscombe & G.H. von Wright (Blackwell, Oxford: 1969).

²³ Strawson op.cit. pp.14–20

²⁴ These correspond roughly to the truisms Moore set out in his 'Defence of Common Sense', which is reprinted in his *Philosophical Papers* (Allen & Unwin, London: 1959). Moore himself remarked on the 'strange' epistemological status of these truisms (p.44).

grounded in the way in which we lead our lives, in what we do (cf. section 204). One only needs to introduce Wittgenstein's own pragmatist account of belief (cf. sections 422, 427) to connect his stress on the role of action to the epistemic naturalist's focus on that of our natural common sense beliefs.

The issue I want now to focus upon is that of the metaphysical status of these Moorean propositions, whose peculiar epistemological status has already been agreed. If the epistemic naturalist adopts the perspective of metaphysical naturalism he can accommodate this latter status by treating their truth as intrinsic to our methods of inquiry, so that there is no substantive question of our 'tracking the truth' with regard to them by means of these methods of inquiry. There is, however, nothing here to imply that these general propositions do not just state contingent general matters of fact of the same kind as other general empirical propositions. This result conflicts with the tenor of some of Wittgenstein's remarks about them. For he sometimes describes them as 'rules' (e.g. section 319), and raises doubts about the propriety of speaking of their 'agreement with reality' (e.g. section 199, 215). These remarks can be construed simply as expressions of the epistemological status of these propositions; but I do not want to argue the interpretation of the text. For Crispin Wright has unequivocally advanced the position Wittgenstein's remarks sometimes suggest—that once these propositions are accorded a special epistemological status, then they must also be denied the status of stating facts.²⁵

Before discussing Wright's argument for this thesis, it is worth observing how problematic it is. How can the existence of the past (another Moorean proposition) not be a general fact? Surely such a fact is implied by lots of particular facts about the past—e.g. that the Battle of Hastings was fought in 1066—so can we not just run a simple Moore-type 'proof' of the existence of the past? Why, then, does Wright introduce his non-factualist thesis? He gives several reasons, but, in the present context, the crucial one is that he thinks that a plausible test for the factuality of a class of statements is whether 'appraisals of their acceptability can be legitimated within a satisfactory naturalistic epistemology'.²⁶ Wright argues that Moorean propositions fail this requirement because no naturalistic epistemology which legitimates our appraisals of them will be satisfactory to sceptics; by challenging our entitlement to confidence concerning the Moorean propositions, according to Wright, the sceptic undermines our entitlement to a naturalistic epistemology which represents us as having knowledge of the truth of these propositions. This does not seem to me persuasive. Certainly, in advance of the rejection of sceptical arguments by

²⁵ Wright (1985) *op.cit.* pp.455ff.

²⁶ Wright (1985) *op.cit.* p.455

reference to the epistemic naturalist position, there can be no satisfactory epistemology.²⁷ That was indeed my argument in the previous section. But once epistemic naturalism has been adopted, there is no reason why it should not enable a theorist, not only to repudiate sceptical arguments, but also to construct a naturalistic epistemology which shows why the epistemic naturalist position produces correct appraisals. Of course, acceptance of such a construction ultimately depends on the spontaneous common sense beliefs which the epistemic naturalist invokes; but the circle involved in legitimating the naturalist's favourable appraisal of such spontaneous beliefs is virtuous and not vicious. I conclude, therefore, that Wright does not give a good reason for supposing that Moorean propositions fail his test for factuality. Epistemic naturalism can be combined with metaphysical naturalism to defend the factuality of the Moorean propositions.

A different strand in Wittgenstein's remarks concerns the possibility of other forms of life, expressed by spontaneous beliefs which give rise to different Moorean propositions. A case which much concerns him is that of religious belief (e.g. sections 239, 336), and (whether or not this was Wittgenstein's own point of view) this can be considered from the point of view of an epistemic naturalist who is also an atheist. Such a person cannot deny that there are people with apparently spontaneous religious convictions, which give rise to Moorean propositions concerning the existence and attributes of a god. The atheist does not share these convictions, and therefore does not find himself committed to the same Moorean propositions. But the issue for him *qua* epistemic naturalist is whether the existence of these divergent natural cognitive dispositions puts pressure on the objectivity of the conception of knowledge that he is able to offer.

The epistemic naturalist's first line of defence must be to insist that his response to scepticism did not rely only upon the existence of natural cognitive dispositions; it also involved the possibility of attaining, with their help, a reflectively coherent understanding of their place within the world. Hence it is open to the atheist to maintain that the theist's cognitive dispositions, though genuine enough, cannot be accommodated into a coherent scheme, and for this reason do not pose a threat to the objectivity which he claims for his own, atheist, system. A theist will, of course, dispute this thesis; but what matters here is not who is right, but whether both sides should at least agree that they deny the other's claim. For the epistemic naturalist faces here an analogue of the traditional

²⁷ The terminology here is potentially confusing. Wright's 'naturalistic epistemology' is an epistemology viewed from the perspective of metaphysical naturalism. It is not the Humean epistemic naturalism.

objection to the coherence theory of truth,—the apparent possibility of incompatible systems of belief each of which is by itself coherent. If the epistemic naturalist really permits this, then it seems that he only picks us out of the sceptical frying-pan in order to cast us onto the relativist fire.

To deal with this objection I think the epistemic naturalist should reaffirm that the reflective coherence which he holds to be essential to the validation of natural cognitive dispositions includes a commitment to metaphysical naturalism.²⁸ For that commitment internalises the constraint that coherence cannot be attained in incompatible ways. One cannot hold both that one's own cognitive dispositions furnish one with a naturalistic understanding of oneself and the world which explains which dispositions are reliable methods for attaining beliefs about the world and, also, that other, conflicting, cognitive dispositions yield equally satisfactory, but conflicting, explanations of the reliability of human cognitive dispositions. For if there is a single phenomenon to be explained, in this case human cognitive powers, then, although there can be levels of explanation, the explanations must cohere as different descriptions of the same phenomenon. Thus, even though there is here no method for resolving all deep disagreements, a commitment to metaphysical naturalism brings with it an agreement that these are genuine disagreements.

This conclusion complements that which I made when discussing philosophical scepticism. In that context I argued that metaphysical naturalism by itself is inadequate to refute sceptical arguments, but that when supplemented by epistemic naturalism these arguments can be set aside. I have now argued that the relativist threat to epistemic naturalism should be answered by incorporating a commitment to metaphysical naturalism within cognitive naturalism. Thus although I insisted before on the distinction between these two types of naturalism, it turns out that they need each other.²⁹

III

I want now to apply this combination to a central issue of current philosophy of language and mind—the tension between, on the one hand, certain

²⁸ It may be felt that a commitment to metaphysical naturalism rules out the theist position. But as long as the metaphysical naturalist position is not assumed to be reductive I do not see why there cannot be a naturalised theology—along the lines of traditional conceptions of the 'immanence' of God.

²⁹ I should, however, acknowledge that I have not established here that each is both necessary and sufficient to solve the other's characteristic problem; in each case I have only argued for a sufficiency thesis. More work would be needed to establish the corresponding necessity thesis—cf. note 20.

supposed implications of Wittgenstein's rule-following arguments, and, on the other hand, the aspirations of those who wish to construct a naturalised philosophy of meaning. The tension will be familiar: the rule-following arguments have been taken, especially by Kripke, to show that there is no fact of the matter concerning what anyone means;³⁰ but a naturalised philosophy of meaning usually aims to identify the facts which constitute meaning. Reactions to this tension are varied: most naturalisers pass over Kripke's arguments in silence, though Dennett represents Kripke as an adherent of his own instrumentalist faith when he remarks that 'Kripke's ruminations on rule-following, which strike some philosophers as deep and disturbing challenges to their complacency, have always struck me as great labors wasted in trying to break down an unlocked door'.³¹ On the other side, rule-followers have concluded that the approach to the understanding of language characteristic of traditional linguistic theory is seriously defective. Kripke, for example, maintained that Wittgenstein's argument implies that 'the use of the ideas of rules and of competence in linguistics needs serious reconsideration, even if these notions are not rendered "meaningless"'.³²

This debate does not just concern the philosophy of language. Linguistic meaning is often taken to be internally linked to the contents of thought, especially beliefs and intentions. So if a naturalised philosophy of mind specifies natural facts which constitute the contents of beliefs and intentions, then there would seem to be material for an account of the fact of the matter as to what speakers mean.³³ The connection assumed here between linguistic meaning and mental content can be disputed. Philip Pettit, for example, has sought to insulate linguistic meaning from this kind of determination by proposing that although there are natural facts which constitute the possession of content by 'sub-personal' intentional states, including beliefs and desires, the fact that linguistic meaning involves deliberate rule-following ensures that it cannot be constituted by such sub-personal states.³⁴ Others, however, have argued in the opposite direction that the rule-following considerations can be applied directly to states such as belief to threaten naturalistic accounts of their content.³⁵

³⁰ cf. S. Kripke *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* (Blackwell, Oxford: 1982) ch.2.

³¹ D. Dennett 'Evolution, Error, and Intentionality' in *The Intentional Stance* (MIT, London: 1987) p.294.

³² Kripke op.cit. p.31. cf. C. Wright 'Wittgenstein's Rule-Following Considerations and the Central Project of Theoretical Linguistics' in *Reflections on Chomsky* ed. A. George (Blackwell, Oxford: 1989).

³³ cf. C. McGinn *Wittgenstein on Meaning* (Blackwell, Oxford: 1984) pp.144ff.

³⁴ P. Pettit 'The Reality of Rule-Following' *Mind* 99 (1990) pp.1-2.

³⁵ cf. P. Boghossian 'The Rule-Following Considerations' *Mind* 98 (1989) p.514. J. Sartorelli 'McGinn on concept scepticism and Kripke's sceptical argument' *Analysis* 51 (1991) pp.79-84.

Clearly, if this were right the rule-following argument would pose a serious threat to any naturalised philosophy of mind, and thus to metaphysical naturalism in the sense I have been considering.

What is the essential feature of the concept of meaning which is supposed to imply that it transcends any possible naturalistic theory? The answer, of course, is its supposed *normativity*.³⁶ It seems then that we have here a Humean 'is/ought' thesis—to the effect that naturalisers are guilty of another instance of the 'naturalistic fallacy' of thinking that one can derive a normative conclusion, in this case concerning meaning, from natural facts. But we should be wary of hasty judgments here; as we have already seen there is no incompatibility between a naturalised epistemology and the normativity of knowledge. To take matters further we need to understand better in what the normativity of meaning is supposed to consist. John McDowell has expressed this thesis in the following terms:

We find it natural to think of meaning and understanding in, as it were, contractual terms. Our idea is that to learn the meaning of a word is to acquire an understanding that obliges us subsequently—if we have occasion to deploy the concept in question—to judge and speak in certain determinate ways, on pain of failure to obey the dictates of the meaning we have grasped;³⁷

The idea here seems to be that in learning the meaning of a word we learn how we ought to speak; we learn under what conditions we ought, subsequently, to assent to, or dissent from, sentences containing the word and even assert such sentences ourselves. Clearly there are 'ought's here; but are they, as Kant would put it, categorical or hypothetical? Surely they are only the latter. Learning the meaning of a word brings with it no categorical obligation to say anything at all; rather what we learn is what we ought to say if we want to express our desires, contribute to a conversation, impress the neighbours, and so on. Perhaps we can simplify here by saying that we learn what we ought to say if we want to speak the truth; but the imperative is still only hypothetical. The reason this matters is that hypothetical imperatives typically arise from the combination of a desire (broadly conceived) and some connection between the end desired and the current situation of the subject—e.g. if one wants to harvest one's broad beans in June, one ought to plant the seeds in March; and the fact that the conclusion is an imperative, an 'ought', does nothing to show that the connection is not a natural fact (though the connection can be conventional,

³⁶ cf. Kripke op. cit. p.37; Pettit op.cit. p.8.

³⁷ J.McDowell 'Wittgenstein on Following a Rule' *Synthese* 58 (1984) p.325. McDowell acknowledges that the 'contractual' simile comes from C.Wright *Wittgenstein on the Foundation of Mathematics* (Duckworth, London: 1980) p.19.

and in that sense not 'natural'). Hence, the fact that in learning the meaning of a word one becomes subject to a hypothetical imperative concerning how one should speak does not show that there is anything intrinsically normative, and thus not natural, about meanings. One can hold both that the concept of meaning characterises entirely natural (though perhaps also conventional) connections between language and the world, and that in learning the meaning of a word one learns how one ought to speak.

It seems, then, that the objection to a naturalised philosophy of language is not really an extension of the old 'is/ought' charge. Instead, if an objection is to be extracted from the discussion of normativity, it is that a naturalistic philosophy cannot accommodate the fact that in ascribing a meaning to a descriptive utterance we pick out certain conditions as truth-conditions for the utterance, whether or not these conditions actually obtain. For, certainly, if a naturalistic philosophy cannot accommodate this fact, then it cannot explain the conditional obligations to which a grasp of meaning gives rise. But the antecedent here remains to be established. The argument for it is that which Kripke employs when criticising the dispositional account of meaning—namely that naturalistic accounts cannot allow properly for the possibility of mistakes.³⁸ Kripke's challenge is certainly pertinent: for the possibility of mistakes is essential to many mental states—the very idea of a question would be incoherent if the content of a question were dependent upon its answer. In thinking about Kripke's challenge it is best to start from the issue of mental content, since *everyone* agrees that it is a conclusive objection to a simple causal theory of the content of beliefs that such a theory does not allow for mistaken beliefs.³⁹

There is, however, no agreement on the way ahead. It would be silly for me to try to discuss fully here all the proposals that are currently on offer. But it is, I think, necessary to enter some way into this debate in order to exhibit the resources that are available to the naturalist programme and thereby undermine confidence in the anti-naturalist thesis that no such proposal can work. There are three general strategies for dealing with this matter: one can identify a belief's truth-conditions

1 as those circumstances which produce tokens of the belief under ideal, or normal, conditions, or

³⁸ Kripke *op.cit.* pp.22ff.

³⁹ cf. D.Stampe 'Towards a Causal Theory of Linguistic Representation' in P.French, T. Uehling & H. Wettstein (eds.) *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* vol.2 (Univ. of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis: 1977) esp.pp.88–9. F.Dretske 'Misrepresentation' in *Belief: Form, Content and Function* ed.R.Bogdan (Clarendon, Oxford: 1986). J.Fodor *Psychosemantics* (MIT, London: 1987) pp.101ff. D.Papineau *Reality and Representation* (Blackwell, Oxford: 1987) pp.61ff. P.Godfrey-Smith 'Misinformation' *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 19 (1989) pp.533–550.

- 2 as those whose obtaining it is the belief's proper function to indicate by the occurrence of tokens of the belief, or
 3 as those whose obtaining would guarantee the success of actions caused by the belief and other true beliefs.⁴⁰

The first of these strategies looks implausible; it requires a non-circular specification of ideal (normal) conditions, and it cannot be directly applied to non-perceptual beliefs, such as beliefs about the future. The second strategy is similarly restricted in its application, and, if it is supposed that the function of belief derives from a reliable correlation in circumstances which are important for the evolutionary success of the organism, then it runs into difficulties with apparent beliefs about the presence of predators that have an evolutionary role even though they are not reliably correlated with the presence of predators.⁴¹ The third strategy, which draws on the pragmatist conception of belief,⁴² is not vulnerable to these objections, and seems an essential ingredient of any satisfactory account. But it faces several difficulties of its own: in particular, the account of belief-content it implies seems too extensional (any description of the success-conditions will be admissible), and it does not incorporate any causal constraints, reflecting the history and cognitive capacities of the subject, upon the conceptual structure of beliefs.

One strategy at this point is to incorporate the pragmatist approach within a teleological theory, as has been proposed by Millikan and Papineau.⁴³ The central idea here is that successful action is the effect of belief which it is belief's proper function to produce; so where an action caused by a belief will be successful iff *p*, the belief will perform its proper function iff it is produced iff *p*, and this condition (namely that under which a belief performs its proper function) is taken to identify its content. By itself, however, this reinterpretation of the pragmatist approach does not help with the difficulties identified above, which suggest, rather, that the pragmatist approach should be incorporated within a causal theory which makes it a condition on the content of a subject's belief that the subject's belief-forming mechanisms (perception, memory, inference)

⁴⁰ Kripke himself suggests (1) (op.cit. pp.27–8), though only in order to reject it; for (2) cf. F.Dretske *Explaining Behaviour* (MIT, London: 1988) ch.4; for (3) cf. J.Whyte 'Success Semantics' *Analysis* 50 (1990) pp.149–157.

⁴¹ Godfrey-Smith op.cit. pp.546–8.

⁴² cf. C.S.Peirce 'The essence of belief is the establishment of a habit, and different beliefs are distinguished by the different modes of action to which they give rise' from 'How to Make Our Ideas Clear' reprinted in *C.S.Peirce: Selected Writings* ed.P.P.Weiner (Dover, New York: 1966) p.121.

⁴³ R. Millikan 'Thoughts without laws; cognitive science with content' *Philosophical Review* 95 (1986) pp.47–79. 'Biosemantics' *Journal of Philosophy* 86 (1989) pp.281–97, D.Papineau *Reality and Representation* (Blackwell, Oxford: 1987) ch.4.

should account for the subject having a belief with that content. On this suggestion, then, the content of a belief is that account of the conditions for the success of actions caused by the belief which explains, in the light of the subject's belief-forming mechanisms, why the belief is produced when it is. Since not any account of these success-conditions will thus explain the formation of the belief, the intensionality of belief-content receives here a better treatment than in the simpler theory.

This modified pragmatist account can be incorporated into a teleological framework: it could be said that the content of a belief is that account of the conditions under which it performs its proper function which explains why it is produced when it is. But this adds nothing obvious to the causal-pragmatist account with which I shall stick. This latter account needs to be supplemented by an account of belief-forming mechanisms, which, without providing a simple causal theory of content, elucidates the connections between perceptible features of the world and the occurrence of beliefs. Such an account will surely require the adoption of a version of the 'language of thought' hypothesis in order to provide a causal basis for inferential processes and our capacity to recombine old concepts in new beliefs, but I shall not speculate further about details. What does still require some attention is the account to be given of the content of desires, which is essential for a specification of what counts as success in action and thus for any pragmatist account of the content of belief. Although it is obvious that behaviour caused by desires reflects their content, since this behaviour is bound to be a joint effect of the subject's beliefs and desires, it is not easy to extract from an account of it a specification of the content of the operative desire without presumptions about the content of operative beliefs,—which is what the pragmatist needs. But, as a first approximation, this can be provided by reference to that effect whose achievement by action caused by a desire causes the desire to cease; for this feature of an effect of a desire reflects only the content of the desire and not those of the beliefs which also helped to produce it. This account will not quite work, for it is not the actual achievement of such an effect which puts an end to a desire, but the subject's perception of this achievement; so an account of perceptual content, still independent of belief, must also be provided. For this, however, I think we can have recourse to a teleological version of indicator semantics: the content of a perception is that cause of the perception which it is the perception's proper function to indicate.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ For an account of perceptual content of this kind, cf. K. Sterelny *The Representational Theory of Mind* (Blackwell, Oxford: 1990) pp.124–7. In my account of the content of desires I largely follow J. Whyte except concerning the role of perception: cf. 'The Normal Rewards of Success' *Analysis* 51 (1991) pp.65–73.

I am well aware that this is over-simple; but it has been my aim only to sketch out the resources available within a naturalistic perspective in order to demonstrate the implausibility of the strong anti-naturalist thesis. Let me put these resources to work in a response to two arguments for the anti-naturalist thesis advanced by Boghassian⁴⁵. Boghassian's first argument is that the naturalist is committed to supposing that, for every concept, there are ideal conditions under which, if subjects judge that the concept is instantiated, they are right; and he objects that this looks like an unacceptable verificationist conclusion. It will be clear that the pragmatist approach employed here altogether avoids this commitment; for on this approach the content of a belief is defined by its potential contribution, if true, to the success of the behaviour it causes, so the only commitment is that the truth of belief should guarantee success.⁴⁶ Nor does the causal constraint on the content of belief introduce Boghassian's commitment; for this only requires that there be a causal explanation as to how a belief was acquired, and this does not imply that there are any special circumstances such that beliefs acquired under them are bound to be true.

Boghassian's second objection is that the holism of belief makes it impossible for the naturalist to identify the right conditions for the occurrence of one belief without reference to other beliefs, which contravenes the requirement that content be determined by purely naturalistic properties. The reply to this must be that there is no reason why the holism of belief should not be accounted for by a holism of causal roles. It is no objection to the assignment of functions to parts of the human anatomy that they only have their proper function within a human body in which most other parts have their proper function. Similarly, therefore, it is no objection to the assignment of content to a belief as a mark of its distinctive causal role that that state only has this causal role within a system of interconnections between such states in which other states have related roles.⁴⁷

At this point we encounter Pettit's point that even if a naturalistic account of the content of beliefs and desires can be provided, it does not follow that the self-conscious intentionality of beings such as ourselves can be comprehended within such an account.⁴⁸ The great chain of physical being somehow snaps just before it encompasses our own self-conscious common sense psychology. From a Darwinian perspective this seems a strange position to take up, but one can suppose that the concept of

⁴⁵ P. Boghassian op. cit. pp.538–40.

⁴⁶ This commitment is not unproblematic, as where one attempts the impossible. But these cases can be excluded by restricting attention to cases in which subjects can succeed.

⁴⁷ cf. R. Van Gulick 'Functionalism, Information and Content' reprinted in *Mind and Cognition* ed. W.G. Lycan (Blackwell, Oxford: 1990) esp.pp.118ff.

⁴⁸ cf. Pettit op.cit. pp.1–2.

meaning, and others that we employ in describing our own intentionality, are not straightforward explanatory concepts at all. But what reasons are there, connected with the rule-following arguments, for supposing this to be true? As I have already argued, it is not sufficient just to invoke the alleged normativity of the concept of meaning; further argument is needed to show that one cannot provide naturalistic accounts of the semantic connections between language and the world presupposed by the hypothetical imperatives of linguistic understanding.

The reason directly associated with the rule-following discussion is that of the alleged indeterminacy of meaning. Kripke's famous arithmetical example is intended to show that because all the natural facts associated with the past use of a word do not uniquely determine the truth-conditions of its future use, these truth-conditions, and thus the meaning of the word, are left indeterminate by the natural facts.⁴⁹ But once we have admitted, in line with rejection of the strong anti-naturalist thesis, that there are natural facts concerning the content of someone's non-linguistic beliefs, desires, and intentions, it is not easy to see how radical indeterminacy enters in once linguistic intentions are introduced. For the obvious naturalistic response to Kripke's argument is to appeal to the beliefs and intentions of speakers in order to specify what they mean.

IV

These are rather brief remarks, doubtless too brief to be persuasive. But rather than pursue that debate, I want now to confess that I too, under Kripke's influence, have had that 'eerie feeling' when contemplating the rule-following argument that 'the entire idea of meaning vanishes into thin air'.⁵⁰ Am I bound, as a robust defender of a naturalistic philosophy of language, to dismiss this feeling as a mere illusion? I think not. Kripke presents his arguments as *sceptical*. Now, as I am well aware, the sceptical style of argument is employed by Kripke only as an artifice of exposition; he writes that 'merely epistemological scepticism is *not* in question.'⁵¹ But suppose one were to make this the question? That is, suppose we introduce a gruesome possibility—that the meaning of 'David Holdcroft' is such that in future the name refers to Margaret Thatcher—and now ask ourselves, how can we tell that this possibility is mistaken? Does a commitment to the kind of naturalistic philosophy of language I have been defending

⁴⁹ Kripke op.cit. pp.38–9.

⁵⁰ Kripke op. cit. pp.21–2.

⁵¹ Kripke op. cit. p.39.

provide us with an answer to this sceptical challenge? If the first part of this lecture is correct, we should be prepared for a negative answer. For the naturalistic philosophy of language is an application of metaphysical naturalism, and I argued that metaphysical naturalism remains vulnerable to sceptical arguments. But the issue here needs to be examined on its own merits.

Once it is 'merely epistemological scepticism' that is at issue, the dialectical strategy will be somewhat different from that followed by Kripke's sceptic, who is permitted to occupy God's point of view. For the metaphysical naturalist does claim that there are facts, presumably accessible from that point of view, which render meaning determinate. Instead, the sceptical thought worms its way into the first-person point of view of each of us to destroy our confidence that we know what we mean. For, once gruesome possibilities are introduced, and recognised to be consistent with all our past practice, how are we to eliminate them? Did we intend to convey beliefs about the addition of two numbers when we employed the plus sign—or was it beliefs about their quaddition? Did we intend to convey the belief that the grass is green when we used the word 'green'—or the belief that it is *grue*? Once we entertain these sceptical possibilities we find that the semantic and intentional facts have been obscured behind a gruesome veil. The situation of the sceptical thought itself is then, admittedly, rather delicate: for it implies that it itself is located behind the veil. But I do not think that we should regard this as showing that the sceptical thought is self-defeating; as elsewhere, the sceptical strategy can be formulated as a *reductio ad absurdum* of our pre-sceptical self-confidence.

What resources are then available to the subject to enable her to exhibit the sceptical doubt as unreasonable? There is perhaps content-less introspective evidence—sensations, imagery, and unspoken words. But, for reasons which Wittgenstein stressed, none of this evidence has determinate implications for semantic hypotheses.⁵² What, however, about the facts in terms of which the naturalistic account of intentional content was set out in the previous section? Entertaining gruesome possibilities does not seem to give us reason to doubt our ability to gain knowledge of these facts. Hence, it would seem, metaphysical naturalism does in this case provide the subject with resources to cope with a sceptical argument.

The trouble with this response is that without some antecedent understanding of our own beliefs and intentions, we lack the ability to conduct rational inquiries into, among other things, the content of our own thoughts. For rational inquiry involves the adoption of hypotheses

⁵² cf. e.g. L. Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations* sections 141, 154.

and their scrutiny in the light of evidence. Yet how can I follow such a procedure without some presumptions concerning what hypothesis I do, in fact, entertain? If I cannot rule out gruesome interpretations of a hypothesis concerning my own thoughts, I cannot conduct any rational inquiries to determine what I am thinking. The third-person route to self-knowledge offered by the metaphysical naturalist's account of intentional content turns out to be illusory; for we cannot pursue such a route without an understanding of our thoughts as we attempt to direct our inquiries along it. Since, *ex hypothesi*, we start off with no such understanding, we can learn nothing about ourselves that way. Hence we need to have a way of acquiring this self-understanding without relying on the kinds of inquiry characteristic of the third-person route to knowledge of oneself. It is therefore a mistake for Dennett and Millikan to attack this claim, which they call 'meaning rationalism', as a misguided relic of Cartesianism, to be abandoned by all true naturalisers.⁵³ In the face of sceptical argument the 'meaning rationalist' claim is certainly problematic. But to abandon it is to abandon all hope of avoiding the sceptical conclusion that we have no knowledge of our own thoughts and meanings.

My previous discussion will indicate which type of response to this sceptical challenge I favour—the Humean epistemic naturalist's response of invoking our spontaneous beliefs about our thoughts and meanings. Although I am again not concerned to argue for an interpretative thesis, this is, I think, part of the response that Wittgenstein himself favoured. In a famous paragraph in his *Philosophical Investigations* he wrote

- 217 'How am I able to obey a rule?'—if this is not a question about causes, then it is about the justification for my following the rule in the way I do. If I have exhausted the justifications I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: 'This is simply what I do'.

It is worth noting that in this passage Wittgenstein allows that there can be a 'causal' question about rule-following distinct from the issue of justification. This distinction fits well with my view that the sceptical challenge in this area is epistemological, concerning questions of justification, and not metaphysical; Wittgenstein does not deny that there is a causal story about rule-following.

When discussing the epistemic naturalist strategy before, I emphasised that it was not enough just to invoke spontaneous cognitive dispositions; if a title to objective knowledge is to be made defensible, then the subject needs to be able to develop these dispositions into a reflectively coherent conception of the world and her place in it which incorporates

⁵³ Dennett (1987) *op.cit.* p.313; Millikan (1984) *op.cit.* pp.91–3.

something along the lines of the account of these dispositions offered by the metaphysical naturalist. So, where this strategy is applied to the case in hand, it implies that we can vindicate our attributions of non-inferential self-knowledge where we can combine our spontaneous self-ascriptions of thoughts and meanings with our understanding of the world and our situation to develop a psychology which shows how it is only to be expected that we should have this kind of self-knowledge. Such a theory seems bound to attribute to us an 'inner sense', whereby we can gain reliable, though not infallible, beliefs about our own mental states. This hypothesis is, however, liable to arouse considerable hostility from those who think that it is just a hangover from the Cartesian tradition; so it is worth looking briefly at two alternative accounts of self-knowledge. Once one appreciates how unsatisfactory they are, it is, I think, easier to become reconciled to the inner sense model.

Wright, who holds that the rule-following arguments undermine the naturalistic conception of meaning and content presupposed by the 'inner sense' model, has proposed an account of self-knowledge based upon an analogy with the familiar secondary-quality conception of colours.⁵⁴ He argues that, because, according to this conception, the fact of an object's being blue 'is constitutively' the fact that under cognitively ideal conditions we are disposed to judge it to be blue, our judgments of colour have a privileged status in determining what colours things actually are. Similarly, therefore, according to Wright we should account for the authoritative status of our first-person attributions of thought by assigning to these judgments a similar 'extension-determining' role. We should not think of a subject's intentions as 'some *independently constituted* system which the subject's opinions at best reflect'; instead 'what determines the distribution of truth-values among ascriptions of intention to a subject who has the conceptual resources to understand these resources and is attentive to them are, in the first instance, nothing but the details of the subject's self-conception in relevant respects'.⁵⁵

This account obviously challenges the account of mental content I have espoused, but if it were to provide a satisfactory account of self-knowledge that would be a reason for rethinking the matter. I do not think, however, that Wright's proposal will work. One difficulty concerns the attribution of beliefs and intentions to lower animals who lack the capacity to attribute them to themselves. On Wright's account it would seem that these attributions get their sense from counterfactuals concerning the content of the self-attributions that these animals would make had they

⁵⁴ Wright (1989) op.cit. pp.246ff.

⁵⁵ Wright (1989) op. cit. p.253.

the capacity to do so. This seems to tie the employment of these concepts to nursery tales; yet serious animal ethologists employ them to explain animal behaviour without any such fantasies. Another difficulty is that if the constitutive account is to work, the ideal conditions under which the subject's self-attributions have their constitutive role must themselves be independent of the subject's thoughts; but since (as Wright himself notes) one of the cognitively ideal conditions is the absence of self-deception, it is not clear how this requirement is to be met. But the fatal difficulty is that an infinite regress arises concerning the content of judgment, or belief. On Wright's account, the content of a belief is determined by the subject's judgment, under ideal conditions, as to what she believes. How then is the content of this judgment determined? On Wright's account, it can only be by a higher-order judgment concerning that judgment—and so on. This regress is vicious: at each level we find a judgment (actual or potential) whose content depends on the content of a higher-level judgment (actual or potential). Thus, in seeking to determine the content of a bottom-level belief, we are referred progressively up the hierarchy with no prospect of relief; we never, so to speak, find a firm hand-hold.⁵⁶

A different approach is proposed by Davidson. He has argued that the process of radical interpretation, through which (according to him) meaning and intentional content are determined, presupposes that speakers normally know what they mean; and since we can also assume that speakers normally know which sentences they hold true, we can conclude that they normally know what they believe.⁵⁷ As with Wright's proposal, Davidson's position conflicts with the naturalistic philosophy of mind I have defended. But where Wright is neo-Lockean, Davidson is neo-Kantian; on his view the radical interpreter, like the Kantian understanding, brings her a priori principles to make sense of physical behaviour that is not meaningful simply in virtue of its physical properties, since, according to Davidson, there are no psychophysical laws. Attributions of meaning and intentional content have, therefore, always to be understood with reference to the perspective of a potential interpreter; and since, Davidson argues, such an interpreter must presume that her subjects, the native speakers, normally know what they mean, we arrive at an account of self-knowledge without relying on the inner sense model.

Davidson's approach appears vulnerable to the regress argument

⁵⁶ Suppose, somehow, that the account of colour was such that the colour of something depended upon the colour of a subject's judgment concerning the thing's colour: then a similar vicious regress would apply to the account of colour.

⁵⁷ D. Davidson 'First Person Authority' *Dialectica* 38 (1984) pp.101–11; 'Knowing One's Own Mind' *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 1987 pp.441–58.

that undermines Wright's account. For Davidson makes the content of native thoughts dependent upon those attributed to them by the radical interpreter. But how, then, is the content of the latter's interpretative attributions determined? Again, we seem to be pointed upwards to ever higher meta-interpretations with no prospect of relief. Furthermore Davidson's main argument for his position is, I think, unpersuasive. Davidson wants to establish, without relying on any antecedent presumption of self-knowledge, an asymmetry thesis—'a presumption that speakers, but not their interpreters, are not wrong about what their words mean'.⁵⁸ But this thesis fails to take account of the fact that most language is not simply expressive; instead speakers choose the words which they believe will enable their audience to grasp whatever they wish to communicate, and they can be mistaken about the meaning of the words they thus employ. A visitor to a foreign country who wants to order a cup of coffee is not well advised simply to make this request in his own tongue and hope that the natives catch on: he would do much better to listen to the natives and try to copy their words when, as he thinks, they are ordering a cup of coffee. Clearly, in this latter situation there is no presumption that the speaker knows what he means.

Perhaps Davidson's reliance upon knowledge of language, whose meaning is in some degree a social, and not merely individual, phenomenon, can be omitted; one might well argue that interpreters are bound to presume that those whom they can make sense of as rational agents possess considerable self-knowledge. Yet this now looks like an unhelpful conditional; if rationality implies self-knowledge then ascription of the former implies ascription of the latter. But this does nothing to show what makes it correct or not to make sense of a being as rational, or possessed of self-knowledge. It seems to me, therefore, that Davidson's account of self-knowledge is no more satisfactory than Wright's, and this failure lends support to the view that self-knowledge can only be adequately substantiated within the metaphysical naturalist's model of an inner sense.

The question that remains, therefore, is how this model should be developed. This is essentially a task for cognitive psychologists, and not philosophers, but a crucial move towards rendering this model acceptable was made by Armstrong, when he compared introspection to the 'silent' bodily senses, such as proprioception.⁵⁹ The traditional 'Cartesian' conception of introspection as an inner analogue of vision, the inner eye, is vulnerable to the objections that there is no organ of introspection, nor any

⁵⁸ Davidson (1984) op.cit. p.110.

⁵⁹ D.M. Armstrong *A Materialist Theory of Mind* (Routledge, London: 1968) ch.15.

characteristic introspective experience comparable to visual experience. But once the comparison is made with proprioception, which provides us with beliefs about our body without any organ that we can control or much in the way of sense-experience, the idea of introspection should be less troubling. It should be understood as a capacity we possess to acquire beliefs about our own mental states, and given the advantages to us of such a capacity, which is essential for rational reflection, it ought not to be mysterious from a naturalistic perspective that we have developed it, even if we remain largely ignorant how in fact it is accomplished. Thus although faith in such a capacity remains to a considerable extent a cheque drawn on the metaphysical naturalist's account that cannot yet be cashed, it is not unreasonable for the epistemic naturalist to write such a cheque in presenting his response to the argument of the Kripkean sceptic. My conclusion here, therefore, is that just as before my two types of naturalism need each other.