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RADICAL SCEPTICISM, EPISTEMOLOGICAL EXTERNALISM, AND “HINGE” PROPOSITIONS

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ABSTRACT. A certain interpretation of Wittgenstein’s remarks in *On Certainty*—advanced by such figures as Hilary Putnam, Peter Strawson, Avrum Stroll and Crispin Wright—has become common currency in the recent literature. In particular, this reading focuses upon the supposed anti-sceptical import of the Wittgensteinian notion of a “hinge” proposition. In this paper it is argued that this interpretation is flawed both on the grounds that there is insufficient textual support for this reading and that, in any case, it leads to unpalatable philosophical problems. Moreover, it is claimed that the popularity of this construal of *On Certainty* in the contemporary debate reflects an implicit commitment to the contentious doctrine of epistemological internalism. Nevertheless, it is argued that, suitably modified along the epistemologically externalist lines suggested by Michael Williams, one might be able to resurrect a viable anti-sceptical hinge proposition thesis. Furthermore, it is claimed that such a conception of the notion also receives some, albeit inconclusive, textual support from *On Certainty*.

I

In his final notebooks, published as *On Certainty* (henceforth, ‘OC’), Wittgenstein offers a sustained (though fragmentary) examination of a number of epistemological issues. Central to this examination is his conception of a certain type of proposition that performs a peculiar epistemic role. One of the ways in which Wittgenstein characterises this sort of proposition is through the metaphor of the “hinge”:

[...] 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. (OC §§341-3)¹

As this quotation indicates, what is odd about these propositions is that, unlike other seemingly empirical propositions, our belief in them does not seem to either stand in need of evidential buttress or, for that matter, be legitimately prone to coherent doubt. And this property is not explained merely by the fact that these propositions are “*in deed* not doubted”, since the situation is rather that we do not doubt them because, in some sense, we *ought* not to doubt them. Even despite their lack of sufficient evidential support, their immunity to coherent doubt

is part of “the logic of our scientific investigations.”

In proposing this notion Wittgenstein was explicitly challenging the conventional epistemological wisdom that a belief is only legitimately held if it is sufficiently evidentially grounded (otherwise it is open to legitimate doubt), and that *no* belief in an empirical proposition is beyond coherent doubt should the grounds for that belief be found wanting. In particular, Wittgenstein’s remarks here were primarily targeted at G. E. Moore’s (1925; 1939) famous “common-sense” response to the sceptic, so it is worthwhile beginning our commentary there.

Crudely put, the radical sceptic argues as follows:

- (1) I do not know that I am not the victim of a radical sceptical hypothesis.
- (2) If I do not know that I am not the victim of a radical sceptical hypothesis, then I cannot know any one of a wide class of ‘everyday’ propositions (propositions that I typically take myself to know).

Hence:

- (C) I cannot know any one of a wide class of everyday propositions.

Consider, for example, how this template works when the relevant sceptical hypothesis is specified as the ‘brain-in-a-vat’ (BIV) hypothesis that I might be a disembodied brain ‘hooked-up’ to a computer which is ‘generating’ my current experiences (e.g., Putnam 1981, chapter 1; Pollock 1986, 1-12). It certainly seems plausible to claim that I cannot know that I am not a BIV. After all, there is, *ex hypothesi*, nothing in my present experience that could possibly conclusively indicate to me that I was not at present envatted as the sceptic imagines. One might reasonably argue, therefore, that I lack sufficient evidence for my belief in the denial of this sceptical hypothesis, and thus that I do not know the denial of this sceptical hypothesis. Moreover, since I know that if I were a BIV then many of the everyday propositions which I believe (such as, ‘I am currently sitting down’) would be false, it also seems to follow that my lack of knowledge of the denial of this hypothesis results in my lacking knowledge of a whole range of everyday propositions (we shall explore the underlying motivation for this claim in a moment). Accordingly, it would appear that I do not know many of the everyday propositions that I ordinarily take myself to know after all.

The opposing move in this respect—commonly known, for reasons that shall soon become apparent, as the *Moorean* move—is to respond to this *modus tollens* argument by arguing *modus ponens*:

- (1) I do know a particular everyday proposition.
- (2) If I know this everyday proposition then I must know that I am not the victim of a radical sceptical hypothesis.

Hence:

(C) I know that I am not the victim of a radical sceptical hypothesis.

It is in this vein that Moore claimed that, *contra* the sceptic, he knew certain propositions that were typically thought to be open to sceptical doubt. In particular, Moore famously ‘proved’ the existence of the external world (and thus the denial of any sceptical hypothesis designed to show that there was no such world), by simply gesturing with his one hand and saying ‘Here is one hand’, and then gesturing with the other and saying ‘And here is another’. Since, he claimed, he had established that he knew that he had two hands—and thus that two ‘external’ objects existed—so he had thereby established that he knew there was an external world as well. Moore regarded this as being a perfectly “rigorous” proof, reminding us that

[...] we all of us do constantly take proofs of this sort as absolutely conclusive proofs of certain conclusions—as finally settling certain questions, as to which we were previously in doubt. (Moore 1939, 147)

To illustrate this he gives the example of proving that there are at least three misprints on a page. To settle this question we simply look for one, then another, and then another. If this is an adequate ‘proof’ of the contested proposition in this context, then why should the gesturing of one’s hands be deficient in response to the sceptic? So Moore answers the sceptical challenge by straightforwardly *affirming* various contested propositions along with the empirical grounds he possesses which justify this belief. He also offers a further *caveat*: that, at the very least, the truth of these propositions is more certain than the soundness of any sceptical argument which is intended to counter our belief in them.²

So whereas the sceptic argues from doubt of a general anti-sceptical proposition, concerning, say, our relationship to the external world, to doubt of a class of everyday propositions which presuppose the truth of this anti-sceptical proposition, the ‘Moorean’ style of response is to argue from a putative instance of knowledge of one of the contested everyday propositions to knowledge of the general anti-sceptical proposition. One of the key components of Wittgenstein’s critique of this approach is the claim that in arguing in this way Moore has misdescribed our epistemic practice by treating a hinge proposition as if it were just straightforwardly empirical. Wittgenstein focuses upon Moore’s claim to know P, “I have two hands”, in this respect. Moore says that he knows P and, furthermore, that his knowledge of this proposition is evidentially supported (he says that he can *see* that he has two hands and so forth). This initial contention that Moore makes is pivotal because once this knowledge claim is secured, the anti-sceptical conclusion follows relatively unproblematically. If one *does* know that one has two hands (and knows that having hands entails that there is an external world),

then, intuitively at least, one must know that there is an external world, or that one is not a (handless) BIV (cf. OC §1). Crucially, however, as Wittgenstein argues throughout *On Certainty*, one cannot properly claim to *know* a hinge proposition.

For instance, Wittgenstein argues that the evidential grounds that Moore adduces to support his knowledge of P are entirely irrelevant. What makes P certain, and therefore exempt from doubt, is not the fact that it enjoys a high degree of evidential support,³ but rather that it performs a framework role in normal circumstances. It is because P performs this role that we are unwilling to let anything count against it, since whatever could count against it could be no more certain than P itself.

Equally, however, it is mistaken to think, as Moore does, that our belief in P is evidentially grounded. As Wittgenstein stresses, if evidence is to be coherently thought of as counting as a ground for belief in a certain proposition, then that evidence must be regarded as being more certain than the belief itself. The trouble is, this is not possible in the case of a hinge proposition such as P because *nothing* is more certain than this proposition in normal circumstances. Here is Wittgenstein:

My having two hands is, in normal circumstances, as certain as anything that I could produce in evidence for it.

That is why I am not in a position to take the sight of my hand as evidence for it. (OC §250)

Moore's belief in P cannot be coherently thought of as grounded by the sight of his hands (as he alleges), since it is not plausible to think that he is more certain of his sight than he is of the existence of his hands. This is illustrated by the fact that if one were to seriously doubt something so certain as whether or not one had hands, then why should one trust the evidence of one's sight? If, in normal circumstances, the former is open to doubt, then so, surely, is the latter (OC §125). The idea, then, is that we cannot view these sorts of propositions as being on an epistemic par with ordinary empirical propositions that can be both evidentially grounded and coherently doubted.

Wittgenstein thus distinguishes between the non-epistemically grounded features of our practices which exempt hinge propositions such as P from doubt, and those epistemic features which support the use of epistemic terms such as "justified" and "know".⁴ In particular, he notes that the practice of acquiring epistemic support for one's beliefs *presupposes* one's acceptance of certain hinge propositions. As a consequence, one cannot coherently acquire epistemic support for one's belief in a hinge proposition. Moore's mistake thus lies, in the first instance, in his failure to realise that the privileged role that P plays which makes it exempt from coherent doubt (in normal circumstances) and thereby apparently suitable for his use in a

proof of the existence of the external world, is the very sort of role that excludes it from coherently entering into an epistemic evaluation.

By way of illustration of this point, consider Wittgenstein's critique of Moore's choice of P as an instance of an empirical proposition that entails the existence of the external world. Moore's contention seems to be that *any* empirical proposition which was sufficiently grounded and which entailed the existence of an external world would do, and this, Wittgenstein alleges, reveals a lack of understanding of the sort of epistemic role that a proposition like P can play. For instance, why does Moore not use a proposition concerning the existence of another planet?:

"Doubting the existence of the external world" does not mean for example doubting the existence of a planet, which later observations proved to exist. —Or does Moore want to say that knowing that here is a hand is different in kind from knowing the existence of the planet Saturn? Otherwise it would be possible to point out the discovery of the planet Saturn to the doubters and say that its existence has been proved, and hence the existence of the external world as well. (OC §20)

It would indeed be ridiculous to try to prove the existence of the external world on this astronomical basis in any way that would convince the sceptic. This provokes the challenge of why this should be so since, absent a relevant distinction between the epistemic status of our beliefs about Saturn and about the existence of our hands, it appears that either of these propositions should be able to serve the purpose equally well. Intuitively, the only relevant difference is that a proposition like P has *more* evidential support, and thus that it is this feature of our belief that enables it to play the foundational role that Moore had in mind. This contention is problematic, however, since insofar as one regards one's belief in P as possessing sufficient evidential support, then why should one find the evidential support accorded to one's belief in the existence of Saturn lacking? That is, the evidential distinction between these two propositions reflects, at best, a difference of degree, and therefore fails to explain the apparent difference in *kind* at work here.

Wittgenstein's diagnosis of this situation is to argue that the reason why Moore does not mobilise his belief in the existence of Saturn (or any other non-hinge empirical belief for that matter) in the face of scepticism is precisely because this is a proposition that has *mere* evidential support. His use of P, on the other hand, is meant to reflect the fact that there is a class of pivotal propositions which are accorded a degree of certainty that is independent of a evidential grounding. Moore is not certain of P because he has excellent grounds for his belief in P (since no item of evidence is certain enough to ground the 'super-certainty' attached to this belief), but rather because the role that this proposition plays in our epistemic practices is

such that it lies outwith the arena of epistemic evaluation. This is meant to be illustrated by how doubt of the existence of the planet Saturn is entirely different from doubt concerning the existence of one's hand, where the difference is not simply one of degree (as if the latter were merely supported by a greater amount of evidence):

For it is not true that a mistake gets more and more improbable as we pass from the planet to my own hand. No: at some point it has ceased to be conceivable. (OC §54)

Unlike doubt about the existence of Saturn, doubting whether or not I have hands is, in normal circumstances, utterly inconceivable. In the first instance this is because, due to the framework role that hinges play, to doubt this proposition is thereby to doubt *most* of our beliefs (which are less certain than P) *all at once* (cf. OC §§370, 490, 613). In the second, it is because just as nothing can empirically ground belief in this proposition, so nothing can ground *doubt* in it either, since whatever could constitute a ground for doubt would always be more open to doubt than P itself. As a result, the doubt of P, unlike doubt in the existence of Saturn, would be of an entirely *arbitrary* nature.⁵

Furthermore, Wittgenstein contends that the unusual circumstances in which a proposition like P does play an everyday empirical role which is akin to a proposition about the existence of Saturn, it is entirely irrelevant to the sceptical debate (OC §§23, 347, 349, 387, 412, 483-4, 526, 596, 622). An example of such an abnormal circumstance would be where someone has just stumbled out of the debris of an explosion without any feeling of his hands. In such cases, P fails to perform a hinge role since in these abnormal cases P would no longer be accorded the degree of certainty that is typically reserved for it. As a result, one could properly claim knowledge of such a proposition on evidential grounds (one could, for instance, coherently use one's sight in order to check to see that one's hands are still intact). Crucially, however, Moore's claim to know P is not made in such an abnormal circumstance, for if it were then it would be odd that he should take such a belief to offer sufficient grounds to support his belief in the existence of an external world. Moore is thus caught in a bind. Either his belief in P is completely certain as he claims, in which case P is a hinge proposition and so not a candidate for the requisite epistemic evaluation; or P is a candidate for an epistemic evaluation, in which case it lacks the special property of being a hinge proposition which is treated as absolutely certain.

Wittgenstein expands upon this train of thought by offering the following general remarks concerning what qualifies as an appropriate use of the expression "to know" according to the rules of "normal linguistic interchange" (OC §260). This is meant to support the

contention that saying that one knows a hinge proposition is not analogous to merely asserting something which, though true, is superfluous, but rather akin to someone saying “good morning” in the middle of a conversation (OC §464; cf. OC §350). In short, it offends against the *grammar* of epistemological claims (OC §§10, 111-2, 116, 151, 243, 347-50, 372, 414, 461, 468-9, 576).⁶

Wittgenstein argues, for instance, that one can only properly claim first-person knowledge when one is in a position to say *how* one knows.⁷ But since hinge propositions are not evidentially grounded, this can never be adequately done (OC §§14ff., 23, 438, 441, 483-4, 550-1, 564, 574, 576). Imagine, for example, that one attempted to legitimate one’s claim to know P by appealing to the evidence that one has for P; regarding what one sees and what one has been told in this respect and so forth. In what way is this explanation to serve any role if all the evidence adduced in support of P is itself less secure than P? As Wittgenstein puts the matter:

One says “I know” when one is ready to give compelling grounds. “I know” relates to a possibility of demonstrating the truth. Whether someone knows something can come to light, assuming that he is convinced of it.

But if what he believes is of such a kind that the grounds he can give are no surer than his assertion, then he cannot say that he knows what he believes. (OC §243)

As we have seen, one of the distinguishing features of a hinge proposition is that nothing (at least in normal circumstances) is more certain than it, and so there is no parcel of evidence available which would be able to serve this supporting function. Accordingly, Wittgenstein says that instead of saying that he *knows* a proposition like P, Moore should have more honestly claimed that such a proposition “stands fast for me” (OC §116; cf. OC §253).⁸

In a related vein, Wittgenstein argues that one can only properly claim first-person knowledge when that claim has the potential to be *informative*, and this condition is clearly not met in the case of a hinge proposition. Moore only knows P (if he does) provided that (*mutatis mutandis*) everyone else does as well. Accordingly, Moore’s use of the *caveat* “I know ...” is at best misleading since it generates the implicature that Moore has some special access to the epistemic buttress of the embedded proposition that others lack.⁹

In general, then, Wittgenstein argues that a proper assertion of first-person knowledge implies (in the standard case) both that one has sufficient evidential grounds which can support one’s claim—(which are, for instance, more certain than the belief in question)—and that these grounds are peculiar to one’s vantage point. Both of these attributes are lacking when one claims to know a hinge proposition.¹⁰

II

A certain reading of Wittgenstein's remarks in this respect, which supplements the core thesis outlined above in a number of interesting ways, has gained common currency in recent years. This interpretation—what I shall refer to as the “non-epistemic” interpretation—has appeared, for instance, in the work of such distinguished figures as Peter Strawson (1985, chapter 1), Crispin Wright (1985; 1991), Hilary Putnam (1992, chapter 8), and Avrum Stroll (1994, *passim*). Essentially, this reading adds two further claims to those just canvassed, neither of which seems, at first glance at any rate, to be the least bit contentious.

The first is that Wittgenstein's remarks on hinge propositions which, as we have just seen, are primarily aimed at undermining the Moorean response to the sceptic, can be put into service against radical scepticism itself. Such a claim seems eminently reasonable. After all, if one can charge Moore with misconstruing our use of epistemic terms by claiming to know hinge propositions, then surely we can also convict the sceptic of a similar crime by attempting to doubt those same hinge propositions.

The second is that it follows from the fact that these hinge propositions lack sufficient evidential grounds and cannot properly be claimed to be known, that they are in fact *unknowable*. Again, this seems like a perfectly plausible claim to make given the textual support available, for is not the availability of sufficient evidential grounds a necessary condition for knowledge possession? Moreover, are not the propriety conditions for a claim to know often a reliable guide as to the truth-conditions of what is claimed, so that where one is unable to properly claim to know a proposition one usually does not know that proposition?

With these two (often unstated) extra claims in play, however, one ends up with a rather distinctive and, I think, problematic epistemological thesis. Part of the difficulty rests with the fact that this reading of Wittgenstein is meant to constitute a *refutation*—as opposed, for instance, to a *dismissal*—of the problem of radical scepticism. In this regard, the core idea is that the hinge propositions are those statements which express the denials of sceptical hypotheses - such as that there is an external world (e.g., Strawson 1985, chapter 1; Wright 1985; Stroll 1994, *passim*), or that we are not either in a state of perpetual slumber or BIVs (e.g., Wright 1991).¹¹ Whereas the sceptic claims that unless I can exclude the sceptical possibility that I am, for instance, a BIV, then I am not in a position to know that, say, I am currently sitting down (and a host of other everyday propositions), the anti-sceptic we are envisaging here maintains that the fact that I am unable to know that I am not a BIV should not

in any way prejudice the legitimacy of my believing that I am not a BIV, and thus my presupposing the truth of this proposition in my everyday beliefs. Accordingly, on this view our knowledge of everyday propositions is secure *even despite* the lack of evidential grounds we have to support our belief in the denials of sceptical hypotheses.

Consider, however, the manner in which this thesis impacts upon the highly intuitive ‘closure’ principle for knowledge, which states, roughly, that if you know a proposition, P, and you know that P entails a second proposition, Q, then you also know Q. The sceptic contraposes on this principle when he argues that if you fail to know that you are not the victim of a sceptical hypothesis of some description (e.g., the BIV hypothesis), then, given that you know that most everyday propositions (such as the proposition which states that you are currently sitting down) entail the denial of this hypothesis, so it follows that you also fail to know any of these everyday propositions either. The problem, however, is that if you endorse the non-epistemic reading of hinge propositions then you must thereby give-up this intuitive principle. After all, according to this interpretation of hinge propositions, one can know an everyday proposition (such as that one is currently seated), know that this entails the denial of a sceptical hypothesis (such as that one is a BIV), and yet *not* know the denial of the sceptical hypothesis (because it is a hinge proposition and so unknowable).¹²

Textual evidence for the view is further undermined by its selective use of hinge propositions. Indeed, this thesis only counts a proposition as a hinge insofar as it fits neatly into the debate with the radical sceptic by being the denial of a radical sceptical hypothesis (such as, “There is an external world”). The problem is that most of the propositions which Wittgenstein seemed to regard as being hinges—from “I have two hands”, to “Every human being has parents” (e.g., OC §211)—do not share this characteristic.

The contemporary reading of the notion of a “hinge” proposition is thus highly problematic, both as an anti-sceptical thesis and as a plausible rendering of Wittgenstein’s position. One moral that might be drawn from this is that we should not expect too much from such anti-sceptical ‘interpretations’ of the Wittgensteinian position in this respect. After all, their source is a fragmentary notebook, not a polished text and, besides, Wittgenstein was not noted for any anti-sceptical fervour. I think that this is right, and in what follows I will endeavour to not lean too heavily on exegesis, whether it favours or counters the position I propose. What I will suggest, however, is that a cogent anti-sceptical stance can be wrought from the notion of a hinge proposition, whether it was Wittgenstein’s conception of this notion or not. Moreover, I shall argue that, insofar as we look to the authority of *On Certainty* at all,

there is just as much in that text to support this account of hinge propositions than there is to support its competing, non-epistemic, interpretation.

III

In order to see how such a different account of hinge propositions can be given, it is necessary to first consider Michael Williams' (1991) ingenious rendering of this thesis since it constitutes a mid-way position between the non-epistemic account and the view I favour.¹³ Essentially, what Williams has attempted to achieve in recent work is an account of hinge propositions which combines both a commitment to closure with an acceptance of at least the key elements of the non-epistemic thesis. He does this by advancing a form of contextualism that holds that:

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

Williams thus maintains that there is a multiplicity of contexts which are individuated both by their inferential structure (what stands fast with respect to what), and what is taken for granted in that context (i.e., its hinge propositions or, as Williams (1991, 121-5) describes them, its "methodological necessities").

Crucially, Williams claims that one can never evaluate a hinge proposition because in doing so one changes the context and therefore turns the hinge proposition into an ordinary empirical proposition. In particular, he argues that the kind of hinge propositions that hold fast in everyday contexts hold fast precisely because we don't question them. If we were to question them then we would leave the everyday context and enter the context of sceptical inquiry that does not take *these* propositions for granted (though it does take certain theoretical claims as given). And once they are brought forward for attention there is no defence that one can reasonably give and thus they become unknown. Nevertheless, that the sceptic can create a context in which we lack knowledge does not mean that we lack knowledge in everyday contexts. As Williams puts the matter:

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

Accordingly, closure holds. In everyday contexts agents are able to know the hinge propositions that are presupposed in their inquiry. Crucially, however, such knowledge must

remain forever tacit because to bring such propositions forth for evaluation is itself to enter a different epistemological context—that of traditional (i.e., non-contextualist) epistemology—and in this context the hinges are no longer taken for granted. We thus get a position that allows that hinge propositions are unknowable in certain sceptical contexts (a concession to the non-epistemic treatment of them), but which also accepts closure in such a fashion that we are able to know these propositions, albeit tacitly, in everyday contexts.

In order to see the workings of this thesis in more detail, consider the following example. Williams notes that one of the most incoherent elements of any denial of closure is that it appears to permit us to assert such incoherent conjunctions as “Napoleon was victorious at Austerlitz [... *but I do ...*] *not* know that the Earth existed at that time” (Williams 1991, 322). Williams evades this difficulty by arguing that in everyday contexts where our belief that the earth did not spring into existence five seconds ago (replete with the apparent traces of a distant ancestry) is tacit, we do know that proposition. In sceptical contexts, however, contexts in which this proposition ceases to be tacit because we bring it forth for attention, it is no longer known because we are now guided by the hinge propositions of traditional epistemology and by the lights of this sort of inquiry, argues Williams, we do know next to nothing. That this is so, however, does not mean that we do not know a great deal in everyday contexts, only that there is something amiss with the presuppositions of traditional epistemology. It is not as if, claims Williams, we are doing history in a more rigorous fashion when we consider the epistemic status of these presuppositional propositions. Rather, we have simply ceased to be doing history altogether and have begun to undertake a whole new type of investigation that is purely epistemological.¹⁴ The moral is thus that knowledge, whilst practically non-existent in sceptical contexts, is secure in everyday contexts. Closure thus holds provided that we do not equivocate between different epistemic contexts, and, in particular, between the everyday contexts in which quotidian and discourse-specific propositions are at issue against a back-drop of shared “hinge” assumptions, and the ‘sceptical’ context in which these shared assumptions are themselves up for evaluation.

We thus evade some of the difficulties—both philosophical and exegetical—that present themselves with the standard non-epistemic reading of hinge propositions. On the one hand, we can now retain the closure principle and thereby offer an epistemological thesis that seems to be genuinely anti-sceptical. On the other, by moving to a form of contextualism where contexts, and thus hinge propositions, can be individuated by disciplinary considerations, we can accommodate the fact that most of the examples of hinge propositions

that Wittgenstein offers are not the denials of radical sceptical hypotheses at all, but rather more mundane propositions that perform their hinge role only relative to a certain context of inquiry.

Despite the attractions of the Williams view, however, there is an anomaly in it. For if it is really true that there is something unsound about the context that the sceptic employs then why should it be that our engagement with the sceptic destroys our knowledge at all? In short, if scepticism is as theoretically questionable as Williams claims, then why should we concede anything to the sceptic, in *any* context?

This point is further supported by the fact that it is Williams' concession to the sceptic on this point that leads to one of the most counterintuitive elements of his position. Williams argues that his retention of closure in everyday contexts does not make him committed to the Moorean stance of arguing for anti-sceptical knowledge on the basis of everyday knowledge. His reason for this is that the very act of claiming knowledge in this way forces one into the very context in which one lacks such knowledge. He writes:

I didn't say that I could *claim to know* that I am not a brain in a vat. [...] All I said was that I do know all sorts of mundane facts; and that for as long as I know them, I know that various sceptical possibilities do not obtain. Claiming is another matter. (Williams 1991, 352)

What is interesting about such a thesis, however, is that it supposes that sometimes merely claiming knowledge can effect a change in context such that our erstwhile knowledge is destroyed. For what Moore does when he claims his anti-sceptical knowledge is mark a shift from an everyday context to one in which scepticism is at issue, and thus to one that involves the evaluation of the hinge propositions of quotidian contexts. Note, however, that all that has changed in the interim regarding Moore's epistemic position is the course of the conversation—other factors which are usually taken to influence the possession of knowledge, such as one's informational state, have remained the same. And yet he *has* lost knowledge. This is the bitter pill that the contextualist must swallow—that the very existence of knowledge can, at least sometimes, be dependent upon mere conversational factors.

That the answer to scepticism might require us to revise our intuitions somewhere is not in itself, however, all that surprising. Nevertheless, if there were a way of retaining the key anti-sceptical thesis without making such a counterintuitive move, then it would surely be wise to explore it. This is even more so given that the very resource that is needed to evade this consequence of the view seems to be implicit in Williams' own thesis. For if the sceptic's context can be rejected, and if one demurs from allowing that the possession of knowledge can

fluctuate in response to mere conversational or disciplinary factors, then one can argue that whether or not we know is fixed independently of mere contextual circumstances, whether sceptical or non-sceptical. And how is this achieved? By focussing on the very feature of our epistemic practices that Williams highlights—that sometimes *claiming* knowledge can be improper even though we have it. Accordingly, we argue that hinge propositions, if known at all, are always known. The problem with hinge propositions is thus not that they are sometimes unknown (in certain contexts), but that one can never coherently *claim* to know them. And since this is a distinction that Williams makes much of (and since he wants to dismiss out of hand the sceptical context of inquiry), this ought to be a proposal in keeping with the spirit of the account that Williams put forward. It is certainly worth exploring.

IV

What is interesting about such a thesis is that it does receive some textual support from *On Certainty*. We saw earlier that Wittgenstein's primary concern in *On Certainty* did not seem to be with the denial of scepticism so much as with the rejection of Moore's 'proof', and that his focus was on the propriety, or otherwise, of first-person claims to know rather than with the standard epistemological analysis of epistemic terms. Given that this is so, one might be tempted to argue that Wittgenstein's key interest in these notebooks, in line with his other later writings, was merely to identify the "grammar" of epistemic language-games. This is certainly an interpretation of the text that has a number of supporters. For example, Michael Kober (1996) has argued, that the primary aim of *On Certainty* was not to provide a "dissolution of scepticism", but rather:

[...] *a philosophically illuminating picture of the epistemic structure of language-games and their epistemically relevant settings.* (Kober 1996, 412, italics in the original)¹⁵

Kober's point is that *On Certainty* is less concerned with the epistemological question of what the conditions for knowledge are than with the wider issue—more contiguous with his remarks in earlier writings—of what the *rules for language-games that are conducted with epistemic terms are*. Of course, the two interpretations are not mutually exclusive, since one could regard these remarks on language-games as revealing commitments to fundamental aspects of epistemological doctrine. For example, one could understand Wittgenstein's contention that a proper first-person claim to know demands the ability to adduce sufficient grounds to support

that assertion as an epistemological thesis (e.g., OC §243).

Nevertheless, the issue is not whether Wittgenstein was engaged in such a debate at all, but rather what epistemological morals should be drawn from these remarks on epistemic language-games. Consider again the inference that the proponent of the non-epistemic thesis makes—that it follows from the fact that we are unable to offer sufficient grounds for our belief in a hinge proposition that we therefore do not know hinge propositions. Clearly, a direct consequence of this claim—at least given the further Wittgensteinian thesis that a proper first-person claim to know requires the ability to offer sufficient grounds—is that one cannot properly *claim* first-person knowledge of a hinge proposition. But does it necessarily follow that where you cannot properly *claim* to know, you cannot know?

For one thing, it is certainly an uncontentious fact that the conditions for proper assertion of first-person knowledge claims need not bear any necessary relation to the truth-conditions for knowledge possession. There will be occasions in which it is proper to claim knowledge even though one does not in fact know, just as there will be situations where to claim knowledge would be absurd even though what you claim would, nevertheless, be true. Given this hiatus between propriety conditions and truth conditions, it is therefore at least problematic to directly infer from Wittgenstein's widespread critique of first-person claims to know hinge propositions that Wittgenstein thought hinge propositions were unknowable.

Indeed, reflection on the nature of conversational implicature to our practice of claiming knowledge is relevant here. For our purposes, take a conversational implicature to be any inference which one is entitled to make upon hearing an assertion given that one is allowed to make certain assumptions about the agent making that assertion—that he is, for instance, honest, co-operative and (at least otherwise) rational. *Ceteris paribus*, if an agent's assertion carries a false implicature then it will be deemed improper even if the assertion is true, and even if the agent's grounds for belief in that assertion are sufficient to justify that belief.¹⁶

With this account of conversational implicature in mind, it could well be that when Wittgenstein argues that a first-person claim to know a hinge proposition is improper because one is unable to offer sufficient evidential grounds to support that claim he should merely be taken as arguing that the assertion is improper because it generates a false conversational implicature (that one can offer sufficient evidential grounds), not necessarily because what is asserted is false. *Contra* the “non-epistemic” interpretation of hinge propositions, then, one could take the Wittgensteinian point to be that one should not claim knowledge of hinge propositions not because such propositions are unknowable, but rather because such a claim to

know would always contravene the purely social rules encapsulated in an account of conversational implicatures.

These remarks about conversational implicature also bring out another salient point, which concerns the manner in which certain epistemologically internalist intuitions are informing the non-epistemic interpretation. For our purposes here, take epistemological internalism to be the thesis that it is a necessary condition of knowledge that one is able to reflectively determine the factors that make it such that one knows. The thesis of epistemological externalism, in contrast, is the denial of this claim, and therefore maintains that this internalist condition is not necessary for knowledge. So whereas both camps will tend to agree that certain external conditions need to be met in order for an agent to be truly said to know, the internalist will add the further requirement that in every instance of knowledge an internal condition must also be met as well. The externalist, but not the internalist, thus leaves open the possibility that one could know merely by meeting some externalist condition.¹⁷

The first thing to note about the externalist account is that it calls into question the assumption made by the proponent of the non-epistemic interpretation that where sufficient reflectively accessible grounds are unavailable for one's belief in a certain proposition—as in the case of, according to Wittgenstein, hinge propositions—it therefore follows that one is unable to know these propositions. Whereas, for the internalist, the lack of such grounds will directly entail a lack of knowledge, this entailment will not immediately follow on an externalist account. The externalist can allow for the possibility that one might know a proposition whilst nevertheless lacking reflectively accessible grounds to support one's belief in that proposition.¹⁸

Another interesting aspect of this 'purely' externalist knowledge is that although an externalist would be happy to regard the agent in question as knowing the proposition at issue, he would not consider that agent as being in a position to either self-ascribe that knowledge or legitimately claim that knowledge since these are activities which do require reflectively accessible grounds. Significantly, however, this feature of purely externalist knowledge—that a first-person claim to know would be, whilst true, wholly improper—cannot be simply captured in terms of the social rules cashed-out in terms of conversational implicature. This is because it is not just a self-ascription of externalist knowledge in a social setting which is improper. It would, for instance, be just as improper for such a mere externalist knower to even *think* to himself that he has knowledge because, as far as he is aware, he lacks sufficient grounds to indicate that this is so (even though it is in fact true). The impropriety of a first-person claim to

know in the case of pure externalist knowledge is thus not entirely dependent upon the fact that it generates a false conversational implicature. Instead, a stronger point needs to be made. One ought not to claim knowledge in these cases because, regardless of the prevailing social conventions and the false conversational implicatures that this assertion will generate, one just is not in a position to properly make such a claim (even though it is in fact true) because one lacks sufficient reflectively accessible grounds to license that claim. So although these first-person claims to know do carry false conversational implicatures, one does not completely capture the source of their impropriety by merely focussing upon this fact. Instead, one must recognise that the agent in question lacks a certain cognitive capacity which, although it makes a first-person claim to know improper, is not itself (the externalist argues) necessary for knowledge possession. Henceforth, we shall refer to the false implicatures that such improper (though true) first-person assertions of knowledge generate as ‘false *epistemic* conversational implicatures’. That way we shall be able to mark them apart from true assertions that are improper for purely social reasons.¹⁹

Crucially, however, since the internalist account of knowledge demands reflective access to the factors relevant to that knowledge, so it follows that one could not be in a situation in which one both internalistically knew a proposition and yet was unable to adduce sufficient grounds to support that knowledge. Accordingly, social factors aside, on the internalist account (and unlike the externalist account), to possess knowledge is to be able to properly claim that knowledge. There will thus not be any cases in which a true first-person assertion of knowledge generates a false epistemic conversational implicature.

The contrast with conversational implicature thus marks out a crucial difference between an internalist and an externalist account of knowledge. Whereas an internalist can only allow that a first-person claim to know can be both true and illegitimate because of *social* factors, the externalist is able to go further and argue that sometimes such assertions are improper because of purely *epistemic* factors.

Accordingly, the non-epistemic interpretation tends to assume an internalist epistemology on two fronts. On the one hand, it presupposes that where sufficient reflectively accessible grounds are unavailable—as in the case of hinge propositions—the proposition in question is unknowable, thereby indicating a commitment to the internalist thesis that such grounds are necessary for knowledge possession. On the other hand, and as a consequence of the former commitment, it presupposes that, social factors aside, where one cannot claim first-person knowledge one does not know, even though, as we have just seen, externalist accounts

highlight a class of cases in which knowledge is (the externalist claims) both possessed and yet not properly claimed no matter what social factors obtain.

As noted above, one of the constraints that Wittgenstein offered regarding legitimate first-person claims to know was that the agent who made the claim should be able to adduce sufficient grounds to support his assertion. Clearly this is the very sort of ability that is going to be lacking in the case of purely externalist knowledge and thus, by implication, in the case of any knowledge that we might putatively have of the denial of a sceptical hypothesis. As we have just seen, however, on an externalist account of knowledge it does not follow from the mere fact that a certain proposition cannot properly be claimed to be known because it generates a false epistemic conversational implicature that it therefore *cannot* be known. Indeed, since Wittgenstein is trying to be true to the mechanisms of our actual usage of epistemic terms, so we might reasonably suppose that for him, too, there should be externalist components of our epistemic practices. Moreover, the hypothesis that Wittgenstein shares some of these externalist intuitions would also explain why, for Wittgenstein, the Moorean error is often held to consist not in disagreeing with the *truth* of the sceptical thesis, but rather with trying to explicitly *argue* with the sceptic. As Wittgenstein puts the matter at one point:

Moore's mistake lies in this—countering the assertion that *one cannot know* that, by saying “I do know it”. (OC §521, my italics)

If Wittgenstein really is concerned to support the non-epistemic thesis in *On Certainty*, then why, in remarks such as these, is he so coy? If, primarily, it is Moore's *belief* that he knows that is at fault, then why focus upon the impropriety of Moore's *claim* to know?²⁰

Moreover, as noted above, the non-epistemic interpretation of Wittgenstein is only able to give an account of *one* of the two types of examples of hinge propositions that Wittgenstein offers. Recall that the sort of hinge propositions that the non-epistemic account focused upon were those ‘global’ propositions which involved the denials of radical sceptical hypotheses; propositions such as “I am not now dreaming”, or “The universe did not come into existence five minutes ago”. Significantly, however, the bulk of the examples of hinge propositions that Wittgenstein offers are not of this global form. Examples of these ‘local’ hinges include, “I have (two) hands”, “Cats do not grow on trees”, and “All human beings have parents”. Combining an externalist epistemology with an account of the conversational implicature of our epistemic language-games allows us to pay attention to the important differences between these two types of hinge propositions.

I shall consider the global hinge propositions first. By the lights of any plausible

interpretation of *On Certainty*, the primary Wittgensteinian thesis will be that our belief in these sorts of propositions will lack, perforce, the kind of internalist grounds that are necessary to support a legitimate first-person claim to know (i.e., a claim to know that does not generate a false epistemic conversational implicature). Accordingly, independently of the issue of whether or not we do know these propositions, we ought not, *à la* Moore, claim or otherwise self-ascribe such knowledge. Where the two interpretations will diverge is in their account of the truth—as opposed to the implicature—of what is asserted. Whereas on the non-epistemic account the global hinges are thought of as necessary presuppositions of our beliefs which are themselves unknown (indeed, *unknowable*), on the externalist account they will, potentially at least, retain their presuppositional nature whilst gaining an epistemic status. That we lack sufficient internalist grounds for these propositions will only impair the legitimacy of our first-person claims to know (and non-social self-ascriptions of knowledge) in this respect—it will not decide the issue of whether we do in fact know them.

Indeed, the key modification that Williams makes to the standard non-epistemic line is to allow that agents can know the denials of anti-sceptical hypotheses, albeit only in everyday contexts where such knowledge is ‘tacit’. Williams is only able to make a move like this plausible because he endorses, on independent grounds, an externalist epistemology. Accordingly, he is not constrained by the internalist contention that knowledge possession requires sufficient reflectively accessible grounds. In this way he can retain closure and offer a genuinely anti-sceptical thesis. If one is willing to allow that we can know such propositions, however, then the question arises as to why that knowledge is ever lost in sceptical contexts, especially when such sceptical theorising is regarded as being based on dubious theoretical foundations. Moreover, if we can make sense of our reluctance to ascribe such knowledge in terms of the impropriety of claims to know when it comes to hinge propositions—a thesis that both Williams and Wittgenstein share—then the motivation for arguing that in some contexts we do not know global hinge propositions diminishes further. It thus seems plausible to hold that where Williams goes wrong is in not being externalist enough—in not following-through his externalist critique of the sceptic’s claims such that we allow that an agent can have anti-sceptical knowledge in any context.²¹

So whereas the non-epistemic interpretation sees the presuppositional role of global hinge propositions as legitimating our belief in them even *despite* a lack of adequate internalist grounds (and thus knowledge), the thorough-going externalist interpretation only views these presuppositions as legitimate *so long as* they are known. On both accounts we are held to be

compelled to assume the truth of these propositions even without the necessary internalist grounds, but whereas this involves an epistemic ‘leap-of-faith’ on the non-epistemic account, this merely reflects inevitable empirical constraints on our epistemic position on the externalist account; the fact that we cannot acquire adequate internalist grounds for all that we believe. If our beliefs in the global hinge propositions are sufficiently sensitive to the truth, then the superstructure of our epistemic practices may well be generally in order. If they are not, then we know very little. But, this thought is not the same as the sceptical contention that, *a priori*, we lack knowledge of most of what we believe. Rather, it merely reflects the fact that whether or not we know most of what we believe depends upon certain empirical conditions obtaining. As Wittgenstein puts the matter, in the final analysis, “It is always by favour of Nature that one knows something” (OC §505).

The ‘local’ hinges—which do not concern radical sceptical hypotheses as such, but rather more mundane propositions such as “I have two hands”—require a separate treatment. What these propositions have in common with the global hinges is that saying that you know them carries the false conversational implicature that you can adduce grounds which would sufficiently support your belief in the proposition which you claim to know. The reason why this implicature is false, however, is entirely different in the two cases. Whereas one cannot offer sufficient internalist grounds for one’s belief in global hinge propositions because there are none (if one knows them at all it is due to purely externalist factors), in the case of local hinges there *are* grounds to be offered—it is just that they cannot coherently be thought of as epistemically supporting the belief in question.

As Wittgenstein expounds at length in *On Certainty*, since the attitude of certainty which is taken towards hinge propositions is such that nothing is regarded as more certain than them, it cannot be the case that any other proposition can be coherently proffered in support of one’s belief in a hinge proposition. In the case of a local hinge proposition, however, this does not mean that there are no grounds supporting one’s belief in this proposition. Rather the point is that the local hinge propositions represent elements of our everyday conception of the world that are so taken for granted that the grounds which support belief in these propositions would not be *socially* accepted as performing this supporting role.

This is not to say that on the externalist account one does not have reflective access to the grounds that support one’s knowledge of local hinges, since if one does know these propositions then, typically, one will have reflective access to the grounds that make one’s belief sufficiently justified. Nevertheless, as noted above in our discussion on conversational

implicature, the acceptability of making a first-person claim to know does not stand or fall with epistemic factors alone—rather one must also meet the social standards appropriate to the assertion in question. In this case, this means being able to offer grounds which, whether or not they do in fact sufficiently support the belief in question, can be coherently taken to sufficiently support that belief. And since nothing can be taken in this way as regards hinge propositions, so one cannot claim first-person knowledge of them even if, as can be the case with local hinges, one does in fact possess sufficient internalist justification for one's belief in them.

Consider the example of a (true) first-person claim to know that one has hands. Given the certainty attached to this proposition (in normal circumstances) no grounds could be coherently offered in support of this knowledge and thus the claim to know would generate the false conversational implicature that such grounds could be offered. The assertion would thus be improper. Nevertheless, if the grounds which support one's belief in this proposition (such as one's experience of one's hands and so forth) *do* appropriately perform this supporting function and one does in fact have reflective access to these grounds, then one will have knowledge, internalistically construed, of this proposition. One way of expressing this matter is via the distinction made earlier between false conversational implicatures and false *epistemic* conversational implicatures. Unlike a first-person claim to know a global hinge proposition, a first-person claim to know a local hinge proposition would only generate a purely *social* false conversational implicature which constituted no reflection whatsoever on the epistemic status of the agent's belief in that regard.²²

According to the externalist interpretation of hinge propositions being sketched here, we thus get a two-fold distinction between the different ways in which a known hinge proposition cannot be legitimately claimed to be known. On the one hand, as with the global hinges, we have the cases in which (if one knows anything at all) one does know these propositions, but where one cannot claim such knowledge because one lacks the necessary reflectively accessible grounds. This would be an instance of a first-person claim to know which generated a false epistemic conversational implicature. On the other hand, as with the local hinges, we have the cases in which one knows the propositions but where one cannot claim such knowledge because one lacks grounds that are socially apt for the purpose of sufficiently supporting belief in those propositions. This would thus be a case of a first-person claim to know which generated a purely social false conversational implicature.

Of course, it does not follow from these remarks that Wittgenstein was actually a closet externalist, only that there are elements of his work that are compatible with such a reading. Indeed, as we noted earlier, given the fragmentary nature of Wittgenstein's final notebooks, we should be extremely cautious about trying to find any canonical reading of his position. Nevertheless, since the problems that a non-epistemic (and predominantly internalist) reading of his work generates are so severe, it is at least significant that he may have not been a closet internalist either. Furthermore, by noting this ambivalence on Wittgenstein's part we open up the intriguing possibility that a compelling anti-sceptical hinge proposition thesis which can plausibly be regarded as Wittgensteinian can be achieved by working within an externalist epistemology.²³

NOTES

¹ Although the "hinge" metaphor is the dominant symbolism in the book, it is accompanied by various other metaphors such as the following: that these propositions constitute the "scaffolding" of our thoughts (OC §211); that they form the "foundations of our language-games" (OC §§401-3); and also that they represent the implicit "world-picture" from within which we inquire, the "inherited background against which [we] distinguish between true and false" (OC §§94-5).

² It is actually a moot point whether Moore saw himself as answering the sceptic at all, let alone offering an *argument* against scepticism (see Baldwin 1990; 1993), but many commentators, including, most famously, Wittgenstein himself, have conceived of Moore's remarks in this way. Of the two cited papers upon which Moore's reputation as an anti-sceptic was largely established (Moore 1925; 1939), the first was written in response to an invitation to provide a *personal statement* (and therefore not necessarily a *validation*) of his position, whilst the second is regarded by some as being an attempt at a refutation of *idealism*, not scepticism, in that Moore was only aiming to prove the *existence* of an external world, not also that we have any *knowledge* of it. (I leave it to the reader to decide if this distinction is entirely plausible). To add to the confusion, in the later paper Moore notes that although he knows the premises of his 'proof', he cannot prove them (Moore 1939, 150). Nevertheless, the interpretation of Moore offered above is widely endorsed. See Barry Stroud (1984, chapter 3); Crispin Wright (1985); Michael Williams (1991, 40-5); and Avrum Stroll (1994, *passim*). For a more in-depth discussion of the inadequacies of the Moorean response to scepticism, see Duncan Pritchard (2001).

³ Some commentators, such as Stroll (1994, 47-8), do take Wittgenstein to be suggesting that certain propositions are hinges due to their high level of evidential support. Stroll seems to be misled by certain locutions that Wittgenstein employs, especially the phrase "everything speaks for it, and nothing against it" (e.g. OC §§190-1). As Wittgenstein is keen to point out, however, this does not indicate an *evidential* support at all, but rather a kind of *agreement* that this proposition should not be doubted (e.g. OC §163-66; 203 & 214-5).

⁴ As Wittgenstein puts it at one point, "'Knowledge' and 'certainty' belong to different *categories*" (OC §308).

⁵ Accordingly, Wittgenstein argues that one cannot, strictly speaking, be accused of making a *mistake* if one doubts a hinge proposition. This is because mistakes are accounted for in terms of *reasons*, but there could be no reasons that would explain one's doubt of a hinge proposition. If, in normal circumstances, one doubted P, then, given that such a doubt is necessarily groundless, one's doubt could only be accounted for in causal terms which eschew the use of reasons (e.g. in terms of a mental disturbance) (OC §§70ff., 155ff., 196, 300-4, 420, 512-6, 647, 674-5).

⁶ For discussion of these constraints, see Stroll (1994, chapter 8).

⁷ This contention is echoed by J. L. Austin. Consider, for example, the following passages:

When I say, 'I know', I give others my word: I give others *my authority for saying* that 'S is P'. [...]

If you say you know something, the most immediate challenge takes the form of asking, ‘Are you in a position to know?’: that is, you must undertake to show not merely that you are sure of it, but that it is within your cognisance. (Austin 1961, 99-100, italics in the original)

⁸ In a related fashion, Wittgenstein argues that just as one cannot say how one knows a hinge proposition, so one cannot say how one might go about convincing someone of the truth of a hinge proposition either. For instance, how *does* one persuade someone who, in normal circumstances, doubts whether or not he has two hands? (Imagine, for example, that he concedes that he, and everyone else around him for that matter, seems to see his hands). And if we did convince him, how could we account for this? (OC §§257, 428) If, in normal circumstances, he does not believe a proposition like P, then it seems that no amount of empirical evidence (which will, perforce, be less certain than the hinge itself) will, or could, satisfy him. Indeed, Wittgenstein argues that although we can imagine a situation wherein someone acted-out his doubt of a hinge proposition, we could make no sense of such a person (we could not regard this person as rational). The doubt would be regarded as a sign of insanity, misunderstanding, or as being merely rhetorical (perhaps as a joke (OC §463)).

⁹ One way in which Wittgenstein develops this thought is via the contention that the “I” in “I know that P” is superfluous (OC §§58, 587-8). The qualification implies a set of relations both to knowledge and a person such that it purportedly adds something extra to the content of the expression “P”. But if the certainty accorded to these propositions is common to everyone (at least in normal circumstances) then there is no sense to the idea that Moore has some special knowledge which is unavailable to others, or that he possesses information which he, but not others, have acquired (OC §§84, 100, 401, 462, 466). To support this contention Wittgenstein points out that ‘I know’ only has a meaning when it is uttered by a person (it would be meaningless if, say, a sign at a zoo claimed that “I know this is a zebra” (OC §588)). And since it is indifferent to the epistemic content of P whether or not it is preceded by the claim “I know” so the use of the first-person pronoun is at best misleading. A *prima facie* objection to this analysis could be the existence of the sort of ‘subjective’ hinges that Wittgenstein offers. They include propositions like “My name is D. P.” (e.g. OC §§628-9), which are indexed to an individual; propositions such as “I have not been to the moon in the last year” (e.g. OC §§661-2), which are indexed to a certain historical period; and propositions like “I speak English” (e.g. OC §§70, 486) which are indexed to a certain cultural/geographical location. However, one can generalise these examples in the following way by taking the first to be something like “My name is N. N.”, and (a more problematic suggestion), consider the second and third types of example as hinges only insofar as they are standardly treated as such in quotidian conversational contexts.

¹⁰ It has been suggested (DeRose 1998; Stroll 1994, chapter 1), that the bulk of these conditions were actually derived from remarks on Moore’s arguments made by Norman Malcolm (1949; cf. Malcolm 1952; 1977). Another thinker whose writings had a significant impact on *On Certainty* was John Henry Newman (1844; 1985), whose influence pervades the text (although he is only actually explicitly mentioned by Wittgenstein once (OC §1)). For discussion of Newman’s work in this regard, see Anthony Kenny (1992) and Pritchard (2000a).

¹¹ Hilary Putnam (1992, chapter 8) declines to offer any specific examples of a hinge proposition, but if one examines his remarks on this subject it becomes apparent that he endorses a strikingly similar thesis to that offered by Strawson, Wright and Stroll. For more on how Wright’s notion of a hinge proposition is inadequate to the task, see Pritchard (2000b).

¹² Moreover, it is not as if the solution to this quandary is to simply combine a hinge proposition thesis with the denial of closure since, as those who have actively decried the closure principle have pointed out—among them Fred Dretske (1970) and Robert Nozick (1981)—the denial of closure itself results in a refutation of scepticism. The motivation for adducing hinge propositions as an anti-sceptical device is thus lost. Why argue for hinge propositions *and* the denial of closure, when the denial of closure alone will do the job just as well? Of course, one could respond to this objection by maintaining that the hinge proposition thesis could be used to add support to these arguments for non-closure, such that, properly understood, what drives the Dretske-Nozick denial of closure is an implicit appreciation of the status of hinge propositions. Such a diagnostic manoeuvre would, however, be highly implausible. After all, what motivates the Dretske-Nozick line is a ‘relevant alternatives’ thesis such that knowledge of everyday propositions in no way depends upon knowledge of such irrelevant anti-sceptical propositions as that I am not a BIV. The hinge proposition thought, in contrast, is precisely that such propositions *do* perform a foundational role, and thus that these are propositions that *are* relevant, in the requisite sense, to everyday knowledge. (Indeed, given that this is the driving motivation behind the notion of a hinge proposition, it is difficult to see how any non-epistemic construal of them is going to be able to support a coherent anti-sceptical thesis). A unification of the hinge proposition thesis and arguments for non-closure is thus unlikely. Furthermore, there is also the problem that this interpretation has very little in the way of textual support. For example, in the very first line of *On Certainty* Wittgenstein notes that “If you do know that *here is one hand*, we’ll grant you all the rest”, and what else can he mean by this except that genuine knowledge of everyday propositions *would* result in genuine knowledge of the propositions which they are known to entail—i.e., the denials of sceptical hypotheses?

¹³ It should be noted, however, that, unlike the other authors mentioned earlier, Williams makes no grand claim to be accurately capturing Wittgenstein’s intended conception of a hinge proposition.

¹⁴ This is in contrast to those semantic contextualist accounts of knowledge that are currently in vogue—such as the theories offered by Keith DeRose (1995) and David Lewis (1996)—which recognise a context-independent

hierarchy of epistemic standards. On their view, a sceptic who participated in an historical context *would* be employing a more rigorous, rather than just a different, epistemic standard.

¹⁵ Thomas Morawetz (1978) is another commentator who offers an interpretation of *On Certainty* along these lines.

¹⁶ In characterising conversational implicature in this way, I follow H. P. Grice (1989). Note that, as Grice himself makes clear, a conversational implicature can always be ‘cancelled’ by the agent making the assertion offering some sort of explicit disclaimer or *caveat*. In what follows, I shall assume that the assertions in question are not qualified in this fashion.

¹⁷ For a characterisation of internalism along these lines, see Roderick Chisholm (1989, chapter 1). Note that externalism, so defined, is perfectly consistent with the claim that the internalist criterion is a central element of knowledge—it merely denies its necessity. For more discussion of this point, and for a characterisation of externalism along the lines sketched here, see Robert Brandom (1998).

¹⁸ The standard example of ‘pure’ externalist knowledge that is often given in the literature is the knowledge putatively possessed by the ‘naïve chicken-sexer’. This is an agent who has a highly reliable ability to detect the sex of chicks but has no beliefs about how he does it nor any reason for thinking that he is reliable in this respect. On the externalist account such an agent would have knowledge even though he lacks any good internal grounds to support that knowledge. For discussion of this example, see Lewis (1996) and Brandom (1998).

¹⁹ It is important to note that, strictly speaking, such false epistemic conversational implicatures are not really conversational implicatures at all (at least not in the Gricean sense). Nevertheless, as long as the inclusive use of this term is recognised, it should do no harm to the ensuing discussion.

²⁰ This is not to deny that there are remarks in *On Certainty* that only awkwardly fit the interpretation offered here. After all, as noted above, it would be overly optimistic to expect to find a definitive thesis being expounded in an unedited notebook. My concern here is not, however, to find an overarching interpretation of the text, but rather to undermine the supposed hegemony of the non-epistemic construal and indicate how the intuitive notion of a hinge proposition can be used for externalist ends.

²¹ Further support for this thesis is provided by recent proposals in ‘virtue’ epistemology. For example, Ernest Sosa, the leading exponent of such a view, has put forward a non-contextualist externalist theory of knowledge—what he calls a ‘Moorean’ theory—that can account for our knowledge of anti-sceptical propositions. See Sosa (1991, 1999).

²² This thus explains why the role that ‘local’ hinge propositions play can be relative to certain socially defined parameters, such as normal circumstances, a certain system of beliefs, or a cultural-cum-geographical location. It also explains why, unlike global hinge propositions, local hinges can *lose* their special epistemic role (consider, for instance, the erstwhile ‘social’ hinge that the earth is flat (cf. OC §§291-99)). Rather than exhibiting the universal epistemic property of being immune to internalist knowledge, local hinges instead merely ‘mimic’ this property as a result of the certainty that is accorded to them in certain scenarios.

²³ This paper expands upon a number of themes present in an earlier piece of work that was presented at the 23rd International Symposium of the Austrian Ludwig Wittgenstein Society entitled ‘Rationality and Irrationality’ which was held in Kirchberg, Austria in August, 2000. (That paper was also subsequently published in the proceedings of that conference, see Pritchard (2000c)). My thanks go to the audience that day, and also to Lars Binderup, Edward Craig, Patrick Greenough, Lars Gundersen, Katherine Hawley, Jesper Kallestrup, Patrice Philie, Sven Rosenkranz, Leslie Stevenson, Peter Sullivan, Michael Williams, and, as ever, Crispin Wright for their comments on various versions of this paper. I am also grateful to an anonymous referee for this journal for an extremely subtle commentary.

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