

5 Scepticism, Illusion and the Sources of Knowledge

And if he left off dreaming about you . . .
Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*

This chapter will first confront the problem of scepticism and its role in our quest for truth. This investigation will cause us to consider how appearance and reality follow as a consequence and the subsequent turning to various sources upon which to ground knowledge.

Scepticism

I doubt it! Is this really the title of this chapter sub-section? Maybe not? How can I know – oh, let's get over it. We've had enough of this. How many things should we doubt? Is the President of the United States an honest fellow? (I don't suppose it matters too much the year that you ask this question.) Is the British Parliament honest? Should we believe that we can continue driving Hummer SUVs that get seven miles a gallon of gas and have a BTU construction coefficient that is many times that of the Toyota Prius or Honda Civic and not turn the world into an oven of death? In life we are presented with many rather dubious claims. It seems that a degree of scepticism is in order. But what is scepticism and how much is too much? To answer this question we must hit the rewind button and review the history of philosophy.

The ancient Greeks coined the cognate for 'scepticism' in the Greek word '*skepsis*' that means to consider something on the basis of the senses. The ancient Greeks such as physician Sextus Empiricus (c. 160–210 CE) and the medical 'empiric' and 'methodist' schools distrusted rational coherentists.¹ The reason for this is that they felt that the physician could only help his patient if he had so much

concrete detail that it defied any general rules. Some writers in modern theories of the good (called particularists) echo this caveat.² They believe that theories of the good ignore particular circumstances and thus distort any proposed solution. Each case had to be considered on its own terms. On this approach, one would resist (as much as possible) forcing any general accounts upon the phenomena at hand.

I had first-hand experience of proponents of this position when I used to work at the philosophy registration desk at Marquette University where I once taught. In those pre-personal-computer-registration days, we handed out a limited number of IBM punch cards for students wishing to take a particular class. We also had a not-so-secret group of cards that we could give that would allow the number of students to exceed the declared class size. The department chair admonished us only to give these out in the direst situations. Thus, the contest was engaged: students found out about the supplementary cards and set out their creative skills to get into the classes they wanted (that were already closed). They would say things like, "I know that there is a rule . . ." or 'If only you knew my circumstances . . .' or 'My situation is special because . . .' and so forth. The point of these petitioners was to let me know that the general covering rule was designed to apply to certain situations, e.g. $A: \{s_1, s_2, s_3, \dots s_n\}$. Despite the intention of the covering rule, the petitioning student wanted to convince me that their situation did not fall into A because it is $s_n + 1$. Instead, it belongs into the set of anomalies, B, that contain none of the same members as A. All the rules that apply to A do not apply to B. Since the student before me is asserting that she is in B, then I should not use A-rules to adjudicate her case. In other words, the rules don't apply to her because her situation is different. She wants me to give her one of the special cards that the department chair has told us not to do except in extreme duress. To consider this claim let us consider a thought experiment.

THOUGHT EXPERIMENT 5.1

What if everyone were different, and we couldn't classify anyone because all the rules of class inclusion would fail to recognize those

properties that were different? And what if all general rules were based upon people being included into classes? Wouldn't that mean that there would be no general rules (except the self-referential rule just enumerated)? What would be the consequence?

Thought Experiment 5.1 points us to problems posed by the ancient sceptic and their modern counterpart, particularism. The 'anti-class => anti-rule' folk believe that one should somehow immerse himself into the rich empirical detail, and that this belies all but individual recognition.

Now I *am* a proponent of contextualized individual recognition. We live in a world of particulars so that to ignore this would be anti-empirical. When it comes to people, we all possess individual dignity, and individual dignity recognition must always be maintained. (Again Truth bumps up against the Good.) But it does seem rather implausible to me to rid ourselves of rules and set-inclusion procedures. The very formulation of our thoughts through vocabulary, syntax, and grammar seems to demand that we bounce back and forth between the general and the particular. Thus, I take the ancient sceptics to offer a cautionary tale: don't forget individuals and particularity in your quest for the truth. These sceptics are saying that particularity is much more plausible than a rationally abstract prescription for finding out what *is*.

A more contemporary usage of 'sceptic' came about in the medieval times in the person of the African philosopher, Augustine of Hippo (354–430 BCE), in his work *Against the Academicians*.³ In this work Augustine makes the following two arguments:

ARGUMENT 5.1

'Either p or ~p is true'

1. 'P or ~p' cannot be denied – Fact⁴
2. That which cannot be denied is true – A
3. Either p or ~p is true – 1, 2

ARGUMENT 5.2

'Senses do not err in what they report'

1. When you report seeing something you either are using your senses or not – F
2. Senses acquire appearances and present them to the mind – A
3. What appears truly is apprehended – A
4. Senses do not lie – 2, 3
5. Appearances not from senses (like madness or sleep) cannot be blamed on the senses – F
6. The falsity of non-sensed appearances is not the fault of the senses – 5
7. Senses do not err in what they report – 1, 4, 6

These two arguments set a stance against the ancient understanding of scepticism (based upon *skepsis*). There is no legitimate reason to deny argument one. This is often called the law of the excluded middle. When considering mutually exclusive complementary sets, it is always the case that if one is a member of one set, then one is not a member of the other. One cannot be in both at the same time in the same respect. An example of this would be pregnancy. At any given time, Mary Lou Sue is either pregnant or she isn't. There is no in-between.

It would be impossible to refute this. This is because the very use of language requires the acceptance of this law of thought along with its sister: the law of non-contradiction that says that we cannot conjoin a proposition and its contradictory opposite: $\sim (p + \sim p)$. Along with propositional identity ($p = p$) these primitive statements seem beyond scepticism. To doubt them would be to deny one's entire rational consciousness. However, by the same measure, we can't prove them. Once again, we fall prey to the rationality incompleteness conjecture. One must shift to the selective faith maxim and adopt it the most plausible hypothesis.⁵ It seems more intuitively plausible to accept a principle upon which all rationality seems to depend than to reject it – even if there is not a conclusive positive proof to that effect.⁶ Given these foundational conditions, it seems reasonable to accept Argument 5.1.

In Argument 5.2 the most controversial premise is number 3: What appears truly is apprehended. This amounts to an affirmation of the veracity of sense impressions from the internal perspective of the agent. Let's examine this further through another thought experiment.

THOUGHT EXPERIMENT 5.2

Fred Football is the quarterback of his team. On a crucial play of the final minute of the game Fred threw an interception (a pass intended for his own player that was caught by the opposite team). Let's assume that Fred Football threw a pass to an individual waving his hands and appearing to Fred to be his receiver. Let us also assume that that player was not Fred's teammate (he wore a different coloured jersey), but because Fred focused upon the waving hands and physique of the player, who resembled in this way his teammate, he thought it was his teammate. Therefore, Fred threw the errant pass that cost his team the game. What happened?

If Argument 5.2, premise 3 is correct, then what appears is truly apprehended. Yet a mistake was made. How are we to understand this? There are at least two answers: (a) the judgement made by Fred (inside his brain) was flawed, or (b) the senses *did* err and thus Augustine's refutation of ancient scepticism is flawed. Under this first account, one might say that the processing procedure of interpreting the sense impression was hurried or otherwise impaired (perhaps also because a 250-pound linebacker was about to crush Fred). As a result, a flawed outcome (at the processing end) resulted.

Which hypothesis is correct: (a) or (b)? This is a difficult problem to solve. Augustine chose (a) because he felt that there must be some foundational acceptance of sensory data input. Without such a commitment, much of the raw material upon which we construct our personal worldview would be in such disarray that a holistic worldview would be impossible to construct.

However, on the other side, René Descartes (1596–650) chose (b).⁷ He believed that sometimes the senses might betray us. Ultimately, they couldn't be relied upon for the foundation of all

knowledge. Only reason could perform such a task. Eventually, Descartes comes to a provisional acceptance (for the most part) of empirical input on the basis of a rationally based set of arguments for the existence of God and the further assertion that a good God (an unexamined posit) would not create illusions of what seemed like truly perceived experience when, in *fact*, it was false. This would amount to a trickster God (and being a trickster is not to be good), thus God would not make the senses unreliable. Thus, at the end of the day, Descartes agrees with Augustine, but not for the same *reasons why*. In philosophy, the reasons why are very important. Thus, though Descartes ends up agreeing with Augustine, he cannot be said to be an advocate of (a). This is because the *verification* of the senses came through an extended rational defence that *began* with the assumption that the senses were faulty.

This discussion initiates the modern understanding of scepticism. In the modern realm (defined by philosophers as beginning with Descartes in the seventeenth century), scepticism began to be associated with "critical inquiry". But Descartes, in the first meditation of his *Meditations on First Philosophy*, suggests that he will engage in a radical doubt (not unlike Sextus but without Sextus' empirical foundationalism). In practice, Descartes is more reasonable. He doesn't (and couldn't) doubt *everything* – who could doubt the laws of identity, excluded middle, or non-contradiction? But Descartes does make a rhetorical point that leads subsequent philosophers to ponder the place of scepticism in creating a personal theory of knowledge.

The role of scepticism as critical understanding is advanced by David Hume (1711–1776) in the following arguments:⁸

ARGUMENT 5.3

1. Action requires the mind operate on various principles – F
2. Acting on various principles implies accepting various principles – F
3. A radical sceptic cannot accept any principles – F
4. A radical sceptic cannot act – 1–3
5. Action is necessary for common life – A

6. Radical scepticism is refuted by action in common life – 4, 5
7. Mitigated scepticism eliminates false beliefs – A
8. Getting rid of false beliefs is good – F
9. Only limited and mitigated scepticism can be useful – 6–8

ARGUMENT 5.4

1. There are two types of reasoning: (a) (analytical) arguments about relations of ideas, and (b) (synthetic/empirical) matters of fact – A
2. Science is properly about matters of fact – A
3. Mathematical reasoning (quantity and number) is properly about relation of ideas – A
4. (There is no proper third form of thinking) – A
5. Science and maths should be based upon their proper form of reasoning – 1–4
6. Sometimes people mistake one form of reasoning for the other – F
7. When people mistake one form of reasoning for another, they create a new (third) form of reasoning – F
8. Creating a third form of reasoning leads to error – 4, 6, 7
9. Intellectual belief should not be based upon error – A
10. Intellectual belief that is not based upon reasoning about quantity and number or experimental fact is not justifiable – 5, 8, 9

In Argument 5.3 Hume argues against radical scepticism – the kind that Descartes seems to imply in his first meditation. Argument 5.4 combines aspects of Augustine's Arguments of 5.1 and 5.2 as offering the foundations for knowing as fundamental logic and math along with empiricism. Let's look at Hume's arguments a little more carefully in order.

First, let's examine Argument 5.3. This argument puts forth the claim that radical scepticism should be abandoned and mitigated scepticism adopted. Radical scepticism is the revolutionary position that many have attributed to Descartes. In the *Meditations on First*

Philosophy Descartes employs construction metaphors in describing how one might build an edifice of knowledge that begins with a single point of absolute certainty (a sound foundation). According to the ancient Greek philosopher Archimedes, if one could find a single absolute point, he could use it as a fulcrum to move the world.⁹ Thus, Descartes gives the impression that he almost doubts everything in search of this point. This is the backdrop of his famous 'cogito ergo sum/je pense donc je suis' argument.¹⁰ This argument (though an imprecise popularization) was extremely influential. Set in the revolutionary era of the seventeenth century, it was part of the shared community worldview of advancement and progress in thinking. Imagine the freedom: everything could be doubted! You could doubt the authority of Charles I of England and chop off his head. You could imagine challenging the Roman Catholic Church. You could imagine many things – but they all equalled freedom.

THOUGHT EXPERIMENT 5.3

Find a safe place. Find a spotter who will protect you in case things get hairy. Now sit down in a comfortable position, shut your eyes, and try to doubt everything you ever believed. This is all provisional, but try it. Assume that everything can be doubted. What happens to you? How did it happen? Were you systematic in your doubt? Did you begin imagining music? Did you imagine painting? Poetry? Total blankness? Anxiety? Pain? A swollen scream from the centre of your being? Stop! It's getting a little dangerous. Write this all down and talk about it with a friend.

Thought Experiment 5.3 is an attempt to experience radical doubt. Many people who have tried this thought experiment end up unable to empty their mind. Others relate an experience of focused meditation. Most fall asleep. No one seems to be able to talk about it except in the most general terms. Virtually everyone ends up disappointed.

Many contemporaries of Hume attributed radical scepticism to Descartes. But careful readers of Descartes know that he did no such thing. Descartes knew he couldn't doubt everything since the mind

required certain clear starting points for its very operation.¹¹ This is why people are disappointed with Thought Experiment 5.3. It is because radical scepticism is an impossible project. The reason for this is that (like Thought Experiment 5.1) radical scepticism involves a self-referential paradox:

ARGUMENT 5.5

The Impossibility of Radical Scepticism

1. Proposition M: 'We must doubt everything' – A
2. Proposition M is true – A
3. Radical scepticism is true if and only if proposition M is true – A
4. Radical scepticism is true – 1–3
5. To doubt something is to assume it is false – F
6. Proposition M is something – F
7. We must doubt proposition M – 1, 6
8. We must assume proposition M is false – 5, 7
9. Radical scepticism is true and assumed false – 4, 8
10. Premise 9 states an impossibility – A
11. Radical scepticism is impossible – 9, 10

Hume (Argument 5.3) and others properly reject radical scepticism. Instead, another form of questioning, mitigated scepticism, is proposed. Mitigated scepticism is very much like the careful scrutiny maxim. One ought to be very careful about what she embraces as true. We do not act unless we have sound, empirically based reasons to do so.

The grounds overcoming mitigated scepticism are found in Argument 5.4. Here, Hume is a bit more specific than Augustine was in Arguments 5.1 and 5.2. Relations of ideas are true in virtue of their internal criteria (coherentism). Matters of fact are verified at once through empirical correspondence between the subject's idea and the physical object. They are understood by the subject to be fundamentally true. This cannot be questioned. This certainty of our brute sensory experience is so strong that it can be called *the dogma of empirical rectitude*. All of us assume that our senses properly report to us facts about the world. This means that we assume in a dogmatic

way that our sense experience is correct unless we are given very strong reasons (rational and empirical) to the contrary. However, such counter-examples will not work unless at least one sense is operating correctly. This is called a *dogma* since there is a natural tendency to disregard counter-examples. It is only when one sensory power in the individual is pitted against another (along with a rational argument) that we will accede to sensory defect.

Hume here has it right that though we must discard radical scepticism, we should not discard scepticism as an attitude within our personal worldview. This is because it permits us to execute the careful scrutiny maxim in our daily context thinking. A certain amount of scepticism is essential if we want to fulfil the quest for knowledge that requires that we all (a) want to embrace all that is true and (b) reject all that is false. To deviate from this quest is to degrade our human nature.

✧ Appearance and Reality

The juxtaposition of appearance and reality confronts us all the time. Fred Football tells Mary Lou Sue that he will be true to her and yet he is found stepping out with Sally Mae! Or Jamal tells Rashid that the thousand-dollar name-brand notebook computer can be his for only three hundred dollars. It fell off a truck! Who will know? Maria wants to confide in Mercedes the secrets of her job ambitions on the understanding that it is confidential. Then Maria finds out that Mercedes used the information to get herself the job instead. And there are so many more.

What are we to think about the question of what appears to be true versus what is actually true? Well, for starters, the question assumes that there is a 'true'. The discussions in Chapter 4 discuss three ways to understand this sort of claim: correspondence theory, coherence theory, and pragmatic theory. But this does not address the real possibility that lots of people may never really possess the true (however it is described).

To address this possibility, we must turn to Plato's cave.¹² In the allegory, Plato depicts the general populace as ignorant folk (based

upon the correspondence theory of truth). These cave dwellers use vision as the basis for their knowledge claims. What they see against the cave wall are only shadows of puppets. If the puppets have any connection to what *is* (and this need not be the case), then they are watching an image third-hand.¹³ If we assume that each level of imitation infers a loss of fidelity, then a third-hand rendition isn't very good. (Of course, it must be remembered that this allegory assumes a correspondence theory of truth in order to work.)

The key moment in the cave allegory is when the rare individual breaks free from the constrictions of the cave (perhaps because he has engaged in the process of the personal worldview imperative?). This person goes outside the cave and discovers that things are really different than they appeared to be in the cave. In the light of the sun the newly freed individual sees the world as it is.¹⁴

This is heady stuff. What you previously saw third-hand, you now see directly *as it is*. Now what are you going to do? Option (a) would be to lie on your back and just bask in the truth; option (b) would be to go back into the cave and share your insights with others. What would you do?

Plato suggests that option (b) carries great risks – even death as per his teacher, Socrates. (We can all think of other victims, such as Jesus, Gandhi, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Jr., Yitzhak Rabin, and others who presented a vision of truth that so disturbed some in the populace that they killed these messengers.)

Since the presentation of an alternate worldview is extremely threatening to those content with the one they already have, it is quite reasonable from their point of view to move to the *dissonance and rejection* response. This very well might inspire those with the threatened worldview to take any action they can – including murder – to contain this alternate vision of truth.

This truth business is dangerous. It can kill you from without and from within.

But where is the origin of this discontent? It implies a seeker who is overcome by his inability to find his Archimedean point. To quote from Matthew Arnold's poem 'Dover Beach':

the True

The tide is full, the moon lies fair
Upon the straits; on the French coast the light
Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand;
Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay.
Come to the window, sweet is the night-air!
Only, from the long line of spray
Where the sea meets the moon-blanch'd land,
Listen! you hear the grating roar
Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling,
At their return, up the high strand,
Begin, and cease, and then again begin,
With tremulous cadence slow, and bring
The eternal note of sadness in.

The poet's narrator here is indulging in the so-called pathetic fallacy as he imputes his own sadness and anxiety about life and love in the context of ancient history and military warfare. The metaphor of the changeable sea as a touchstone of immutable truth creates a dramatic tension. Arnold's narrator is asking what can we really believe in now that Victorian modernity has thrown much up in the air.

The stakes are high: death and madness possibly rest in the balance. So where is the source of this difficulty? It lies in those who engage the quest. Plato suggests that the number of those who are content in their personal and community worldviews and do not want to be bothered is rather large. He never tells us how many, but it is assumed to be an overwhelming majority of people.¹⁵ If this is the case, then most people live in a sort of delusion. They are just not up to the task of undergoing the quest demanded by the personal worldview imperative.

Friedrich Nietzsche concurs with Plato on this point. Nietzsche makes Plato's allegory more concrete with the connection of this journey to the ascension to nobility and power. It becomes an empirical truism that only a few can be at the top.¹⁶ In this case, knowledge is equated with power. Power confers nobility, and thus the überman (the excellent achiever) by seeing the truth can use it to his own

advantage – in a noble way.¹⁷ These will be (as a matter of fact) the rulers of society. (Thus, there is a pragmatic test dropped in: if you aren't a ruler or powerful individual, then you aren't an überman.)

It is interesting that both Plato and Nietzsche depict a populace that is largely under a herd mentality. The general populace doesn't recognize or respond to Truth (in any of its actual forms). So what do we do about this? In Plato's case there is recognition of some sort of demographic power on the part of the *hoi polloi* (ergo, they will put the seer to death). In Nietzsche's case the überman will triumph. If he doesn't, then he was never an überman.¹⁸

A final note in this section on the nature of the appearance-and-reality conflict comes from George Berkeley (1685–1753). In his seminal work *Of the Principles of Human Knowledge*, Berkeley employs a style of short sections (generally less than a page) to begin or to advance arguments. This organizational style is similar to Marcus Aurelius and Ludwig Wittgenstein. It requires more work on the part of the interpreter because appearance and reality interact in the very act of reading. Thus, any reconstruction of these arguments is more interpretative than is the case among other philosophers whose arguments progress in a more linear fashion.

ARGUMENT 5.6

The Ground of Existence¹⁹

1. To exist is to be judged to exist by a mind – A
2. The only way a mind has objects (ideas or sensations) is through perception – A
3. The mind is a spirit – A
4. Ideas and sensations exist in as much as they are presented and judged by a mind or spirit – 1–3
5. If no mind is perceiving an object (ideas or sensation), the object is not in the state of being judged – F
6. There are two modes of judging an object: actual or potential – A
7. If no mind is actually or potentially judging an object, it does not exist – 5, 6
8. Objects have their being in a mind that contemplates them – 4, 7

This is perhaps Berkeley's most famous argument. It sets a standard for the distinction between appearance and reality that is based upon the empirical judgement of the observer. What is crucial here is that existence is relative to an observer. It is referred to as *pro se* existence since it asserts that to exist is to exist for someone on the basis of an empirical experience. For example, consider this page that you are reading right now. The page and the book that holds it in place are real to you as sensory impressions of white and black, and the outline of the book cover, the weight and solidity of the book in your hands, the olfactory experience of the page as it turns, and so forth. While you have that book in your hand and are looking at this page it exists to you *because* it is an object of your immediate sensory experience. Nothing more is known about that book. You don't know whether there really is matter that underlies the sense impressions and causes your sensations. No, this would be an unfounded assumption. What you do know is that your senses (assumed to be reliable) make a judgement about this page before you and the book that contains it. The judgement properly can go no further than the mere catalogue of those sensory reports. This is because it is only these impressions that are presented to you.

Berkeley's position can be called naïve or simple empiricism. Just like Sextus Empiricus in the last chapter, the call is to refrain from making inferences *from* the data but to let that data speak for themselves. We must resist the urge to create abstract ideas from the data and to speculate about non-empirical generalities. This is because the mode of the object's existence to us *is* as it is presented and no more.

One might be able to imagine such a worldview via the following Thought Experiment 5.4:

THOUGHT EXPERIMENT 5.4

You are a devotee of Berkeley (and Sextus Empiricus) and you want to adopt the worldview of naïve empiricism. You are looking for a job that won't cause you to create unfounded abstractions. What job possibilities are open to you?

This thought experiment is more open-ended than you might think. Almost any job could accommodate you so long as you are allowed to concentrate your attention upon the realm of the empirical and not go beyond it. For example, if you were a computer programmer you could work at the machine in front of you and manipulate the symbols of the computer language so long as you didn't speculate upon some deeper meaning. What you see is all there is. When you go home, your computer may be an object of potential perception (i.e. the next working day), but to you *at that moment* it no longer fully exists to you. It only exists contingently (based upon your assumption that no one will steal it or that the building will not burn down). If the 'gold standard' test of existence is that someone perceives something actually or potentially, then your computer's existence *to you* ceases to exist fully when you no longer directly sense it.

This can create a situation in which it appears that objects pop in and out of existence to perceivers. To *us* when we leave an empirical tableau the entirety ceases to exist – to us. Such a possibility is bothersome.

Further, Berkeley's criteria for ascertaining true existence (as opposed to illusion) creates a famous paradox: if a tree falls in the forest (and no one is around) does it make a sound? For Berkeley the answer must be answered from the *pro se* stance. To *me* the tree made no sound. To *you* the tree made no sound. This is because neither of us was there to hear it. For any individual on earth the tree made no sound because no actual person was there. Thus, relative to any actual person there was no sound.²⁰

It is here that Berkeley brings in God to solve this non-realistic implausibility. If one were to posit God as perceiving everything on earth all at once, then *to God* objects don't pop in and out of existence. To God the tree falling in the forest makes a sound.

Therefore, something consistent with a realism worldview can be constructed in which empiricism is emphasized while maintaining a worldview that is plausible for a naïve empiricism standpoint.

A second argument of Berkeley examines another challenge to the appearance v. reality question.

The True

ARGUMENT 5.7

Real Things and Objects of the Imagination²¹

1. [Metaphysical separateness can be determined by epistemological separateness] – A
2. Both real things and imaginary things are presented to us immaterially – F
3. [Those things that are epistemologically different consist of: (a). different for a reason, (b). can be distinguished as different] – A
4. Imagination begins and is formed in our minds in an irregular and inconsistent act – A
5. Real things are outside us and are presented to the mind – F
6. Ideas about real things are formed via regular, constant, vivid conjunction – A
7. Ideas about real things differ from ideas from the imagination – 1–6
8. [That which is strong, lively, and distinct is easily distinguished as more steady and orderly and coherent than the less lively, distinct, and weak] – F
9. Imagination is less strong, lively, and distinct than perceptions of real things – A
10. Ideas about real things are easily distinguished from imagination – 3, 8, 9
11. Real things and imagination (though similar) are epistemologically separate – 2, 3, 7, 10

12. Real things and objects of the imagination are metaphysically separate – 1, 11

Argument 5.7 is very interesting. At premise 2 Berkeley sets out the posit that the medium of transmission of sense perceptions is uniform. Everything (beginning with the object of perception to the intervening space to the mind) is immaterial. All is immaterial. Unlike Descartes (a dualist), Berkeley is a monist-spiritualist. There is one sort of thing that exists (the ontological question) and it is spirit. Only spirit is really known-to-be (the epistemological ques-

tion). The epistemological question decides the ontological question so that epistemology becomes the subject area of greatest importance. So long as we stay close to the empirical data and do not stray far, we're fine. That is, we are likely to be embracing truth and unlikely to be embracing falsehood (our goal, as per Chapter 4).

But then there is the pesky question of the source of illusion and error. Berkeley has already asserted that abstract reasoning leads to error (since it moves away from naïve empiricism). But what leads to abstract reasoning?

One possibility might be imagination. Now here Berkeley has a potential problem. If our minds are immaterial and the medium is immaterial and the object of our perception is immaterial, then how can we distinguish a direct encounter (sensation) from a moment of intellectual reverie (imagination)? Obviously, the intent of the argument is that if we were to consider our active sensation of an apple and our imaginary vision of the apple, the former is superior because we can eat it. The latter is less strong, lively, and distinct. This is because the imagination is a copy of something that is true (cf. Plato). Copies don't match the originals. On the principle of verisimilitude they are, at least marginally, fakes (see Chapter 4). Fakes are (to varying degrees) false. On the level of correspondence theory (understood as pattern resemblance), Berkeley's argument holds. Imagination is a springboard to abstract reasoning and imagination as a substitute for sensation leads us to error. On this account, imagination is a snare to embracing false propositions:

ARGUMENT 5.8

A Neo-Berkeley Argument

1. There are two ways to know: naïve empiricism and abstract reasoning – A
2. Naïve empiricism is the foundational source of truth – A
3. Abstract reasoning is the source of error – A
4. All of us want to embrace truth and eschew error – A
5. We should all embrace naïve empiricism and eschew abstract reasoning – 1–4

6. Imagination leads to abstract reasoning – A
7. We should all eschew imagination – 5, 6
8. Art is driven by imagination – A
9. We should all eschew art – 7, 8

Such an argument is reminiscent of one reading of Plato. If this is a plausible extension of Berkeley, then Berkeley's naïve empiricism is anti-art. When we consider the appearance versus reality problem from this perspective, only the brute force of sensations are properly presented to us. Very little interpretation will do. All else will incline us to error. Since art – especially narrative art such as poetry and fiction – relies upon abstract reasoning through fictive, composite characters and invented plot, it is the perfect model of abstract reasoning. Under this scenario, imagination is the bad guy.

The second way to confront one's sensory manifold is to search for regularities in the data and move towards abstract principles though the process of inductive logic. Here, Berkeley would demur and pull the circuit breakers. Abstract reasoning leads to error. Thus, though it would be impossible to exclude induction entirely, Berkeley (like Sextus Empiricus and the ancient medical empirics) believes that, as much as possible, we should stick to foundational sense impressions and interpret them as little as possible. When we do feel inclined to interpret, it must be done in a simple, conventional way that shows that we really don't think such conventional moves are really *true*. They may be useful for living, but like the pragmatist, one may employ various conventional designs without any commitment to truth.

In this context, imagination is fine so long as it makes no claims to being true. So long as it is mere image arranging in pleasing ways that cannot be further analysed, then so be it. The minute it makes a greater claim, then it moves towards falsity. Thus, those devoted to imaginatively-driven expressions of beauty are purveyors of falsehood. At best, the artists are like cooks that merely please the palate or not according to our conventional, transitory taste.

If this account is correct, then we should cut out the third section of this book and commit it to the flames of sophistry and illusion.

The Sources of Knowledge: Logic, Empiricism, and Emotions

The answer to our cliffhanger about the third section of this book lies in the sources of knowing. It is here that the appearance v. reality question will be answered. Like many important questions in philosophy, Plato and Aristotle originally surveyed the general topography.

Logic: Plato's Programme

Plato said in the *Timaeus* that there were two sorts of ontological entities: (a) those that always are and are apprehended by *noesis* (rational intellection) or *logos* (logical argument); and (b) those that are always coming-to-be but never actually get there and are apprehended by *doxa* (opinion) and *aesthesis* (sense perception).²² Because Plato valued something being long lasting over something being short-lived, *noesis* and *logos* won the day. This was as true for the principles that governed the creation of the universe as it is for day-to-day cognition. For this latter process, Plato sets out what has been termed 'the divided line'.

4 ARGUMENT 5.9 *Chaos* The Divided Line²³

THE LINE

Level One – The Intelligible:

A: Forms known through dialectical intellection (*noesis*)

B: Mathematical objects known through hypothetical reflection (*dianoia*)

Level Two – The Empirical:

A: Empirical objects known through grounded belief or trust (*pistis*)

B: Empirical facsimiles known through image arranging (e.g. advertising, rhetoric, et al., *eikasia*)

The Argument

1. The sources of knowing are empirical or mental – A
2. Empirical sources are easy to come by – A
3. [That which is easy to come by is trivial] – A
4. Empirical sources are trivial – 1–3
5. [Trivial and non-trivial are logical contradictories] – F
6. Mental sources are non-trivial – 4, 5
7. Direct propositional knowledge is relatively easy to come by – A
8. Direct propositional knowledge is relatively trivial – 7, 3
9. The highest form of knowledge comes from pure (dialectical and non-propositional) contemplation – 4, 6, 8

The source of knowledge that Plato endorses should begin in rational intellection. However, this is rarely the case. We must begin at the bottom of the vertical line. In the cave we are all presented with artificial depictions of empirical nature (instead of direct contact with nature itself) in our early years. Most people naively accept the package of conventional presentation given by the shared community worldview. The only modifications on this are through other conventional ad hoc agencies. In our modern world these agencies might be: advertising, media, and common opinion (largely conditioned by the whole of popular culture). By far the greatest numbers of people endorse the pop-culture view of empirical reality. If something appears differently, then that experience is often dismissed as being unrepresentative. Thus, falsification is impossible. The governing, shared community worldview (status quo) rests secure from any barbarians at the gate.

On the next level, a small minority wants to critically access the empirical images that have been arranged for them. The given paradigms of the community worldview are called into question on the basis of coherency and pragmatism. This is the realm of critical scientists. They challenge the given theories of the empirical realm with a view towards extending it. They devote themselves to jettisoning themselves from the popular paradigms in order to embrace a more esoteric understanding of nature. However, Plato asserts that as intelligent as these individuals might appear (especially to the *hoi*

polloi at level II-B), they are constrained by backing the wrong horse in the race: empiricism. Empiricism can only take you so far – i.e. halfway.

The other source of knowledge begins with propositional intellection. This is the realm of mathematics and propositionally based philosophy. Here is the interplay between various hypotheses (thesis and antithesis). From this logical interaction, something akin to mathematical or logically based arguments result. These arguments owe their genesis to intellection and discursive propositional communication.

Most of Anglo-American philosophy of the last 150 years would be categorized at this level. Most of the exposition of *this essay* exists at this level.

The highest source of knowledge transcends propositional philosophy. It asserts that some sort of intellectual grasping is at stake that has no discursive account. One achieves it but cannot directly communicate *what* it is. Such discourse is internalist (by definition). Thus, all externalists will demur at this point.

Philosophers such as Kierkegaard, Camus, Sartre, Heidegger, and others who use a strategy of indirect discourse might fit at this level.²⁴ Also, theologians who purport narrative or other indirect strategies would fit here, too.²⁵ Indirect discourse can give expression in playfully contradictory philosophy,²⁶ or a philosophy presented in such a complex fashion that most readers are forced into an interpretative mode that creates a stratum above the text in which the rendering exhibits itself. Of course a third alternative is to sow one's seeds in literary gardens and use the narrative format (inherently indirect) to structure a domain for interpretation (more on this in Part 3).

So much for Plato's levels and what they mean. The argument for the same (very enthymemic) bases the levels of how we come to know on degrees of difficulty. This is given in a visual metaphor of relative clearness of obscurity. What is visually clear is the easiest to accept. What is obscure probably seems clear to most, but not so to the trained eye. Thus, we have the fictional Sherlock Holmes who 'sees' what others don't because he is a critical, empirical observer. For those who don't place all their chips on the empirical side, then

the obscurity has another side. Some empirical presentation may be obscure because incorrectly it is thought to present a truth that is beyond its ken.

Thus, one might think about achieving true happiness and note that it takes money to eat, have clothing, and shelter. Under one inductive operation one might generalize that money confers happiness.²⁷ However, the grounds of happiness may have a different derivation than from the empirical realm. Plato thinks that this is the case. People were created to use their sense organs (primarily vision and hearing) to contemplate nature for the purpose of trying to apprehend the forms/ideas of what *is*.²⁸

Because Plato's answer to the ontological question is that there are two sorts of things (invisible and visible) and that these also are connected to the ways that they are apprehended (intellection and logic v. sensation and belief), then it is the case that our purpose as humans is to connect to the higher (the invisible via intellection and logic) and to see the lower (the visible via sensation and belief) as – *at best* – a springboard to higher realities. Thus, all art and science is in the deepest sense instrumental to higher and deeper realities and never true ends in themselves. The Abrahamic religions of the world (Christianity, Judaism, and Islam) also see things in just this way. Thus, for Plato, if we relegate our sensory experience into the category of 'springboard' to more serious consideration, which will be the most effective way to embrace what is true and jettison what is false. The real mother lode is to be found in pure intellection. Though there are other advocates of a dominantly rational approach to the sources of knowledge, Plato offers an influential paradigm in the history of philosophy.²⁹

Empiricism: Aristotle's Programme

A different approach from Plato's can be found from his student Aristotle. Aristotle was, in his heart of hearts, a biologist. Around a quarter of his extant writings are on biology. He was also keenly interested in other natural phenomena. Thus, from the beginning, Aristotle gives much more credence than Plato does to the role of sensation and status of empirical knowledge. In Aristotle's work *The*

Categories, Aristotle begins with actual individuals living in the world. These individual organisms are the most real for Aristotle. (Plato thought that the form/ideas of general classes was the most real – just the opposite.) Abstraction from the empirically existing individual is a part of what we do as humans as we try to understand exactly (scientifically).

Table 5.1 Aristotle's Categories³⁰

Substance	Quantity	Quality	Relation	Place	Time et al.
Thing	Quantification	Form	Society	Locales	400 BC
Living thing	*	*	*	Earth	*
Animal	*	*	*	Locales	Human
Human	*	*	Husband duties	Cities	measuring of motion
Male	Numbers	Colours	Social relation	Greek	Solar-based
Start: <u>Socrates</u>	One	White	Husband of Xantippes	Cities	Time
				Athens	399 BC

Now, Aristotle did not write down and fill out the above chart. This is my reconstruction after a common interpretation of it.³¹ But Aristotle does give us the category titles and says that we start with Socrates and then, going upwards, we have a relation of predication such that male is predicable of Socrates. This sort of relation is one of abstraction from the most real (often called the primary substance) to the less real (the abstractions). By making the abstractions less real in this way, Aristotle echoes Berkeley and Hume.

Going horizontally there is a relation of being present in so that 'one', 'white', 'husband of Xantippes', et al. are all present in

Socrates. Notice that the properties present in Socrates do not exist by themselves. There is no existing 'white' aside from an existing white thing, such as Socrates.³² These properties present in Socrates have traditionally been called 'accidents' because Socrates would still be Socrates if they were altered, e.g. if Socrates' wife died and he was no longer her husband, then Socrates would still be Socrates, albeit with one accidental change – from husband to widower.

Thus, the empirical existence of some individual is necessary for the predicables or accidents to be meaningful. When Socrates dies they all disappear. There is no eternal realm in which they all reside.

This general principle applies to animal kinds as well. For example, though it is useful to classify animals in hierarchical classes (and Aristotle offers functional principles of systematics that are largely consistent with modern systematics),³³ when all the members of said class cease to exist (like the dodo bird), then the class also disappears from our biological classification chart. For Aristotle, if you cease to be, then you are history. End of story.

The sorts of questions that Aristotle suggests for the source of empirical knowledge are given at the beginning of the second book of *Posterior Analytics*:³⁴ 1) *hoti* (the verification of the presented sense perception as an organized something), 2) *dioti* (the cause or reason why it is as it is), 3) *ti esti* (as a result of questions 1 and 2 an assessment of the essential definition of this sort of being), and 4) *ei esti* (an assessment of its mode of existence). Aristotle believes that when we ask these four questions of empirical phenomena, that we will gain a reliable method for embracing what is true and discarding what is false.

For example if we observed a rhinoceros, our detailed account of the animal would satisfy the first question. Say in that detailed explanation we were to set out its prominent horn that extends out from its forehead. We might wish to know the reason for this horn (question 2). The answer to this might require that we make reference to accepted scientific theories of causation. (For Aristotle this meant his theory of the four causes: efficient, material, formal, and final.)³⁵ Today, this would mean reference to accepted scientific theories – the projectibility of Goodman (see Chapter 4). The account of the

reason why in contemporary terms might describe the evolutionary advantage of this appendage as a weapon within a given range of environments.

The third question follows from the second. Once we have found out the 'reasons why' of the prominent physical characteristics of the taxon in question, we may then formulate a definition for the animal based upon observed physical features and their functions.

Lastly, we need to speculate upon the modal force of these features/functions. Could the rhinoceros exist with a skin that was thicker/thinner? If a mutant had a longer horn, would it gain a reproductive advantage? Are any of the organs vestigial? The answers to these questions (in the modern context) may give us a better understanding of the species' phylogenetic history and an opportunity to speculate on its relative fitness today.

The four scientific questions form the basis of a critical empiricism that Aristotle develops in the abstract in *The Posterior Analytics*, *The Physics*, and *The Metaphysics*. In *The Parts of Animals* and *The Generation of Animals*, Aristotle turns his attention to more concrete problems in the philosophy of biology such as the nature of reproduction (from humans to bees to insects). For the most part, Aristotle more or less follows his methodology, but the main point for our exploration is that Aristotle (unlike Berkeley) finds a way to merge rational concerns with empirical fieldwork. It is for this reason that he can be characterized as a critical empiricist. Though there are many other prominent empiricists, which have (save Berkeley) been characterized here as externalists, Aristotle's account of empiricism as the source of knowing truth stands as an important paradigm in the history of philosophy.³⁶

Emotions: A pastiche

One result of contemporary feminist philosophy has been an emphasis upon the emotions as a possible source of knowing truth.³⁷ Of course, Aristotle famously dismissed emotions as a source of truth in the *Nicomachean Ethics*:

ARGUMENT 5.10

Aristotle's on Emotions and Virtue

1. To have virtue is to move within action [voluntarily, actively] – A (1106a)
2. In emotion we are moved [involuntary, passive] – A (1106a 1-5)
3. Virtue cannot be based upon emotion – 1, 2 (EN 1106a 6)

Though this argument is on virtue, for Aristotle virtue is dependent upon practical wisdom. Thus, his argument against emotion as a component for virtue would also hold for practical reason (and certainly, by extension, for theoretical reason). The knock upon emotion is that it is out of our control. (Though some defenders, in the Aristotelian tradition suggest that it is a logical consequence of our character that *is* within our control.) Recently, there has been a resurgent interest in emotion. It is not my intent here to enter into that discussion except to explore how emotion can be a source of knowledge.

In this respect, I will direct my comments on how emotion is crucial in one's understanding of beauty and that beauty (according to the general premise of this book) links directly to truth and goodness.

Though Aristotle was a detractor concerning the connection between emotion and the ground of practical reason, he does propose that it is one of the principal ways we understand tragic drama. The emotion here is *katharsis*. This is the emotional purging that the audience feels when one witnesses the decline of a fairly good man through that person's tragic flaw.³⁸

A typical member of the audience creates a sympathetic attachment with the protagonist and then identifies with him. When the flaw brings him down, the reaction is similar to it happening to a friend or loved one. In cases of intense identification, the reaction might be directed to the possibility of it happening to her (the audience member).

After the performance, the audience member feels cleansed as the result of the emotional reaction. The emotional roller coaster and the

recognition of what *could happen* creates a vicarious sense of experience that is real. Though the drama is artificial, the emotional experience by the viewer is real. As a result of this real experience, the audience member goes through an examination that is filtered by the personal worldview of that individual. For example, if the drama was about a brave abortionist (in the era before abortionists, such as *The Cider House Rules* or *Vera Drake*), and the audience member was against abortion, then the audience member would never engage in sympathy with the protagonist and thus never experience catharsis. However, if the audience member believed in a woman's right to choose an abortion for herself, then a sympathetic reaction would have occurred early on and the probability of catharsis would be very high.

The variable here would be goodness. One's understanding of the moral question of a woman's right to choose an abortion would be a precondition to the experience of the emotional catharsis. It is not sufficient for it, but certainly it is a necessary precondition. In this way, goodness (morality) acts as gatekeeper for possible emotional involvement.

Another obstacle might be the way the drama is presented. If it is not executed professionally with skill (causing the observer to willingly suspend her disbelief), then again, emotional involvement will be thwarted. This is to speak to the beautiful. We will not become emotionally involved in a dramatic presentation that is not beautiful. To be beautiful, the movie/play/short story/novel must (at a minimum) meet the professional standards that are set by the artistic tradition and/or current practitioners. This is because it is this tradition (aka the artistic canon) that conditions the audience in their expectations of just what such a work of art is supposed to do. For example, if one were writing English sonnets for an Elizabethan audience, then the expectation would be iambic pentameter lines with an interlocking rhyming pattern in the first ten lines that also sets out the problem with a rhyming couplet resolution. If the poet could skilfully execute these technical devices, then the audience will potentially engage. These technical skills (one aspect of the beautiful) are prerequisites for any emotional interaction.

When properly executed, the emotional interaction with the text, drama, movie, et al. can inform upon the personal worldview of the audience member and help them affirm, change, or modify their own worldview. For example, I have talked to many elderly people in the course of volunteer work who have told me that *King Lear* altered their view on estate planning. Why is this the case? Because in *Lear* the protagonist makes a grave error in listening to the petitions of two evil, flattering daughters (Goneril and Regan) against the unpleasant truth-telling of Cordelia. The consequences of such a mistake drives Lear to madness. The emotional reaction to this particular story interacted with the intellectual moral of the story in such a way as to validate it. Emotions here act as a concurrent validating condition to the proposition at hand. Because emotions spring from one's personal worldview holistically, they are often the tie-breaking element in our judgments on truth.

This is not to say that sometimes emotions can lead us astray. In the end, rationality must trump emotions. But this is not to say that emotions aren't very important. In the day-to-day operation of our lives, they are our surest and quickest way to guide action according to our personal worldview. The process of this interaction in the context of our personal quest will be the subject matter for the next chapter. Turn the page!