

# WITTGENSTEIN AND SCEPTICISM

*Edited by Denis McManus*

## VARIETIES OF SCEPTICISM

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Much of this chapter is devoted to offering a partial taxonomy of various kinds of philosophical scepticism and the various kinds of philosophical response those scepticisms have engendered.<sup>1</sup> The aim of the taxonomic exercise is to furnish a perspicuous overview of some of the dialectical relations that obtain across the range of problems that philosophers have called (and continue to call) ‘sceptical’.<sup>2</sup> I will argue that such an overview affords a number of forms of philosophical insight. The final three sections of the chapter employ the taxonomy developed in the first part of the chapter to show how some of Wittgenstein’s finest commentators have misunderstood one another’s work by failing to command a clear overview of the philosophical terrain here.

### **1 Cartesian and Kantian varieties of scepticism – a first pass at the distinction**

The partial taxonomy presented in this chapter flows from an initial distinction between two varieties of scepticism which I will call *Cartesian scepticism* and *Kantian scepticism*<sup>3</sup> (these labels are admittedly contentious and will be discussed further below). Each of these varieties of scepticism has its origin in a sceptical question (which I will call ‘the *Cartesian question*’ and ‘the *Kantian question*’ respectively); and each of these varieties of sceptical question leads to a sceptical paradox (‘the *Cartesian paradox*’ and ‘the *Kantian paradox*’). I will call the imaginary philosopher who acquiesces in the Cartesian paradox ‘a *Cartesian sceptic*’, and the (even more) imaginary philosopher who acquiesces in the Kantian paradox ‘a *Kantian sceptic*’. The customary response to each of these paradoxes is to seek a way to entitle oneself to do something other than acquiesce in the paradoxical conclusion, by refuting or dissolving or diagnosing or by-passing the paradox in question. This gives rise to two varieties of philosophical problematic, flowing from such attempts to address each of these two sorts of sceptic, that I will call ‘the *Cartesian problematic*’ and ‘the *Kantian problematic*’ respectively. It is with these twin problematics that I will be primarily concerned here and which I will be discussing and refer-

ring to as ‘varieties of scepticism’. According to this unconventional idiom, the term ‘scepticism’ (and its variants, such as ‘Cartesian scepticism’ or ‘Kantian scepticism’) therefore refers not just to one particular sort of philosophical *position* (i.e. that held by one or another sort of sceptic) but rather to the wider *dialectical space* within which philosophers occupying a range of apparently opposed philosophical positions (such as ‘realism’, ‘idealism’, ‘coherentism’, etc.) engage one another, while seeking a stable way to answer the sceptic’s question in the affirmative rather than (as the sceptic himself does) in the negative.<sup>4</sup> So, according to the terminology I am here introducing, a philosopher can be concerned with the Cartesian sceptical problematic without himself being a Cartesian sceptic; and, indeed, Descartes was such a philosopher. And the same holds for the relation between being concerned with the Kantian sceptical problematic, being a Kantian sceptic and being Kant.

The following is an excerpt from the classic formulation of the Cartesian problematic:

How often, asleep at night, am I convinced of just such familiar events – that I am here in my dressing-gown, sitting by the fire – when in fact I am lying undressed in bed! Yet at the moment my eyes are certainly wide awake when I look at this piece of paper; I shake my head and it is not asleep; as I stretch out and feel my hand I do so deliberately, and I know what I am doing. All this would not happen with such distinctness to someone asleep. Indeed! As if I did not remember other occasions when I have been tricked by exactly similar thoughts while asleep! As I think about this more carefully, I see plainly that there are never any sure signs by means of which being awake can be distinguished from being asleep. . . . Suppose then that I am dreaming, and that these particulars – that my eyes are open, that I am moving my head and stretching out my hands – are not true. Perhaps, indeed, I do not even have such hands or such a body at all.

(Descartes 1986 (1641): 13)

I wish to contrast the sceptical problematic which figures in the above passage with the one which figures in the following excerpt from Kant:

The *a priori* conditions of a possible experience in general are at the same conditions of the possibility of objects of experience. Now I maintain that the categories . . . are nothing but the conditions of thought in a possible experience. . . . [A]nd without such unity . . . no thoroughgoing, universal, and therefore necessary, unity of consciousness would be met with in the manifold of perceptions. These perceptions would not then belong to any experience, consequently

would be without an object, merely a blind play of representations, less even than a dream.

(Kant 1961 (1781/1787): A112)

The problematic of the first of these passages centres on how to distinguish between dreaming that one is experiencing something and *actually* experiencing it. The problematic of the second of these passages centres on what it takes to be able to *dream* that one is experiencing something. That is to say, the second of these two problematics focuses on the conditions of the possibility of something that the first problematic takes for granted. I take the (apparent) difference here to be a consequential one.

The most familiar way of formulating the contrast between these two problematics is as one of *knowledge vs. the conditions of knowledge*. Thus, one is often told something along the following lines: the Cartesian wants to arrive at knowledge; the Kantian wants to arrive at the ground of the possibility of knowledge. But what does that mean? There are lots of ways of unpacking this contrast. I will briefly indicate a few of the different points upon which the accent can fall in an unpacking of this contrast, though I would suggest that these apparently distinct formulations can be seen, in the end, to come to the same thing:

- 1 Actuality vs. possibility. Cartesian scepticism takes the possibility of experience for granted; its question has to do with *actuality*. Hence the importance of the word ‘real’ in Cartesian formulations of the sceptical problematic: are things *really* as they seem? Kantian scepticism brings within the scope of its worry that which the Cartesian sceptic takes for granted: that experience possesses the requisite unity so much as to be able to be about something. Hence the importance of the word ‘possible’ in Kantian formulations of the sceptical problematic: how is experience (so much as) *possible*?
- 2 *Being* so vs. being *so*.<sup>5</sup> Cartesian scepticism calls into question the *being* of that which is disclosed by experience; Kantian scepticism calls into question the *intelligibility* of experience. The Cartesian problematic is concerned with the question: how can I know that things *are* as they seem? Hence the worry in the Cartesian problematic focuses on an inferential step from appearance *to* reality. The Kantian problematic is concerned with the question: how can things so much as *seem* to be a certain way? Hence the worry in the Kantian problematic focuses on the conditions of the possibility of the kind of *unity* presupposed by the Cartesian (i.e. that which the Cartesian seeks to infer *from*): what sort of **unity must** characterise a ‘play of presentations’ for it to be more than ‘a merely blind play’, for it to possess **the aspect of offering appearances** – for it to possess the character of being *of* an object.
- 3 Truth vs. objective purport. The Cartesian wants to know **which of his**

thoughts are true, which of his experiences are veridical. The Cartesian sceptic therefore worries about the transition from a sensory experience to a judgement, from a thought to (what Frege calls) its truth-value. Hence the Cartesian problematic inquires into the grounds of truth: given that this is what we are inclined to judge, do we know that we judge truthfully in so judging? The Kantian sceptic seems to deprive us of the resources for so much as being able to enjoy an experience (waking or dreaming), for so much as being able to frame a thought (true or false). The Kantian problematic inquires into the grounds of the possibility of being able to enjoy an experience, entertain a thought-content. The Kantian asks: what does it take to have thoughts that are vulnerable to how things are? The Kantian problematic is concerned, in the first instance, not with truth but with what it is to stick your neck out in thinking, with what Kant calls the *objective validity* of judgement (the possibility of something's being a candidate for truth or falsehood) – with what I will henceforth call the *objective purport* of judgement.

I will briefly indicate here a few of the guises in which Cartesian and Kantian problematics surface across a number of (supposedly distinct) 'areas' of philosophy:

- 1 Philosophy of perception. This is the most classic instance of each of these varieties of sceptical problematic. The Cartesian sceptic asks: how can I *know* things are as my senses present them as being? Is there *really* an external world? I am having an experience of a certain sort (say, that I am here in my dressing-gown, sitting by the fire) but how can I know that things are as my experience presents them as being? The case under consideration is a *best case of knowledge*,<sup>6</sup> and yet there still seems to be room for the question: how can I know that I am not, in fact, lying undressed in my bed dreaming that I am here in my dressing-gown, sitting by the fire? The Cartesian paradox thus takes the following form: if I don't know *this*, then how can I be said to know anything? Why should I ever trust the testimony of my senses? Should I ever endorse the appearances with which my senses present me? The gap the Cartesian seeks to bridge is from his own mind to the outer world. The paradox lies in our apparent inability to answer the following question: how can I penetrate the veil of sensory ideas and attain a view of what is really happening outside of my mind? The Kantian sceptic is preoccupied by different questions: how can my senses so much as *present* things as being a certain way? How can my experience so much as be intelligibly *of* an external world? The Kantian problematic is focused on the problem how the senses must be so as to able to furnish testimony. What sort of unity must experience possess in order to be able to present an appearance about which the question could arise 'Shall I endorse it'? How am I

so much as able to enjoy an experience that possesses a determinate world-directed content (say, that I am here in my dressing-gown, sitting by the fire)? The Kantian paradox lies in its coming to seem a mystery how what impinges on my senses could so much as *appear* to be revelatory of the world. The gap the Kantian seeks to overcome is from sensory blindness to sensory consciousness – from a form of sensibility upon which things merely causally impinge to one upon which things impress themselves as being thus and so.

- 2 The problem of other minds. The Cartesian version of this problem goes like this: The person before me is acting for all the world as if he were in pain, but how can I *know* that he is in pain. Is he pretending? Or is he *really* in pain? The Cartesian paradox here takes the form: if I don't know *this*, how can I ever be said to know what someone else is feeling? The Cartesian problematic here is focused on the problem of how to underwrite the testimony of the human body. The gap the Cartesian seeks to bridge here is from the other's outer bodily movements to his inner states. This version of the Cartesian sceptic asks: how can I penetrate the screen of the other's body and attain a view of what is really happening inside the other himself? This version of the Kantian sceptic is again preoccupied by a different question: how can the human body so much as seem to *express* a mental state? The Kantian paradox here lies in its coming to seem a mystery how an expanse of fleshy matter could so much as *appear* to be revelatory of an inner life. The Kantian problematic here is focused on the question: how does the human body even seem to furnish a *picture* of the human soul? The gap the Kantian seeks to overcome here is from an inexpressive physical entity to an animated field of human expression – from a psychologically-neutral locus of bodily movements to the communicative body of a palpably suffering, desiring, pondering human being.
- 3 Philosophy of language. The Cartesian version of this problem goes like this: how can I *know* that my interpretation of something (a text, an utterance, a sign-post) is correct? How can I be sure that this is what is *really* meant? I know how this sort of sign-post (in the shape, say, of a pointing arrow) is usually to be interpreted, but how do I know that my interpretation in this case is the right interpretation? But if I don't know *this*, how can I ever be said to know what something means? The gap that the Cartesian seeks to bridge here is between his understanding of the meaning of a sign and what the sign actually means. This version of the Cartesian sceptic asks: how can I penetrate the penumbra of interpretation and attain a view of the meaning itself? This version of the Kantian sceptic again is preoccupied by a different question: how can a sequence of marks or noises so much as seem to *mean* something? The Kantian paradox here lies in its coming to seem a mystery how a mere sequence of dead signs could so much as *appear* to be alive with

significance. The Kantian problematic here is focused on the question: how does a linguistic performance acquire the physiognomy of meaning? What sort of unity must a linguistic performance possess in order to appear to be the sort of thing about which the question could arise 'Is this what it means'? The gap the Kantian seeks to overcome here is from meaningless sequences of marks and noises to determinate expressions of thought – from a semantically neutral concatenation of scratches or sounds to a legible field of intelligible meanings.

In any area of philosophy in which one finds one of these two varieties of scepticism, one generally also finds the other. This is not to deny that in some areas of philosophy one of these problematics may come to seem more gripping or otherwise deserving of interest than the other. I would want to argue, however, that wherever one of these sorts of scepticism is possible, the other is also possible. (The fact that these same problematics can and often do surface in virtually every so-called 'area' of philosophy is itself a ground for wondering whether philosophy is usefully divided into separate 'areas' of enquiry as so many nowadays are prone to suppose.) Examples of these varieties of scepticism arise in ethics, aesthetics, philosophy of law, philosophy of mind, philosophy of science, philosophy of mathematics, etc.;<sup>7</sup> but the foregoing three pairs of cases should suffice for the purpose of furnishing a preliminary overview of the twin problematics that I am seeking to isolate here.

This brings us to the first form of philosophical insight that a perspicuous overview of various kinds of scepticism affords. It allows one to command a clearer view of the sorts of relations of symmetry and asymmetry that obtain among variants within a single variety of scepticism. If one commands a clear view of the homology of structure exhibited, for example, across the three variants of Cartesian or Kantian scepticism mentioned above, then one puts oneself in a position to bring resources derived in the consideration of one of these variants to bear on the consideration of others. It is quite remarkable, for example, how many a philosopher today is clear that, whatever else she wants to do in philosophy, she wants to find a way to resist the Cartesian assumption in the philosophy of perception that all perception of external objects requires an inference from how things seem to how things are. She wants to avoid such an assumption because she realises she will then be saddled with a Cartesian gap (leaving herself sealed inside her own mind, unable to claw her way back out to an unobstructed glimpse of the external world). Yet this same philosopher, when she turns, say, to the philosophy of language yields to the corresponding Cartesian temptation without a pang – finding utterly innocent the assumption that all understanding presupposes interpretation – thus saddling herself with a gap of a homologous sort (leaving herself sealed within a horizon of interpretations, unable way to claw her way back out to an unobstructed grasp of the meaning of an expression).

## 2 On the labels 'Cartesian', 'Kantian' and 'scepticism'

There is much that any conscientious historian of philosophy will find to object to in my choosing to attach these labels to each of these varieties of scepticism: does not (what I am calling) Cartesian scepticism antedate Descartes?; is not the issue of scepticism a sideshow in Descartes' philosophy and hence of relatively minor importance (compared with other things – say, the new science, or the quarrel with the Church) for an understanding of Descartes' work as a whole?; is not Kant more Cartesian than I suggest he is?; is not scepticism equally a sideshow in Kant's larger endeavour?; and what about Hume? Such objections are directed at the aptness of these labels, and it would be a mistake to think that the integrity of this project (of distinguishing the varieties of scepticism I choose to label 'Cartesian' and 'Kantian') is much threatened by such objections. Such objections speak only to the question whether I wouldn't be better advised to relabel the varieties of scepticism with which I am here concerned. For the most part, such historical qualms will have to go unaddressed here though I will indicate briefly how I view two.

First, it is quite true that Descartes himself never poses most of the sceptical worries that I will be calling variants of 'Cartesian scepticism' (indeed, it is arguable that he only ever clearly poses one of them – namely, scepticism about the external world). And, though Kant arguably explores more of the possible variants of (what I will be calling) 'Kantian scepticism', he seems to be quite oblivious to some of them. Thus, in claiming that the philosophical problems I mention below represent variants of Cartesian and Kantian scepticism respectively, I am not making an historical claim about which problems are (and are not) discussed in the writings of Descartes or Kant. Rather, I am making a philosophical claim about a congruence to be found in the shape of the problems themselves, regardless of whose writings they appear in.

Second, the aptness of these labels for the purposes of distinguishing the two varieties of scepticism at issue here does not turn on any claim to the effect that an interest in the other problematic (i.e. the one that does not bear the author's name) is absent from the writings of either Descartes or Kant. So it does not imply a denial that Kant was interested in Cartesian scepticism. In fact, Kant addresses a variant of Cartesian scepticism (he calls it 'problematical idealism') and seeks in 'The Refutation of Idealism' to show how the proper treatment of (what he himself calls) 'scepticism' contains as one of its corollaries the untenability of all such forms of idealism. Nor does it turn on a denial that there are incipient forms of a Kantian problematic to be found in Descartes' writings (though I do not think that such a problematic ever comes fully into view in Descartes' pages as a full-blown, self-standing variety of scepticism<sup>8</sup>). I denominate these problematics 'Cartesian' and 'Kantian' respectively, in order to mark not the point of their earliest

philosophical inception (the moment at which the seeds of the problematic first began to blossom philosophically) nor their last philosophical flicker of life (the moment past which they cease to have philosophical currency), but rather the historical moment at which within at least one of their variants their overall philosophical shape first became visible (the moment at which the problematic first reaches full philosophical flower).

Even if one is willing to waive these historical scruples, there still remain philosophical reasons why one might resist these labels. Thus, for example, it will seem to some philosophers perverse of me to use the term 'scepticism' in connection with what I am calling 'Kantian scepticism' precisely because of the ways in which it fails to exhibit some of the characteristic features of Cartesian scepticism. I purported, in originally furnishing ways one might unpack the difference between Cartesian and Kantian scepticism, to be offering various ways of unpacking the contrast between a problematic centred on *knowledge* and one centred on *the conditions of knowledge*. This way of putting the contrast makes it seem as if what were at issue were two forms of epistemological worry. As, however, should already be evident from the foregoing, this is quite misleading. It is, indeed, constitutive of the Cartesian problematic that it be clothed in epistemological form; its focus is on knowledge claims, bringing into question the relation between our knowledge claims and reality. What makes someone such-and-such a sort of Cartesian sceptic is that he is exercised by a *doubt* regarding whether we can have *knowledge* of such-and-such a sort. Given the internal relation between the concepts of doubt and knowledge, the Cartesian sceptic is quite aptly characterised as someone who *doubts*. What figures in the Cartesian problematic as a worry about the relation between knowledge claims and reality comes to look, however, from the vantage point of the Kantian problematic, like only an instance of a more general worry, a worry about the relation between *any* claim (true, false or fantastic) and reality. In making a claim at all, whether or not one thereby takes oneself to be knowledgeable, one makes oneself answerable to how things are. The Kantian asks: how is one able to accomplish this feat? The Kantian problematic is therefore only optionally clothed in epistemological form. It is, at its root, of a more general nature and the worry that exercises such a sceptic is misunderstood if it is taken to turn exclusively on matters having to do with knowledge. What comes into view in a Kantian problematic under the initial heading of 'the conditions of the possibility of knowledge' are the conditions of the possibility of mindedness as such. Kant himself, with some frequency, alternates between characterising the sorts of conditions at issue here as conditions of the possibility of knowledge and as conditions of the possibility of *experience*. (And he implies that they might equally aptly be characterised as, among other things, conditions of the possibility of objectively valid judgement, and conditions of the possibility of sensory consciousness of an object.) The Kantian sceptic is therefore only inaptly characterised as someone who suffers from a *doubt*.

This will seem to some philosophers to constitute a sufficient ground for insisting that what I am calling 'a Kantian sceptic' is not a kind of sceptic at all. So let me be clear on the following point: my aim here is never to legislate how the word 'sceptic' should be used, but only to illuminate some of the diverse ways in which philosophers, in fact, often use it – with the eventual aim of permitting the formulation of the following question: how are these various problematics (each of which is often called one of 'scepticism') related?<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, if one insists upon restricting the application of the term 'scepticism' to overtly epistemological contexts, one is going to be unable to track much that is at issue when the term is employed by Kant, by Wittgenstein, and (as the concluding sections of this chapter will demonstrate) by many contemporary philosophers. Consider, for example, the debate about the rule-following considerations and the threat of so-called *meaning scepticism*. What is often at issue in that debate is not just how one can *know* what something (or someone) means, but *how it is so much as possible* to mean anything at all. The term 'scepticism' in that debate often names the paradox that ensues if we cease to be able to make sense of the phenomenon in question as something that is so much as possible. What threatens to lapse here is not just our *epistemic access* to meaning but the very *possibility* of meaning. In reply to this, someone might want to insist that, if that is so, then that is a good reason for not employing the term 'scepticism' in the context of that debate. Perhaps so. My point, at the moment, is simply that if one wants to track how the term is often used by many philosophers, one needs to see that it sometimes ranges over philosophical contexts wider than the merely epistemological. This oscillation between a narrowly epistemological and a broader Kantian use of the term can make for many confusions; and it is natural to think the short way to avoid such confusions is to initiate an act of linguistic legislation that restricts the permissible use of the term. But it is too early in our enquiry to adjudicate how the use of the term ought to be restricted, if at all. In order to see how the term is best used, first we need to see more clearly how it is used and why it has come to admit of the variety of uses it presently does.

### 3 Some features of the Cartesian and Kantian genres of scepticism

In order to allow for a more fine-grained discrimination of these varieties of scepticism, I will now proceed to distinguish nine generic features of Cartesian and Kantian scepticism respectively.<sup>10</sup> But before I do this, let me caution that, as I employ the terms, 'Cartesian scepticism' and 'Kantian scepticism' denote *ideal types* of philosophical problematic that are instantiated with varying degrees of faithfulness in any given actual philosophical discussion. There are three dimensions of idealisation at work here.

The first dimension of idealisation lies in the idea that a fully realised

variant of, say, Cartesian scepticism will exhibit all nine of the mentioned features. It is an idealisation because most philosophical discussions that exhibit any one of the features (drawn from one of the two above lists of features) will not necessarily exhibit *all* of them (though it will probably exhibit many of them). Thus, it should be understood that, henceforth, when I speak of 'a Cartesian problematic', for example, I will mean a philosophical discussion that exhibits at least a large number of the Cartesian features specified below, but not necessarily all of them.<sup>11</sup>

The second dimension of idealisation concerns the way in which the presentation of these feature-spaces may appear to preclude the possibility of their overlap – to preclude an intermingling of Cartesian and Kantian features within a single philosophical problematic. That is both a desirable and a potentially misleading aspect of the presentation that follows. It is desirable in as much as it is part of my aim to illuminate something about the internal structure of each of these two (admittedly idealised) varieties of philosophical problematic. Each has its own logic. The co-occurrence of such features within a single philosophical discussion is generally (though not necessarily<sup>12</sup>) a symptom of philosophical confusion on the part of an author; and it is part of my purpose to facilitate the diagnosis and treatment of such forms of confusion. Nevertheless, it is potentially misleading because – even if, in a resolutely executed philosophical enquiry, Cartesian and Kantian features will tend to drive one another out – in the irresoluteness of actual philosophical practice, such features can often be found squashed up against one another. Borrowing some terms from Cavell's theory of genre<sup>13</sup>, one might say that Kantian scepticism represents an *adjacent* genre of scepticism – one in which each of the features of Cartesian scepticism is *displaced*<sup>14</sup> in a certain way. And, just as different genres of film (say, a western and a romantic comedy) can be crossed with another – often (though not always) with aesthetically jarring results – so, too, these genres of scepticism can be crossed with another. In philosophy, when this happens, usually (though not always) it is a sign that the author is no longer clear which of these two philosophical problematics he wishes to inhabit.

The third dimension of idealisation concerns the presentation of each of the features as apparently distinct from at least most of the other eight. One reason for thus presenting them has already been indicated: If one reviews actual philosophical discussions some of these features will feature explicitly while others will not. So, by provisionally treating the features in question as apparently distinct, we equip ourselves with a classificatory scheme that can be applied more widely. Yet this raises a number of questions about how we are to understand the philosophical discussions we are thus classifying: are these features all really (as opposed to merely notationally) distinct? And, even where distinct, how independent are they? Is it perhaps the case that any philosophical discussion that explicitly bears some of them must

be implicitly entangled in a problematic that bears all of them? The initial presentation of these features as apparently distinct should not be taken to foreclose the possibility that the latter question is properly answered in the affirmative.

### *Cartesian genre*

With these cautionary remarks to be borne in mind, I will henceforth refer to the following nine generic features of the Cartesian genre of scepticism as *Cartesian features*:

- 1 The Cartesian investigation begins with and turns on the exploration of a certain sort of example – *a best case of knowledge*.
- 2 Such a case is shown to be vulnerable to *doubt*.
- 3 The conclusion *generalises* – we can move from a conclusion about this particular candidate item of knowledge to a general conclusion about all such items.
- 4 The investigation thereby issues in a *discovery*.
- 5 The investigation ends in a mood of *disappointment*.
- 6 The disappointment is born of the impossibility of showing how what we had taken to be possible could be *actual*.
- 7 It looks as if there is something *we cannot do*.
- 8 Our inability is the consequence of the existence of a *Cartesian gap* – a gap we seem to be unable to bridge.
- 9 The sceptical discovery cannot be converted into practice: it is *practically unstable* – yet we are obliged to live as if we could bridge the gap in question.

### *First feature*

To say that an exploration of the Cartesian problematic begins always with 'a best case of knowledge' is to say that it begins always with a carefully selected *example* – one that possesses (or at least appears able simultaneously to possess) at least the following four characteristics. First, the example must involve a *concrete claim* to know: a particular person, at a particular time and place must enter the claim. Second, the claim in question must be able to serve as an *exemplar* of an entire class of claims: it must be sufficiently representative so that each of us can rehearse a version of such a claim in the privacy of our own epistemological closet. Third, the claim must be directed at an *unremarkable object* – the sort of object which requires no special sort of expertise in order to be able to tell one when you see one. Thus (what one might be tempted to call) 'a kind of object' figures in Cartesian examples – a hand, a tomato, an envelope, a chair (but never a nine iron, an M-16 rifle, a Japanese beetle, a goldfinch or a bubble chamber). One must begin

with the right sort of example, in order to get the Cartesian problematic up and running.<sup>15</sup> Fourth, the object must be encountered under *optimal* conditions: in good lighting, at short range, for an extended period of time, etc. An important part of exploring the Cartesian problematic lies in exploring the character and the legitimacy of the examples employed to introduce a Cartesian sceptical recital and ascertaining whether they really do simultaneously possess all four of the required characteristics. A preoccupation with such examples is a hallmark of the Cartesian problematic.

#### *Second feature*

The Cartesian paradox results from the susceptibility of the existence of such an object to *doubt*. The Cartesian investigation initiates an enquiry into the question what (in our experience of the relevant phenomenon) does and does not admit of the possibility of doubt. It thereby seeks to decompose our experience into two sorts of elements: those which are inherently indubitable and those which involve some (even if perhaps minimal) element of risk. The viability of the ensuing doubt lies in the disclosure of a reliance (on the part of the candidate claim to knowledge) upon those strata of our experience involving this identifiable element of risk. Under the pressure of the Cartesian investigator's demand for certainty, we are led to the discovery that very little in our experience is invulnerable to such forms of doubt.

#### *Third feature*

The possibility of such a discovery depends on the capacity of the initially selected example to *generalise*. If we don't know *this*, then we don't know anything. That is, in the disclosure that this particular claim to knowledge is vulnerable to doubt, we do not merely take ourselves to learn that we are not able to know a particular thing that we might have thought we did know. ('Oh, OK, I guess I don't know that is a goldfinch after all.') Rather, we take ourselves to learn something about knowledge as such – or at least about a whole class of knowledge claims. ('If I don't know that there is a tomato in front of me right now, then how can I be said to know anything – or at least anything based on the testimony of my senses.') The vulnerability of our initially selected example to doubt seems, at one and the same time, to disclose the vulnerability of vast portions of our supposed edifice of knowledge. Thus, Descartes does not conclude: 'Well, then I don't know that I am sitting here in my dressing gown by the fireplace, after all.' Rather, Descartes finds himself drawn to take an apparently irresistible yet extraordinarily precipitous step to a far more general conclusion of the following sort: 'Well, then I can never know that things are as my senses tell me they are.'

#### *Fourth feature*

The possibility of such a doubt seems to yield a *discovery*. The sceptical discovery takes the form of *seeing through* the surface of our practices to how they really are. For the results of the Cartesian investigation seem to stand in sharp conflict with our ordinary ways of talking and living. Our practices of entering knowledge claims seem to be fundamentally at odds with what it is that the investigation shows we are really entitled to claim. So, even if the Cartesian inquirer finds himself unable to do other than to continue to speak with the vulgar and to participate in ordinary ways of speaking and acting, nonetheless, in the light of his discovery, these practices must now seem to him to be unmasked as resting upon a tissue of illusion. To the extent that the Cartesian acquiesces in the conclusion his investigation seems to force upon him, he thereby takes himself to be able to see more clearly and deeply into the true nature of these practices than the majority of his fellows who unreflectively participate in them.

#### *Fifth feature*

The initial thrill of discovery gives way to a mood of *disappointment* with knowledge. There no longer seems to any way for the sort of knowledge in question to live up to its name. And this gives rise to a mood of disillusionment. One takes oneself to have an understanding of what would have had to have been the case for this sort of knowledge to have been possible. But it transpires that, at least for beings such as ourselves, that possibility is not attainable. One is thus left with the feeling that there is something that ought to have been possible but which, as it happens, turns out, at least for us, not to be possible. (The mood of Cartesian scepticism is that of the heroes of Shakespeare's tragedies: one of disappointment at being fated to live in a world that will necessarily betray one's trust in it.<sup>16</sup>) Such a prevailing mood of disappointment or disillusionment as the apparently inescapable response to philosophical enquiry is symptomatic of entanglement in a variant of the Cartesian problematic.

#### *Sixth feature*

The disappointment lies in our not being *actually* able to do something that we had always taken to be possible (we are unable to know that things *are* as they appear). The world we had pre-reflectively taken ourselves to inhabit – a world in which we were capable of attaining knowledge of a certain sort – threatens to turn out not to be the world we actually inhabit. We can formulate thoughts about what such a world would be like and can perhaps still enjoy experiences that purport to be of such a world, but we now are no longer able in our reflective moments to endorse the contents of such thoughts and experiences.



*Seventh feature*

The structure of the situation we inhabit therefore now seems to come into view as one in which *we cannot do* something we want to be (and pre-reflectively thought of ourselves as fully) able to do. The sceptical discovery seems to disclose a *limit* to our cognitive abilities – a limit that kicks in at a far earlier point in the cognitive process than we, prior to our philosophical investigation, had any reason to expect, a limit that we cannot penetrate or circumvent, try as we might.

*Eighth feature*

This inability is taken to be a function of our inability to bridge a certain sort of gap. In the case of philosophy of perception, the gap looms between my inner life and the outer world; in the case of other minds, it opens up between his outer behaviour and his inner life, etc. The Cartesian takes himself to have made a genuine discovery in having disclosed the existence of such a gap. Cartesian strategies for finding a way around the Cartesian paradox involve attempts to find a way to live with this gap. The Cartesian who wants to avoid a sceptical conclusion wants to be able to negotiate his way across the gap. (Descartes himself famously looked to God for some assistance in this matter.) But the gap itself is one he still takes to be just *there*. As long as one operates within the confines of the Cartesian problematic, the only possible form of ‘solution’ to the problem of scepticism lies in attempting to construct some such sort of bridge across the gap. I will call the sort of gap at issue here ‘a *Cartesian gap*’.

*Ninth feature*

The Cartesian inquirer will wish to distinguish *theoretical doubt* from *practical doubt*. His doubt, he will tell us, is a merely theoretical one. Though, as such, it represents, he will insist, a perfectly intelligible outcome to an intellectual enquiry; nevertheless, he will also insist, conviction in such a conclusion cannot be sustained by someone caught up in the midst of a practical situation. Cartesian sceptical doubt thus possesses an *inherent instability* due to the impossibility of its realisation in practice.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, we are often reassured by philosophers who wish to introduce us to this problematic that the Cartesian enquiry is one that can and should be suspended for practical purposes.<sup>18</sup> Such reassurances presuppose the standing possibility of practically abstaining from one’s sceptical surmise and re-embracing the modes of experience, thought and expression thereby brought into question. Such an insistence upon the purely theoretical character of the generality of the form of doubt that is at issue in philosophical enquiry is a hallmark of the Cartesian problematic.<sup>19</sup>

*Kantian genre*

Kantian scepticism does not quite share any of the above nine generic features. The Kantian genre of scepticism exhibits instead the following nine *Kantian features* – each of which involves a peculiar displacement or reversal or inversion of the corresponding Cartesian feature:

- 1 It is constitutive of the sort of investigation into knowledge that it is that it is characterised by a peculiar sort of *indifference to the character of the object* it takes up as an example.
- 2 It does not issue in a doubt, but a *boggle*.
- 3 The paradox is not the result of moving from a conclusion about a particular object to a general conclusion about all objects of experience, but rather a result of the inability to see how there could so much as be an experience that purports to be *of a particular*.
- 4 The investigation climaxes not in a sense of discovery, but one of *mystery*.
- 5 This investigation ends in a mood not of disappointment, but of *despair*.
- 6 The despair is born not of the impossibility of showing how what we take to be possible could be actual, but of showing how what we take to be actual could be *possible*.
- 7 It no longer looks as if there is something we cannot do, now it looks as if there is *nothing to do* (not even dream) where we had previously thought there was something.
- 8 The apparent disintegration of this something into a nothing is the consequence of a *Kantian gap*.
- 9 The Kantian sceptical surmise is not merely practically unstable, but *theoretically unstable qua surmise*.

*First feature*

To say that it is constitutive of the Kantian problematic that it is characterised by the *absence of a special category of example* is to say no more or less than what Kant means to say when he says that transcendental logic, though it does not abstract entirely from objects, is concerned only with the conditions of the possibility of the pure thought of an object: with what it is for thought to be able so much as to be able to have a bearing on the world, what it is for our thought to be related to objects *überhaupt*. Transcendental logic must abstract from all differences between objects – from what it is to be cognitively related to this rather than that sort of object – but not from relatedness to an object as such. The two sides of the Kantian problematic, in its classical formulation, turn on how sensibility can yield deliverances that are of objects and how thought can be directed at a (mind-independent) world. The problematic that unfolds here homogenises the field of possible examples. The questions ‘What it is to *dream* that I am in front of a fireplace?’ and ‘What is

it to *see* a fireplace in front of me?’ become simultaneously problematised and equally urgent. The questions ‘What is it to *know* that I am now in Auburn, Alabama?’ and ‘What is it to *think* of a celestial city?’ become equally urgent. The differences between such kinds of example (which play such a crucial role in the context of the Cartesian problematic) cease to be relevant.<sup>20</sup> It is no less a problem for the Kantian to understand how we are so much as able to think thoughts that are false than it is to understand how it is that we are able to think thoughts that are true. The examples occurring in explorations of the Kantian problematic therefore often exhibit a curiously schematic character: they lack the concreteness of their Cartesian counterparts – not only in the sense that they come in for less determinate characterisation, but also in the comparative lack of specification of the epistemic standing of the claim under investigation or of the cognitive attitude adopted towards it.

#### *Second feature*

Under the pressure of the Kantian question, all our cognitive capacities (the capacity to doubt among them) come to seem equally questionable. Having worked his way far into a particular philosophical dialectic, the Kantian sceptic comes to an impasse: it suddenly no longer seems to him possible that one should be able so much as to frame thoughts that are about the world (or to experience another’s bodily movements as expressions of emotion, or to traffic in forms of words that are replete with meaning, etc.). This sort of sceptic becomes perplexed as to what it is to be experiencing or thinking or meaning things in ways that he also cannot help but take himself to be doing in and through the very act of asking his sceptical question. To move in the direction in which his question leads is apparently to deprive his question (along with the whole of the rest of his ‘thought’) of the capacity to possess determinate content. And yet he is unable to dismiss his question. It has come to seem intellectually compulsory. So his mind *boggles*. Such a boggling of the mind, in the face of a looming conclusion that can neither be approached nor avoided – neither fully comprehended nor simply dismissed on the grounds of its incomprehensibility – is a mark of entanglement in a variant of the Kantian problematic.

#### *Third feature*

What is at issue in the Kantian problematic is the possibility of making claims in general, not knowledge claims in particular. This means that the point of departure for a Kantian investigation is not a particular case of knowledge, but rather the topic of the vulnerability of our thought to reality. This, in a certain sense, reverses the direction of the Cartesian investigation: The Kantian paradox is not the result of moving from a conclusion about the character of our experience of a particular case to a general conclusion

about all objects of experience, but rather a result of inability to see how there could so much as be an experience which purports to be *of a particular*. To respond to the Kantian sceptic is to show how our thinking can have a sort of dependence on the world that allows our activity of making claims to come intelligibly into view as one of claim-making at all. In the absence of an adequate response here, the world threatens to recede from our grasp – to the point where not only do we have reason to fear, with the Cartesian sceptic, that we are unable to know which of our claims about it are true, but rather – to the point where we cannot any longer even make sense of the idea that we are able to enter claims about anything of a sufficiently determinate character to be either true or false. This sense of the fading away of the possibility of determinate empirical content in our thought, experience and discourse is a mark of entanglement in the Kantian problematic.

#### *Fourth feature*

We can only discover that which we can think. The Cartesian investigation can issue in a discovery, because the Cartesian takes himself to be able to form a stable conception of that which he discovers we do not have. The Kantian paradox takes the form not of a discovery, but of a *mystery*. In each of the three variants of Kantian scepticism briefly sketched above, the Kantian paradox is one in which the possibility of a sort of appearance usually taken for granted in the corresponding variant of Cartesian scepticism suddenly comes to seem mysterious: how what impinges on my senses could so much as appear to be revelatory of the world; how the inert fleshy matter comprising someone’s body could so much as appear to be revelatory of his inner life; and how a mere sequence of dead signs could so much as appear to be alive with significance. Our ordinary cognitive capacities appear intolerably mysterious now and therefore seem to call for a philosophical project that will relieve our discomfort by providing an account of these capacities that drains them of their mystery.<sup>21</sup>

#### *Fifth feature*

If such a Kantian investigation (into the very possibility of our being able to frame thoughts, enjoy experiences, express meanings, etc.) ends in sceptical paradox, the resulting mood is not one of disappointment – for disappointment (like discovery) is possible only where some glimmering of what it is that one wants (but cannot have) is also available to one. Kant says (concerning what he calls) scepticism, that it is a ‘way of thinking, in which reason moves against itself with such violence, that it could never have arisen except in *völliger Verzweiflung* of achieving satisfaction with respect to reason’s most important aspirations’ (Kant 1977 (1783): 19). The violence with which here, in what Kant calls scepticism, reason turns against itself is a violence of the

most extreme possible sort. What reason questions is *itself*. Our faculty for rational thought arrives at the point where it asks itself (not just how this or that cognitive capacity is possible, but) how it itself is possible, questioning the possibility of the exercise of the very capacity exercised in the framing of such a question. This question is one that reason would be driven to pose only if it found itself in a state of *völliger Verzweiflung* – complete desperation or despair – we might say: despair born of desperation. (The mood of Kantian scepticism is that of the heroes of Kafka's parables: one of bewilderment at the dissolution of the world's conditions of intelligibility.<sup>22</sup>)

#### *Sixth feature*

When reason thus questions its own possibility, the natural history of reason enters a new and radical stage – a sceptical paradox of a different order from the Cartesian is broached. The problem is no longer to understand how something we took to be possible can be actual. The problem is now one that threatens the entire array of cognitive capacities which the Cartesian sceptic takes to be unproblematically available: the capacities to doubt and dream, to feel and think and believe, to enjoy sensory impressions of fireplaces and frame hypotheses about evil demons. The problem now is to understand how something that we take to be actual – for example, the exercise of those cognitive capacities evidently actualised in our philosophical reflections (reflections that themselves seek to address the question of the possibility of such capacities) – can be possible.<sup>23</sup>

#### *Seventh feature*

This collapse of the space of possibilities leaves it looking not – as in the Cartesian case – as if there is something we cannot do. Now it looks as if there is *nothing to do* (not even to dream) where we had previously thought there must be something. The Kantian sceptical discovery, rather than disclosing a boundary which our cognitive abilities run up against, seems to deprive us of any territory through which such a boundary might be able to run. This sense that, in our philosophical enquiry, we have found a way to make the Cartesian limit disintegrate (though at the possible cost of ceasing to be able to make sense of our lives) is symptomatic of entanglement in the Kantian problematic.

#### *Eighth feature*

The Cartesian takes himself to run up against a gap in his philosophising (a gap between mind and world, between the body of the other and his soul, between interpretation and meaning, etc.). He takes himself to have made a genuine discovery in having disclosed the existence of such a gap. The gap

itself is just *there*. The Kantian also seems to encounter a certain sort of gap in his philosophising (between sensory blindness and sensory consciousness, between an inexpressive expanse of mere flesh and the animated field of an expressive human body, between meaningless sequences of marks and noises and determinately meaningful expressions of thought, etc.). But it is not clear what it would be to acquiesce in the existence of his gap. It must already be bridged (as evidenced by his present ability to exercise his capacities for perception, expression, and thought); and yet, as long as the threat of Kantian paradox has yet to be averted, it also appears that there is no way to bridge the gap. Thus, the Kantian problematic tends to be most lucidly adumbrated in the writings of kinds of Kantian who aim to show that where we seem to be confronted with a Kantian gap, we are confronted with only the illusion of a gap.

#### *Ninth feature*

If, as was said above, the philosophical outcome that now looms is one that threatens the array of cognitive capacities which the Cartesian sceptic takes to be unproblematically available (the capacities to doubt and dream, to feel and think and believe, to enjoy sensory impressions of fireplaces and frame hypotheses about evil demons), then the full import of Kantian sceptical paradox must remain intellectually unschematisable. There can be no such thing as getting 'it' fully into focus, for getting things into focus seems precisely to be just a further instance of the sort of thing which we now seem bound to conclude we are unable to do. The Kantian worry is not merely (like the Cartesian one) a form of philosophical perplexity that ceases to be sustainable when the attempt is made to translate it into practice. It cannot even be sustained at the level of theory. The practical possibility of abstaining from the modes of experience and thought and expression that are here brought into question is not an option that can present itself even momentarily as a live one. This form of sceptical paradox is therefore not unstable merely in the way the Cartesian one is (i.e. because we cannot sustain our conviction in it, as we leave the closet of our philosophy and immerse ourselves in the practical exigencies of life), the Kantian paradoxical surmise already occupies a state of radical instability *qua* surmise.<sup>24</sup> The Kantian sceptic finds himself drawn to a question he is both unable to hold stably in his mind and yet unable to dismiss.<sup>25</sup>

### **4 The inflection of philosophical vocabulary in Cartesian and Kantian registers**

The perspicuous overview I have offered of various kinds of scepticism allows one to distinguish some of the very different sorts of things philosophers may take themselves to mean when they employ vocabulary such as 'scepticism',

'sceptical paradox', etc. Moreover, which register – Cartesian or Kantian – a philosopher is operating in will also determine the manner in which a great deal of the rest of his philosophical vocabulary is inflected. Equipped with the preceding overview of Cartesian and Kantian features, it becomes possible, for example, to survey the history of twentieth-century analytic philosophy and to notice that philosophers (in their discussions of what they call 'scepticism') often tend to be preoccupied with one of these two registers to the exclusion of the other. Most of the mainstream of analytic philosophy has been obsessed with the Cartesian problematic. Moore, Russell, Broad, Ayer, Price and Chisholm are among the most distinguished members of this Cartesian branch of the analytic tradition. But there is also a branch of the analytic tradition that, though it has fewer members, is equally as distinguished, and occupies itself almost entirely with the Kantian problematic. It includes among its members C.I. Lewis, Wilfrid Sellars and Peter Strawson. If one then examines how a great deal of philosophical vocabulary ('experience', 'epistemic', 'object', 'the given', etc.) is employed, one notices that it acquires a very different inflection in the writings of one of these sets of authors than it acquires in the writings of the other.<sup>26</sup>

Not only individual bits of vocabulary but whole phrases, clauses, sentences and questions acquire a different philosophical valence depending upon whether they occur in the context of the investigation of a Cartesian or a Kantian problematic. Thus, for example, consider the following question: 'Can our cognitive powers reach all the way to the objects themselves?' This can express a Cartesian anxiety about the existence of a gap between our representations of outer objects and those outer objects themselves (the anxiety here is that our cognitive powers always operate at an awkward remove from the objects they represent), or it can express a Kantian anxiety about our capacity to direct our thought at objects (the anxiety here is that our so-called cognitive powers are unable to furnish us with anything which even amounts to a 'representation'.) Since the same form of words can, on a particular occasion, express either a Cartesian or a Kantian anxiety, it becomes possible, as we shall soon see, for two philosophers to take themselves to be in agreement with one another when they are not, or to take themselves to be in disagreement with one another when they are not. It thus becomes important, when seeking to identify the sort of philosophical problematic in which a philosopher is entangled, to look beyond the most superficial features of a his work, such as the forms of words that he is drawn to employ when framing his problem. One must look instead to the character of the features that characterise his problematic. One philosopher may adopt another philosopher's mode of speaking wholesale and yet miss his problematic entirely.<sup>27</sup>

The remaining sections of this chapter will develop this point – that one may be tempted by such superficial similarities of vocabulary to shoehorn a sceptical paradox bearing Kantian features into a problematic of the

Cartesian form and vice versa – to clarify how some of Wittgenstein's most distinguished commentators have misunderstood one another. Wittgenstein and Kant are the outstanding figures in the history of philosophy whose writings have been concerned to explore the nature and structure of the Cartesian and Kantian problematics alike and, above all, to explore the relation between them.<sup>28</sup> By failing to identify clearly these varieties of sceptical problematic while also failing to see that in both Kant's and Wittgenstein's writings the term 'scepticism' is inflected broadly enough to range over both these varieties (thereby failing to appreciate Kant's and Wittgenstein's respective interests in their connection), otherwise insightful commentators have believed that they agree with one another (and with Kant or Wittgenstein) when they do not and have believed that they disagree with one another when they do not. I will illustrate this point here only in connection with Wittgenstein's work. As a first example of such a misunderstanding, let us consider a misencounter between Hilary Putnam and John McDowell.

### 5 A case of apparent agreement: Putnam and McDowell

In his 1994 *Dewey Lectures*,<sup>29</sup> Hilary Putnam attempts to identify a widespread assumption that he claims runs throughout early modern philosophy – he dubs the assumption in question 'the interface conception' – and he argues that, three centuries later, it continues to be responsible for many of the difficulties that plague contemporary philosophy. Putnam characterises the consequences of the continuing hold of this assumption on the philosophical imagination of our time as nothing short of a 'disaster':

[T]he key assumption responsible for the disaster is the idea that there has to be an interface between our cognitive powers and the external world – or, to put the same point differently, the idea that our cognitive powers cannot reach all the way to the objects themselves.

(Putnam 1999: 10)

Putnam here glosses (what he calls) 'the key assumption' as follows: 'the idea that our cognitive powers cannot reach all the way to the objects themselves'. We will turn in a moment to the question of what assumption it is that these words express. Let us simply note for now that Putnam wishes to claim that if only we could overcome the assumption expressed by these words we would then be in a position to embrace with a sound philosophical conscience what he (following William James) calls 'the natural realism of the common man'. This locution – 'natural realism' – as Putnam deploys it, is not meant to be a label for an alternative philosophical position; rather it is meant to denote something both more familiar and more elusive: our own pre-philosophical

understanding of the character of our cognitive relation to the world, prior to its corruption by certain forms of philosophising that have now come to seem to be forms of post-scientific common sense. Thus, Putnam is able to describe what he seeks to recommend in the *Dewey Lectures* as the cultivation of a kind of second naïveté about the objects of perception. But our philosophical consciences *are* troubled. Putnam knows this, and thus knows that, in issuing his call for a return to a lost state of epistemological innocence, he is bound to appear to many of his colleagues to be merely the most recent incarnation of the proverbial philosophical ostrich burying his head in the sands of our everyday ways of talking and thinking. What makes it inevitable that things will so appear to many of his colleagues, according to Putnam, is the interface conception: it is what makes it look as if the recommended species of naïveté cannot be anything other than *mere* naïveté. Putnam credits John McDowell, in his book *Mind and World*, with having identified (what Putnam calls in the passage above) the ‘key assumption’.<sup>30</sup> But Putnam is here misreading McDowell;<sup>31</sup> and in order to pinpoint how such a misreading of McDowell comes about, it helps to be able to see how a phrase such as ‘our cognitive powers cannot reach all the way to the objects themselves’ can hover – and does hover on Putnam’s pages – between two different sorts of philosophical problematic: a Cartesian and a Kantian one. While often faithfully paraphrasing or quoting McDowell’s exact words, Putnam changes the significance of McDowell’s words by transplanting McDowell’s locutions into the context of Putnam’s own attack on the interface conception. As the context in which the relevant stretches of McDowell’s prose figure shifts from the exploration of a Kantian to that of a Cartesian problematic, so does their sense.

A central aim of McDowell’s book is to make room for the following truism (one that philosophy can easily seem to place out of reach) which Wittgenstein expresses, in McDowell’s favourite quotation from Wittgenstein, as follows: ‘When we say, and mean, that such-and-such is the case we – and our meaning – do not stop anywhere short of the fact’ (PI 95).<sup>32</sup> This sounds very much like things Putnam himself wants to say, for example, in wishing to affirm that ‘our cognitive powers can reach all to the objects themselves’. In affirming this, Putnam represents himself, in the *Dewey Lectures*, as spelling out some of the basic ideas behind McDowell’s strategy for making room for truisms of the above Wittgensteinian sort. And, of course, the negation of the claim which figures in the last phrase in the above quotation from Putnam – ‘that our cognitive powers cannot reach all the way to the objects themselves’ – *can* be taken as merely paraphrasing the same truism that figures in McDowell’s favourite quotation from Wittgenstein. It is clear that Putnam, in aligning himself with McDowell, wishes us to take it that way. But it is equally clear that he also wishes us to take the negation of the claim expressed by that phrase as the expression of the repudiation of the disastrous assumption forced on us by the interface conception. It is in wishing to be able to mean

words such as these in both of these ways at once that Putnam gets entangled both in his understanding of the structure and aim of the argument of McDowell’s *Mind and World* and in his proposals for a way out of the problems that currently plague contemporary philosophy.

One sign that some slippage has taken place is that the Wittgenstein passage – and McDowell’s book generally – is concerned with the possibility of *meaning* (with the possibility of our being able to mean something – rather than nothing – by our words), whereas much of the *Dewey Lectures* are focally concerned with the possibility of *knowledge* (with how it is that we can know things are as they seem). In his opening remarks, Putnam expresses the thought he seeks to vindicate in his lectures as follows: ‘there is a way to do justice to our sense that knowledge claims are responsible to reality without recoiling into metaphysical fantasy’ (Putnam 1999: 4). But from McDowell’s point of view, the focus here on *knowledge* claims (as the paradigm for understanding the kind of responsibility to reality which philosophy brings into question) must count as at best misleading, and at worst misguided. For it invites a misidentification of the strand of philosophy that McDowell is focally concerned to treat: it invites the substitution of a Cartesian for a Kantian problematic. McDowell would, of course, not want to deny that we should view knowledge claims as responsible to reality. But he would want to insist that, for the purposes of his investigation, they constitute only a special case of a more general (Kantian) problematic concerning the possibility of the vulnerability of any claim to how things are. The sort of vulnerability to reality under investigation in his book is exhibited in false claims equally fully as in true ones, in our capacity for thinking (indeed, dreaming) as it does in our capacity for knowing. McDowell’s investigation does not single out those of our claims that are knowledgeable. This is because it is concerned with what must be the case for any sort of human intellectual activity to be intelligible as one of claim-making at all. It is the possibility of making claims in general, not knowledge claims in particular, that comes to seem at risk when our entitlement to the truism in Wittgenstein’s remark seems to come under threat.

As he proceeds in his lectures, as we shall see in a moment, Putnam himself describes the issue with which he is concerned in terms that make no particular reference to knowledge, for instance as the ‘how does language hook on to the world’ issue. So it may seem an uncharitable quibble to raise worries about his opening formulation of the issue in terms of knowledge. But what I said above about the phrase ‘our cognitive powers cannot reach all the way to the objects themselves’ applies equally to the question ‘how does language hook on to the world?’ In the pages of Putnam’s *Dewey Lectures*, these forms of words hover unstably between the expression of a Cartesian and a Kantian worry – and that instability can be resolved only at the cost of depriving Putnam’s preferred diagnosis of the source of contemporary philosophy’s ills of its intended generality. Putnam insists in his *Dewey Lectures*

on privileging a Cartesian problematic as holding the key to a diagnosis of philosophy's most fundamental problems.<sup>33</sup> But Putnam's 'key assumption' cannot unlock the problems that McDowell seeks to address.

Large stretches of the *Dewey Lectures* make sense only if the worry expressed in questions such as 'Can our cognitive powers reach all the way to the objects themselves?' and 'How does language hook on the world?' is taken to be of a Cartesian variety. Consider the following sequence of passages from Putnam's *Dewey Lectures*:

Let us now ask just why realism about 'the external world' came to seem problematical. Early modern philosophers assumed that the immediate objects of perception were mental, and that mental objects were nonphysical . . . What is more, even their materialist opponents often put forward accounts of perception that closely paralleled these 'Cartesian' accounts. Even in contemporary cognitive science, for example, it is the fashion to hypothesise the existence of 'representations' in the cerebral computer. If one assumes that the mind is an *organ*, and one goes on to identify the mind with the brain, it will then become irresistible to (1) think of some of the 'representations' as analogous to the classical theorist's 'impressions' . . . (2) think that those 'representations' are linked to objects in the organism's environment only causally, and not cognitively) . . . I agree with James, as well as with McDowell, that the false belief that perception *must* be so analysed is at the root of all the problems with the view of perception that, in one form or another, has dominated Western philosophy since the seventeenth century . . . The tendency in the last thirty years to repress what continues to puzzle us in the philosophy of perception obstructs the possibility of progress with respect to the broader epistemological and metaphysical issues that do preoccupy us . . . [H]ow could the question 'how does language hook on the world?' even appear to pose a difficulty, unless the retort: 'How can there be a problem about talking about, say, houses and trees when we see them all the time' had not already been rejected in advance as question-begging or 'hopelessly naïve'. The 'how does language hook on to the world' issue is, at bottom, a replay of the old 'how does perception hook on to the world' issue. And is it any wonder if, after thirty years of virtually ignoring . . . the task of challenging the view of perception that has been received since the seventeenth century . . ., the very idea that thought and language do connect with reality has come to seem more and more problematical? Is it any wonder that one can't see how thought and language hook on to the world if one never mentions perception?  
(Putnam 1999: 9–13)

If this sequence is taken as offering a diagnosis of most of what ails contemporary philosophy, and if the question at issue is taken to express both the worry made urgent by the interface conception and yet somehow at the same time the one that animates the sorts of philosophical worry McDowell seeks to address in *Mind and World*, then Putnam may not claim McDowell as an ally. What McDowell will take to be unsatisfactory in Putnam's diagnosis can be put as follows: Putnam, in effect, suggests that the various forms of Kantian scepticism that have come to seem so urgent in recent philosophy can be exorcised simply through the treatment of Cartesian scepticism. McDowell would want to press the following question: Is Putnam right in claiming that the 'how does language hook on to the world?' issue is, at bottom, simply a replay of the old 'how does perception hook on to the world?' issue? The correct answer to this question is: it depends on *which* 'how does language hook on to the world' issue is at issue. (As I have indicated above, there is a Cartesian and a Kantian version of the issue.) McDowell would contend that Putnam's claim is not right about the version of the problem that is, for the most part, the one that figures at the centre of concern in the writings of, for example, Lewis or Sellars or Kripkenstein. The Kantian difficulty (concerning thought's or language's capacity to be vulnerable to reality), with which each of the aforementioned authors struggles, does not, for the most part, have its source in a Cartesian difficulty (concerning the indirect character of all perceptual contact with the 'external' world). None of these authors is evidently concerned to urge a version of (what the *Dewey Lectures* calls) the 'received' view of perception; and Putnam's efforts to highlight the dubious assumptions underlying the 'received' view do not evidently bear on their problems.

Although it is true that McDowell, like Putnam, is concerned to vindicate (what Putnam, following James, calls) 'the natural realism of the common man', it is not an exaggeration to say that McDowell's diagnosis of the sources of the perplexities with which contemporary philosophy struggles is roughly the reverse of Putnam's most recent one: where Putnam argues that it is only if we think through what is confused in the Cartesian sceptic's question 'Do we *really* see houses and chairs?' that will we free ourselves from the confusions visited upon us by the analytical-Kantian sceptical question 'how does language hook on to the world?', McDowell thinks that it is only once we think through what is hopeless about the sort of Kantian bind in which someone like C. I. Lewis threatens to place himself<sup>34</sup> – one in which it is no longer possible to see how thought can so much as be answerable to reality – that we will be able fully to free ourselves from Cartesian worries about the character of our perceptual relatedness to houses and chairs. For Putnam, in the *Dewey Lectures*, the Cartesian paradox is the fundamental source of (what Putnam calls) 'the broader epistemological and metaphysical issues' that continue to 'preoccupy us' in contemporary philosophy (Putnam 1999: 11). For McDowell, in *Mind and World*, the Cartesian worry is an intelligible,

though inept, response to an inchoate form of philosophical anxiety that achieves comparatively fuller expression in the sort of Kantian paradox that, in his view, haunts the projects of authors such as Lewis, Sellars, Davidson and Brandom.

This misencounter between Putnam and McDowell is not atypical. A perspicuous overview of varieties of scepticism enables us to identify such occasions – occasions on which philosophers systematically misunderstand one another’s writings: sometimes paying one another undeserved compliments, and at other times going to battle against one another when their views in no way disagree. In Putnam’s misappropriation of McDowell’s diagnosis of the sceptical paradox that haunts contemporary philosophy, we have a case of merely apparent agreement between two of the finest philosophers of our time. Now let us consider a complementary case – one of merely apparent disagreement.

### 6 An apparent disagreement: Cavell and Kripke

Stanley Cavell’s *The Claim of Reason* presents a brilliant account of certain aspects of Wittgenstein’s treatment of Cartesian scepticism. Saul Kripke’s book *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* (Kripke 1982) explores certain aspects of Wittgenstein’s presentation of Kantian scepticism. When Cavell, at one point in *The Claim of Reason*, pauses to list (what he calls) ‘three phenomenologically striking features of the conclusion which characterises scepticism’, what he goes on to cite are clearly features of (what I have been calling) Cartesian scepticism: (1) ‘the sense of *discovery* expressed in the conclusion of the investigation’; (2) ‘the sense of the *conflict* of this discovery with our ordinary “beliefs”’; and (3) ‘the *instability* of the discovery, the theoretical conviction it inspires vanishing under the pressure (or distraction) of our ordinary commerce with the world’ (Cavell 1979: 129). Kripke devotes far less care to characterising the phenomenologically striking features of the conclusion that characterises the sort of scepticism that concerns him. But one does not have to read far into his book before the following three aspects of his sceptical paradox emerge with some clarity: (1) whatever Cartesian features the paradox might initially appear to possess belong not properly to it but rather merely to the initial motivating (but also misleading) exposition of it (according to which ‘the problem may appear to be epistemological’); (2) an encounter with the paradox takes the phenomenological form not of an initial doubt that eventuates in a Cartesian discovery, but rather of an initial ‘eerie feeling’ that eventuates in (something that bears all the earmarks of) a Kantian boggle (about the very possibility of ever being able determinately to mean anything); so that (3) the form of the conclusion is not one of generalised Cartesian doubt (about our ability ever to discover what is really meant), but rather one of Kantian unschematisability (in the face of an impending yet incomprehensible outcome in which ‘the entire idea of meaning vanishes into thin air’).<sup>35</sup>

Each of these books has a hold of a portion of philosophical territory Wittgenstein is concerned to explore that the other misses. Cavell, however, declares himself unable to recognise the problematic that Kripke calls one of ‘scepticism’ to be a variety of scepticism at all, let alone one in which Wittgenstein should interest himself. This misses something important in Wittgenstein. In saying this, I do not mean here to express sympathy with the substance of Kripke’s suggestions for how to understand Wittgenstein’s preferred response to the (so-called) ‘rule-following paradox’ and especially not with his attribution to Wittgenstein of a ‘sceptical solution’ to that (or any other) sceptical paradox. I mean only to affirm that the paradox which Kripke finds in Wittgenstein is one that Wittgenstein seeks to address, that it is only one instance of a particular sort of philosophical paradox, that Wittgenstein throughout his writings is repeatedly concerned to formulate and address paradoxes of this shape, and that such paradoxes are ones that belong to that broader genus of philosophical perplexity that Wittgenstein means to designate – as did Kant before him – by the term ‘scepticism’. The paradox at which Wittgenstein arrives in Section 201 of *Philosophical Investigations* bears all the earmarks of (what I have been calling) a Kantian sceptical paradox; and the dialectic which threads its way through the preceding sections of the *Philosophical Investigations* is mired in a Kantian sceptical problematic. Indeed, it is the third variant of the Kantian problematic mentioned early on in this chapter – the one that centres on the question ‘How can a sequence of marks or noises so much as seem to *mean* something?’

Cavell says, in his discussion of Kripke in *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome* (Cavell 1990), that he wishes to question whether Kripke’s examples illustrate ‘scepticism’; and Cavell evidently feels that conceding that they do would threaten something important about his own reading of Wittgenstein. But this perception on Cavell’s part stems largely from a failure to command a clear overview of the shape of the philosophical terrain here. Armed with such an overview, it becomes possible to see that nothing in Cavell’s admirable corpus of work on Wittgenstein would be threatened by such a concession. The term ‘scepticism’ in Cavell’s work – and in his writings on Wittgenstein – does exclusively denote a problematic of the Cartesian variety. To concede, however, that Wittgenstein is interested in variants of the Kantian paradox does not gainsay his equally ubiquitous fascination with their Cartesian counterparts. Cavell, in his discussion of Kripke’s reading, begins with a surely sound observation – to wit: that what Kripke calls Wittgenstein’s ‘sceptical solution’ is not anything Wittgenstein would countenance as a ‘solution’ to a philosophical problem. But Cavell moves precipitously from this observation to the conclusion that if Kripke’s solution is not Wittgenstein’s then ‘the problem to which Kripke offers the solution is not (quite) Wittgenstein’s either’ (Cavell 1990: 69). This is a *non-sequitur*. The reason I think Cavell feels bound to take this step is because he is quite properly unable to recognise the sceptical paradox of Section 201 of



*Philosophical Investigations* to be one that bears (what I have called) Cartesian features. Hence Cavell goes on to remark:

Kripke reports that sometimes, contemplating the situation of discovery that one may mean nothing at all, he has had ‘something of an eerie feeling’ (p. 21), and that ‘the entire idea of meaning vanishes into thin air’ (p. 22). Is this, I ask myself, like the feelings I have had, under a sceptical surmise, of the world vanishing (as it were behind its appearances), or my self vanishing (as it were behind or inside my body)? These feelings have been touchstones for me of sceptical paradox, of conclusions I cannot, yet become compelled to, believe. . . . I would like to say that when the entire idea of meaning vanishes into thin air what vanishes was already air, revealing no scene of destruction.

(Cavell 1990: 80).<sup>36</sup>

One can hear Cavell in this passage – and in much of the rest of his subsequent questioning of ‘whether Kripke’s examples illustrate scepticism’ – quite rightly pointing out that Kripke’s alleged sceptical paradox bears none of the Cartesian features: it does not begin with a *best case of knowledge*, the investigation does not issue in a *discovery* to which one is unable to accommodate oneself, the conclusions that Kripke draws about his examples do not *generalise* in accordance with the logic of the Cartesian format, etc. I therefore find myself agreeing with everything that Cavell has to say about this, except his conclusion – that is, I agree that the paradox of Section 201 is not a Cartesian sceptical paradox, but not that it is not a sceptical paradox.

### 7 A second apparent disagreement: Cavell and McDowell

Before considering our second case of apparent disagreement, it will help to contrast (what I will call) the *Kantian way with scepticism* with the *Wittgensteinian way with scepticism*. The positive touchstone of the Kantian way is a radical following through of the implicit assumptions of a sceptical position up to the point at which the position founders in incoherence. The negative touchstone of the Kantian way is that it seeks to find a way to respond to the Cartesian that by-passes the task of having to enter into the details of Cartesian examples, exploring how they are motivated, and considering how they differ from ordinary examples of knowledge. The Wittgensteinian way is not an alternative to, but rather a supplementation of the Kantian way. The difference between the two ways points up something original in Wittgenstein’s later treatment of philosophical problems that is absent from Kant’s treatment of scepticism. The Wittgensteinian way incorporates a further movement, pushing the sceptic in the opposite direction from the one

in which Kant seeks to push him: not only following the sceptic’s presuppositions out to their ultimate consequences, but also examining the initial steps in the Cartesian sceptic’s progress towards doubt, identifying how the sceptic passes from ordinary to philosophical doubt, from a claim to a non-claim context, pinpointing the decisive movement in the philosophical conjuring trick and diagnosing why it is the one that is bound to seem most innocent. Thus, we might say, the Kantian way drives the sceptic forward in his doubt, seeking to propel the sceptic to grace by forcing him to pass through utter despair, whereas the Wittgensteinian way supplements this prospective movement with a retrospective one, leading the sceptic back to the point of entry into his problematic, returning him to the lost innocence of the everyday. The Kantian way compels the sceptic to progress further and further forward, further and further from the ordinary, and deeper and deeper into philosophical perplexity, to an ever more violent form of questioning, to the point at which the sceptic’s question consumes itself. The Wittgensteinian way adds to this pressure an additional one that seeks to bring the sceptic back to the place where he started, where he already is and never left, but in such a way that he is able to recognise it for the first time.

These two movements that Wittgenstein’s philosophical practice alternately seeks to execute are nicely summarised in the following two remarks:

My aim is: to teach you to pass from a piece of disguised nonsense to a piece of undisguised nonsense.  
(PI 464)

What we do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use.  
(PI 116)

We come therefore now to a further aspect of the fourth form of philosophical insight that a perspicuous overview of the various kinds of philosophical response to scepticism can afford. Commentators on Wittgenstein can easily talk by one another by failing to keep in view the complementarity of these two movements in later Wittgenstein’s writings.<sup>37</sup>

We saw, while reviewing Putnam’s misencounter with McDowell, how McDowell wished to privilege the Kantian problematic over the Cartesian one; and we saw in Cavell’s misencounter with Kripke how Cavell seemed to want to privilege the Cartesian problematic over the Kantian one. Thus, based on the evidence reviewed thus far, the following conclusion might seem tempting: McDowell is primarily concerned to explore the Kantian problematic and Cavell the Cartesian. This is not right, however, about the bulk of either McDowell’s or Cavell’s work (or that of almost any other sensitive commentator on Wittgenstein). What happens rather, in their respective writings about Wittgenstein, is that Wittgenstein’s exploration of one of



these two sceptical problematics tends alternately to come into focus while the other recedes into the background. (And, indeed, I think it is almost inevitable that, in working on later Wittgenstein, one should find this happening to one in one's writing about him.) To illustrate the point, I will place side by side some further passages from Cavell and McDowell – passages in which their roles have been reversed – now McDowell will appear to be the one more preoccupied by the Cartesian dimension and Cavell by the Kantian dimension of Wittgenstein's concerns.

McDowell, in 'Criteria, Defeasibility and Knowledge', argues that (what Wittgenstein calls) criteria are internally related to the justification of claims to knowledge in the following way: if a claim to know that such-and-such turns out not to be justified then the criteria for claiming such-and-such were only apparently satisfied. Thus, for example, if you claim that someone is in pain, and it turns out that that person is only pretending to be in pain, then the criteria for pain were only apparently satisfied. Here is McDowell:

Commentators [on Wittgenstein] often take it that the possibility of pretence shows that criteria are defeasible. This requires the assumption that in successful deception one brings it about that criteria for something 'internal' are satisfied, although the ascription for which they are criteria would be false. But is the assumption obligatory? Here is a possible alternative; in pretending, one causes it to *appear* that criteria for something 'internal' are satisfied (that is, one causes it to appear that someone else could know, by what one says and does, that one is in, say, some 'inner' state); but the criteria are not really satisfied (that is, the knowledge is not really available).

(McDowell 1998b: 380)

Cavell, in *The Claim of Reason*, is concerned to challenge almost exactly the same interpretation of Wittgenstein on criteria that McDowell is concerned to challenge and for many of the same reasons. Yet Cavell comes to (what is at least verbally) precisely the opposite conclusion with regard to how to employ the concept of a criterion in connection with the very sorts of examples that McDowell discusses. Thus, Cavell concludes that even if someone is only pretending to be in pain, if it is *pain* that he is pretending to be in, then his behaviour satisfies the criteria for pain. Here is Cavell:

[O]nly *certain* eventualities will count as [someone's] not being in pain. . . Circumstances, namely, . . . in which we will say (he will be) feigning, rehearsing, hoaxing, etc. Why such circumstances? What differentiates such circumstances from those in which he is (said to be) clearing his throat, responding to a joke, etc.? Just that for 'He's rehearsing' or 'feigning', or 'It's a hoax', etc. to satisfy us as explana-

tions for his *not* being in pain . . . *what* he is feigning must be precisely *pain*, what he is rehearsing must be the part of a man *in pain*, the hoax depends on his simulating *pain*, etc. These circumstances are ones in appealing to which, in describing which, we *retain the concept* (here, of pain) whose application these criteria determine. And this means to me: In all such circumstances he has satisfied the criteria we use for applying the concept of pain to others. It is because of *that* satisfaction that we know that he is feigning pain (i.e., that it is pain he is feigning), and that he knows what to do to feign pain. Criteria are 'criteria for something's being so', not in the sense that they tell us of a thing's existence, but of something like its identity, not of its *being so*, but of its being *so*.

(Cavell 1979: 45)

The first thing to notice is that McDowell and Cavell appear, at first blush, simply to disagree: in cases of pretending to be in pain, McDowell says the criteria for pain are not satisfied, Cavell says they are. The second thing to notice is that their roles now seem, as promised, to be reversed. McDowell takes Wittgensteinian criteria to operate at a Cartesian level. The question that is settled, according to him, if criteria are satisfied, is one concerning the truth of a claim, the existence of the pain, the reality of the phenomenon. Cavell takes Wittgensteinian criteria to operate at a Kantian level. The question that is settled, according to Cavell, if criteria are satisfied, is not one concerning the truth of a claim but one concerning its purport, not one concerning the existence of something which falls under a concept but the applicability of the concept itself, not one concerning the reality of a phenomenon but one concerning its possibility. Whichever of these two readers of Wittgenstein you take to be on the right track, it is worth noticing that this is the structure of the disagreement here, and that the level at which you take criteria to operate, e.g. in connection with phenomena such as pain, will have decisive consequences for the sort of response to scepticism that will issue from an appeal to 'criteria'. Now I myself take it that Cavell has got the merely exegetical question right (about what question is settled if Wittgensteinian criteria are satisfied) and McDowell has got it wrong. But I will not argue that point here. (Nor does their difference over this interpretative question mean that there is any substantive philosophical disagreement between McDowell and Cavell here.<sup>38</sup>) What interests me here is the very fact that their disagreement should, at this juncture, have this particular structure. This has a twofold irony, stemming from the ways in which each of them seems to have given up his previous role in the two misencounters canvassed above.

The first irony is to be found in the fact that, in most of his writing about Wittgenstein, McDowell appears to read Wittgenstein as – and in *Mind and World* follows his Wittgenstein in – seeking to take exclusively (what I

called at the beginning of this section) the ‘Kantian way’ with scepticism. McDowell tends to see the Cartesian craving for epistemic security as an intelligible, though inept, response to an inchoate form of the philosophical anxiety that only arrives at clear expression when it is posed as a Kantian sceptical paradox. Thus, despite his Cartesian construal of the grammar of the concept of a criterion in his earlier essay, in *Mind and World*, McDowell proceeds as if the treatment of philosophical scepticism can be prosecuted primarily through attending to the Kantian problematic as a self-standing form of philosophical confusion. Especially in *Mind and World*, he seems to assume, in the manner of Kant himself, not only that the Cartesian sceptical paradox can be shown to be merely a special case of a more general worry, but more importantly that, once this is shown, Cartesianism will be robbed of all its force and will wither away of its own accord without requiring any additional form of specialised treatment. Whereas Cavell, despite his resolutely Kantian construal of the grammar of a criterion, concentrates, above all, in his philosophical writings, on the movement with which the Wittgensteinian way supplements the Kantian way: the return to the ordinary. Cavell takes (and takes Wittgenstein to take) the achievement of such a return to play an essential role in attaining an understanding of the phenomenon of scepticism.<sup>39</sup>

The second irony to be noted in connection with the structure of McDowell’s and Cavell’s disagreement about Wittgenstein’s concept of a criterion lies in the fact that Cavell, though he is far too acute a reader of Wittgenstein to fail to appreciate that the *Philosophical Investigations* is frequently operating at a Kantian level, nonetheless never sees that, for Wittgenstein, as for Kant, the term ‘scepticism’ ranges over far more than a merely Cartesian sceptical problematic – thus over far more varieties of philosophical perplexity than a merely Cartesian inflection of the term is able to encompass. Nonetheless, Cavell, through carefully following out the inner movement of the dialectic traced in Wittgenstein’s investigations, often finds himself fetching up in the terrain of the Kantian problematic. Here is a characteristic passage that may stand for a hundred others:

If you do not know the (non-grammatical) criteria of an Austinian object (can’t identify it, name it) then you lack a piece of information, a bit of knowledge, and you can be told its name, told what it is, told what it is (officially) called. But if you do not know the grammatical criteria of Wittgensteinian objects, then you lack, as it were, not only a piece of information or knowledge, but the possibility of acquiring any information about such objects *überhaupt*; you cannot be told the name of that object, because there is as yet no *object* of that kind for you to attach a forthcoming name to.

(Cavell 1979: 77)

What is threatened here, with the loss of (what Cavell calls) Wittgenstein criteria, is not merely the possibility of isolating an unimpeachable item of knowledge, but the possibility of so much as turning up a candidate for knowledge. At one point in *The Claim of Reason*, Cavell quotes the following four passages from *Philosophical Investigations* in rapid succession:

... [O]nly of a living human being and what resembles (behaves like) a living human being can one say: it has sensations; it sees; is blind; hears; is deaf; is conscious or unconscious.

(PI 281)

What has to be accepted, the given, is – so one could say – *forms of life*.

(PI 226)

What gives us *so much as the idea* that living beings, things, can feel?

(PI 283)

The human body is the best picture of the human soul.

(PI 178)

These are passages in which Wittgenstein presents what Cavell says he understands ‘as the background against which our criteria do their work; even make sense’ (Cavell 1979: 83). They are also quintessential examples of moments in his work in which Wittgenstein’s investigations move (from the Cartesian) to the Kantian level. And, in commenting on these passages, Cavell (taking the problem of other minds here as his example of a sceptical problematic) expresses what he takes to be the significance of such passages in Wittgenstein’s work:

To withhold, or hedge, our concepts of psychological states from a given creature, on the ground that our criteria cannot reach to the inner life of the creature, is specifically to withhold the source of my idea that living beings are things that feel; it is to withhold myself, to reject my response to anything as a living being; to blank so much as my idea of anything as *having a body*. To describe this condition as one in which I do not know (am not certain) of the existence of other minds is empty. There is now nothing there of the right kind, to be known. There is nothing to read from that body, nothing the body is *of*; it does not go beyond itself, it expresses nothing; it does not so much as behave. There is no body left to manifest consciousness (or unconsciousness). It is not dead, but inanimate; it hides nothing  
....

My problem is no longer that my words can't get past his body to *him*. There is nothing for them to get to; they can't even reach as far as *my* body . . . The signs are dead; merely working them out loud doesn't breathe life into them; even dogs can speak more effectively.

(Cavell 1979: 83–4)

I take the presence of a Kantian problematic in this passage to be self-evident. If the worry that is here in play were to become urgent, it would eventuate in (not merely a Cartesian doubt, but) a Kantian boggle. Though Cavell, in such passages (and there are many such passages in *The Claim of Reason*), sees that the transition to a Kantian problematic plays an essential role in Wittgenstein's treatment of scepticism, he seems able to interest himself in this transition only to the extent that it forms part of a response to Cartesian scepticism; hence his view of the scope of this problematic in Wittgenstein's writing is artificially blinkered. Central issues – concerning, for example, the nature of the accord between a rule and its application (not only, as in certain employments of the mathematical case, as a trope for learning a word, but as a potentially philosophically perplexing instance of the Kantian problematic in its own right), between an expectation or wish and its fulfilment, etc. – recede into the background of Cavell's reading of Wittgenstein. This blind-spot in Cavell's reading of Wittgenstein (and in his reading of Kant) comes perhaps most visibly to the surface in his discussion of Kripke's reading of Wittgenstein examined above. Although he sees that Wittgenstein is concerned to explore the Kantian problematic, he does not see (and feels that he must not allow) that it can issue in a distinctive (and, as I have tried to show, distinctively Kantian) variety of philosophical paradox – one that Wittgenstein views as a variety of scepticism. This leaves Cavell's account of Wittgenstein's treatment of scepticism essentially incomplete. Only a reading able to accommodate, both exegetically and philosophically, the insights contained in both Cavell's and McDowell's respective readings of Wittgenstein – that is, only one that understands why, in Wittgenstein's treatment of the extended philosophical dialectic of which they each form a part, neither variety of scepticism is to be privileged over the other – will be complete.

## 8 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to suggest that a perspicuous overview of various kinds of scepticism and the kinds of response they engender affords a number of different kinds of philosophical benefit: it allows one to command a clearer view of the sorts of relations that obtain across apparently distinct areas of philosophy; it allows one to distinguish the very different sorts of things philosophers mean when they employ (what is apparently)

the same philosophical vocabulary; and it allows one to see more clearly why authors such as Wittgenstein are often misread. (Here, I have also tried to show how and why some of his best commentators misread one another and misunderstand themselves – taking themselves to disagree with one another when they do not, taking themselves to agree with one another when they do not, and taking themselves to be in agreement with themselves when they are not.) It may also allow one to see more clearly what is distinctive about Wittgenstein's contributions to the history of thought about scepticism; but a proper treatment of that issue must wait for another occasion.<sup>40</sup>

## Notes

- 1 This chapter is a shorter and somewhat differently organised version of a longer paper that will appear in Conant and Kern (forthcoming).
- 2 The taxonomy is meant to serve as a descriptive tool for distinguishing various sorts of philosophical standpoint. It is constructed in as philosophically neutral a fashion as possible. Some of the more specific philosophical claims that I myself express sympathy for in the later part of this chapter (e.g. regarding how these varieties of scepticism are related to one another) do, however, turn on collateral philosophical commitments.
- 3 A reason for referring to the taxonomy offered here as 'partial' is because the overview of varieties of scepticism set forth here is in no way intended to be exhaustive. For example, it is not intended to accommodate (what I take to be) a variety of scepticism that constitutes one strand in Hume's sceptical outlook and which (for lack of a better label) I will call *Pyrrhonian scepticism*, nor a further variety of scepticism, *Agrippan scepticism*, that some contemporary philosophers might think ought to be sharply distinguished from the Pyrrhonian, Cartesian and Kantian varieties (see, for example, Williams 2001: 61ff).
- 4 Such an inclusive use of the term 'scepticism', while unusual, is not unprecedented. For a similarly inclusive use, primarily in connection with Cartesian scepticism, see, for example, Cavell 1979: 46.
- 5 I owe this way of formulating the contrast to Stanley Cavell. See Cavell 1979: 45. However, I make a use of this contrast here – to formulate the distinction between Cartesian and Kantian scepticism – of which Cavell himself might not approve. Nevertheless, it is not an accident that Cavell's formulation of this contrast should perfectly serve my purpose, as we shall see towards the end of this chapter.
- 6 I borrow this characterisation of the sort of case explored within the Cartesian problematic from Cavell. (It should perhaps be noted, however, that Cavell himself thinks of the characterisation as applying to sceptical examples *tout court*, rather than merely to those that figure within one particular variety of scepticism.)
- 7 I say 'variants' of each of these varieties of scepticism arise in each of these 'areas' of philosophy (rather than 'a variant' of each arises) because in 'areas' such as ethics and philosophy of science – 'areas', that is, that involve a tangle of different sorts of philosophical problem – a multiplicity of variants of each variety are to be found. Indeed, in both ethics and philosophy of science, for example, a version of each of the philosophy of perception variants and each of the philosophy of language variants of sceptical problematic (along with a great many others) are to be found. This furnishes yet a further reason why one

- ought to be suspicious of the idea that one should be able to limn the skeleton of philosophy at its joints merely by effecting a division into areas based solely on differences in subject-matter – ethics, science, mathematics, etc.
- 8 For some discussion of the presence of an incipiently Kantian problematic in Descartes' thought, see Conant 1991. What I call in that paper 'a different kind of Cartesianism' is a variant of (what I call in this chapter) 'Kantian scepticism'.
  - 9 I speak here, rather tentatively, of *varieties* (rather than *genera*) of scepticism, and of these varieties as subtending *variants* (rather than *species*) of Cartesian and Kantian scepticism respectively, in order to leave this question open. However, I myself do favour a particular line, namely that the apparent 'kinds' in question are, in the end, to be recognised as only apparently distinct kinds.
  - 10 I do not mean to claim that either of these sets of features exhaustively characterise either of these varieties of scepticism.
  - 11 I do not mean hereby to rule out cases of philosophical discussion that do perfectly exemplify, without blemishes, either the Cartesian or Kantian format respectively, but only to indicate that they are surprisingly rare.
  - 12 For it not to be a symptom of (at least some degree of) confusion on an author's part requires, I think, that the author already have thought through – and thus have come to some stable view of his own concerning – the relation between these two varieties of scepticism. There are such authors, but not many.
  - 13 See Cavell 1981 and 1996a.
  - 14 Cavell's term for this is *negated*.
  - 15 Cavell suggests we call the sort of object that figures in such examples 'a generic object' (Cavell 1979: 52–3).
  - 16 The internal relation between Cartesian scepticism and Shakespearean tragedy is explored by Cavell in the essays collected in Cavell 1987.
  - 17 This conflict between our ordinary practice and our philosophical reflection on that practice is the source of the aura of paradox that accompanies any attempt to acquiesce in a Cartesian sceptical conclusion. That conclusion, taken in isolation, does not have the outward form of a paradoxical assertion (in the way, say, that the liar paradox does); its paradoxical aspect lies instead in our inability to sustain our conviction in such a conclusion when, as Hume puts it, we leave our philosophical study and return to the backgammon table.
  - 18 For most everyday purposes, we cannot and should not try to do otherwise than to take the perceptual appearances that present themselves to us – say, the sudden appearance of an oncoming car – to constitute genuine instances of perceptual knowledge. The Cartesian sceptic knows this. He knows that we cannot help but take someone writhing in pain to be in pain; we cannot help but take certain ossified habits of interpretation to disclose the meaning of a sign; etc. If he understands the structure of the Cartesian problematic, he will not take such observations to impugn his procedures. Some philosophers have thought – and have thought that later Wittgenstein thought – that such observations themselves could suffice to overturn such forms of scepticism. That is a misunderstanding of Cartesian scepticism – and a misunderstanding of Wittgenstein's understanding of it. This is not to deny that such observations (or 'reminders', as Wittgenstein preferred to call them) might have a role to play in the treatment of Cartesian scepticism. But they hardly suffice to overturn any interesting form of scepticism.
  - 19 Someone who is disinclined to believe in the trustworthiness of the government's pronouncements, or the promises issued in television advertisements, or the impartiality of judicial proceedings, etc., is sometimes called a sceptic in ordinary language. I will refer to this character as *the hard-headed customer*. The differences between the hard-headed customer and the Cartesian sceptic are perhaps most evident in the light of this ninth feature: There is no difficulty in imagining that the hard-headed customer might be able to convert his various theoretical doubts into practical ones: He may take care not to align his beliefs and actions in accordance with the expectation that the government's pronouncements will be fulfilled, he may make a point of not purchasing items advertised on television, etc. Reflecting on the differences between the hard-headed customer and the Cartesian sceptic can help to bring out how the nine Cartesian features, listed above, are internally related to one another; a proper understanding of each depends upon an appreciation of how it is related to the others. That the hard-headed customer does not suffer from Cartesian scepticism can be seen in part from the fact that he fails to begin with a sufficiently generic object; this, in turn, can be seen from the way in which his doubt fails to generalise as precipitously as in the Cartesian problematic, etc.
  - 20 More precisely: the differences between these sorts of examples cease to be relevant for the bulk of the Kantian enquiry. At a late stage in the enquiry, it will become important to a Kantian inquirer to recover these sorts of differences – differences that underwrite the movement of thought in a Cartesian investigation – but only once the Kantian paradox has been averted and the intelligibility of object-directed thought and experience no longer stands under threat.
  - 21 Hence, in recent years, the increasingly important relationship between various sorts of philosophical project calling for some sort of naturalistic reduction, on the one hand, and the Kantian problematic in philosophy, on the other. The demand for such reductions in the absence of a plausible programme for their execution can, on the one hand, give rise to the relevant sense of mystery; while a philosophically independently fuelled sense of Kantian paradox can, on the other hand, fuel the sense that a programme of naturalistic reduction is the only possible form of solution to the most urgent philosophical problems that face us today.
  - 22 I explore the engagement with a philosophical problematic of this sort in Kafka's parables in Conant 2001.
  - 23 To sum up this sixth Kantian feature, one might adapt a joke – which I first heard from Dan Dennett – in the following way: 'Scientists want to know whether something possible is actual. Philosophers want to know whether something actual is possible.'
  - 24 Unlike the concluding statement affirmed by a Cartesian sceptic (see n. 17 above), formulations of the Kantian sceptical paradox tend to converge on conclusions that have the canonical form of a logical paradox. This is perhaps particularly evident if one considers the philosophy of language variant of Kantian scepticism. Borrowing, for the moment, the terms in which Kripke couches the paradox, the sceptical conclusion for this variant might, for example, be formulated as follows: 'There is no fact of the matter as to whether this sentence has a meaning.' Or more radically still: 'There isn't anything which this sentence means.' The variant of Kantian scepticism for which this is perhaps least evident is perhaps that of (so-called) 'scepticism regarding other minds'. This is partly because, once we think the Kantian variant of this problem all the way through, we come to see that this ceases to be an apt way of denoting the variety of scepticism that here comes to be at issue. To see that even this variant veers towards a conclusion that has a self-annihilating structure, it is important to see that the structure of the Kantian version of this problem is one in which the initial Cartesian distinction between the (putatively indubitable) case of my own mindedness and the (putatively comparatively dubitable) case

- of the mindedness of others is cut out from underneath one. The Kantian sceptical conclusion here is not just that there is nothing which could count as *his* expressing his mental states in a manner that could enable me to know them, but rather: there is nothing which could count as *anyone's* (and therefore: *my*) expressing a mental state.
- 25 Just as it is important to distinguish the Cartesian sceptic from the hard-headed customer, so, too, one should not confuse the Kantian sceptic with yet another character who is often called a 'sceptic' in ordinary language: someone who does not believe in divine revelation, or extrasensory perception, or astrology, etc. I will refer to this character as the *debunker*. He differs from the hard-headed customer in that he believes that the phenomena about which he is 'sceptical' are such as not even to be possible. The hard-headed customer need not call into question the bare possibility of a trustworthy government or a truthful television advertisement; what he doubts is merely their actuality. The debunker's doubt, on the other hand, is directed at the possibility of certain phenomena. Yet it would be a confusion to think the debunker is a Kantian sceptic just because he doubts something to be possible that others take to be actual. His doubt is not a philosophical doubt any more than that of the hard-headed customer is: It does not issue in philosophical paradox. That a successful bout of debunking does not issue in a specifically Kantian variety of paradox can be seen from the way in which the outcome fails properly to satisfy any of the nine Kantian features listed above. This is perhaps most evident in the case of the ninth feature: There is no difficulty in imagining that the debunker might be able to dispense altogether with recourse to, say, divine revelation. His capacity to conceive the impossibility of divine revelation does not appear in any way to be an exercise of a capacity whose very possibility has thereby been called into question. Reflecting on the differences between the debunker and the Kantian sceptic may, again, help to bring out how the nine Kantian features, listed above, are internally related to one another: That the debunker does not suffer from Kantian scepticism can be seen in part from the fact that he begins with a very particular sort of example; its debunking does not eventuate in a Kantian boggle; for he is under no intellectual obligation to take the phenomena (that thereby seem to him not to be possible) to be actual, etc.
- 26 The distinction between these two varieties of scepticism can provide philosophically far less superficial categories for sorting philosophers into groups than those we usually rely upon, such as the alleged divide between analytic and Continental philosophy. One can learn to see past the common philosophical reference points and superficial similarities in philosophical tradition and style that unite thinkers such as Heidegger and Sartre, on the one hand, and Wilfrid Sellars and H.H. Price, on the other, and begin to discern certain fundamental divergences, thus enabling one to notice fundamental philosophical affinities between thinkers from different traditions, allowing one to sort together Heidegger and Sellars, on the one hand, and Sartre and Price, on the other.
- 27 Conversely, one may resolutely avoid a particular philosopher's ways of speaking as a strategy for avoiding his problems and yet end up mired in precisely the philosophical problematic one sought thereby to avoid. This is part of the reason why Richard Rorty's preferred strategies for dissolving philosophical problems tend to be so ineffectual.
- 28 I argue for this claim in the longer version of this chapter cited in note 1.
- 29 Putnam's *Dewey Lectures* were given at Columbia University in March of 1994 and first published in *Journal of Philosophy*. They are reprinted in Putnam (1999) and all references to them will be to that publication.
- 30 The context of the previous quotation makes this evident.
- 31 I do not mean to deny that McDowell is concerned to criticise the interface conception in some of his writings, most notably in his essay 'Criteria, Defeasibility, and Knowledge' (in McDowell 1998b), but only that McDowell would not identify the target of that essay with 'the key' confusion that he seeks to exorcise in *Mind and World*.
- 32 Quoted at McDowell 1994: 27.
- 33 Elsewhere in his writings, Putnam is extremely sensitive in his treatment of philosophical problems that bear the earmarks of a Kantian problematic, and in showing how putative solutions to those problems, if strictly thought through, can be seen to collapse into variants of Kantian scepticism. Putnam's criticisms of attempts to naturalise meaning are an example of this. For a brief discussion, see pp. xlii–xlvi of my 'Introduction' to Putnam 1994.
- 34 In the longer version of this chapter, cited in note 1, I discuss in some detail how the work of G.I. Lewis is exemplary of a certain kind of Kantian philosopher – one whose work, against its own intention, threatens to collapse into a form of Kantian scepticism.
- 35 Kripke 1982: 21–2. Kripke initially presents his motivating example in terms that alternate between a Cartesian worry and a Kantian worry. The Cartesian worry can be put as follows: 'How can I *know* whether in the present case someone is adding or quadding; and if I do not know this, then [given that this would appear to be a best case of knowledge of addition] how can I ever know if anyone is really adding?' The Kantian worry can be put as follows: 'How can there ever so much as be a fact of the matter as to whether someone is adding; and, if there cannot then [given that this would appear to be as elementary a case as there can be of someone meaning one thing rather than another] how can anyone ever so much as determinately *mean* anything?' Kripke himself is – at least in certain places in his book (see, for example, p. 21) – fairly clear that his initial Cartesian characterisations of the issue (according to which, as he says: 'the problem may appear to be epistemological') can serve him only as a provisional expository device (thus he says: 'the ladder must finally be kicked away') for leading people into a sceptical paradox of an altogether different and more fundamental variety.
- 36 It is peculiar that Cavell should think that his last remark might help to differentiate his problematic from one that does not deserve to be characterised as one of scepticism. It is true that, viewed from the standpoint of the Cartesian sceptic's own self-understanding of the nature of his conclusion, we *appear* to be faced with a scene of destruction as long as we permit the sceptical conclusion to remain unchallenged. But *that* appearance is not one that Wittgenstein, on Cavell's own reading of him, will be prepared to let go unchallenged. The continuation of the remark from the *Investigations* (PI 118) to which Cavell here alludes is one that he himself has insisted is best translated: 'What we are destroying is nothing but structures of air. . . .' (see, for example, Cavell 1979 p. xvii). The radicalisation of the Cartesian problematic represented in Kantian scepticism moves us in the direction of such a realisation. Of course, as long as it continues to appear – as it does to a Kantian sceptic such as Kripkenstein – as if our everyday concepts of thought, understanding, meaning, etc. are without application and thus themselves nothing but mere structures of air, then the treatment of scepticism will, for Wittgenstein, not yet be complete. That treatment will not be complete until our criteria for the application of those concepts are recovered. But it does not follow, as Cavell seems to suggest, that such a Kantian radicalisation of the Cartesian problematic cannot form a part of that treatment.
- 37 One can think of these two movements that Wittgenstein seeks to execute as

the *movement up the dialectical ladder* (towards nonsense) and the *movement down the dialectical ladder* (towards the ordinary). This way of putting things helps to bring out both a fundamental moment of continuity and a fundamental moment of discontinuity between Wittgenstein's early and later philosophical practice. The former of these two remarks could serve equally aptly as a characterisation of the aim of the author the *Tractatus*. The latter could not. What I am here calling 'the Wittgensteinian way' is therefore meant to designate a way with scepticism that we first find only when we turn to Wittgenstein's later writings.

- 38 Cavell, if he were brought to see how McDowell is employing the term 'criterion', could concede, without harm to any of his philosophical commitments, something along the following lines: 'Well, that is not how Wittgenstein uses the term; but if you are determined to use the term in this (un-Wittgensteinian) way, then the right (i.e. *philosophically* Wittgensteinian) thing to go on and say, so using it, is just what you say (e.g. that in cases of pretending the criteria for pain are only apparently satisfied).' And McDowell, equally, if he were taught Cavell's understanding of the term (criteria are not criteria for something's *being* so, but for its being *so*) would have no reason not to concede that the right thing to say, so using the term, is just what Cavell says (i.e. that in cases of pretending, if it is *pain* you are pretending to be in, then the criteria for pain are satisfied). The disagreement between Cavell and McDowell about criteria is a further instance of a merely apparent disagreement in which the appearance of disagreement is engendered through an unacknowledged transition from a Cartesian to a Kantian problematic. Both McDowell and Cavell are in profound disagreement with their respective and very similar sets of interlocutors (Baker, Wright, Albritton, Malcolm, etc.), but they are disagreeing with them about different things. (McDowell's point has to do with how justification and knowledge are internally – and not merely externally – related to one another; Cavell's has to do with how an appeal to criteria cannot do a sort of work that Wittgenstein calls upon it to do, if criteria are understood in the manner of such commentators.) Their respective focal philosophical motivations for disagreeing with such commentators are perfectly compatible. This is not to deny that the differences here in what they have to say about Wittgenstein's response to scepticism may be tied to substantive differences in the details of their respective understandings of the character of that response. It is only to insist that these differences can be assessed only after we appreciate that what the one here affirms and the other here denies (in affirming and denying that, in the case of someone's pretending to be in pain, the criteria for pain are satisfied) are not the same thing.
- 39 It is worth noting that nothing McDowell says anywhere, as far as I can see, ever denies the importance of such a return (and thus the sort of attention to the ordinary upon which Cavell places so much emphasis in his reading of Wittgenstein). Indeed, much of what McDowell says would seem to presuppose it.
- 40 As should be evident to anyone familiar with their work, the project of this chapter is pervasively indebted to the writings of Stanley Cavell, John McDowell, and Hilary Putnam. This particular version of the chapter, as it appears here, is indebted to Denis McManus – both for his suggestions about how to organise and edit it and for his forbearance with its author.