



UPPSALA
UNIVERSITET

The Limit of Knowledge

Wittgenstein's certain defeat of scepticism

Alva H. Katsoulis

Supervisor: Mira Hannegård

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Department of Philosophy

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Abstract

Ludwig Wittgenstein's *On Certainty* is an attempt to defy scepticism while not adhering to a position of realism. In this paper I have set out both to clarify Wittgenstein's views according to my interpretation, and to further elaborate his concepts so as to make his account against scepticism stronger. I will argue that Wittgenstein's account against scepticism should be accepted, and that he does indeed succeed in 1) refuting the sceptical argument, and 2) showing that it is not possible to sustain a scepticism as an intellectual position, to "be a sceptic".

Crucial to my account is that scepticism can be divided into the *sceptical argument*, and *pure scepticism*. The sceptical argument will be shown to be fallacious, whereas pure scepticism, it will be argued, should be regarded as real but not practically viable, in accordance with my interpretation of Wittgenstein's intentions. The aim of this essay is to show that Wittgenstein *sufficiently counters* scepticism.

Introduction

Ludwig Wittgenstein did in *On Certainty* attempt to defy scepticism from a non-realist standpoint. The work is both a critique of scepticism, and of G.E. Moore's realist position against scepticism. The debate following the publication of *On Certainty* has revolved around whether Wittgenstein actually provides a good argument against scepticism, or not. The vastly different readings of *On Certainty* are due to Wittgenstein recognizing that both sceptical doubt *and* certainties are unjustified¹, which would seem incoherent.

I will argue that Wittgenstein's account against scepticism should be accepted. This will be done with the support of Stella Villarmea and Duncan Pritchard's essays on the topic. Moreover, I will propose that Wittgenstein's model of language-games and hinge propositions is in need of a refinement in order to highlight the contextual significance of the nature of knowledge. The aim is to establish that Wittgenstein does counter scepticism sufficiently in *On Certainty*.

In order to get a better grasp of this topic there is some terminology that one needs to know. Firstly, *Language-game* is Wittgenstein's concept introduced in *Philosophical Investigations*. The idea is that language operates within different "games" for different contexts. The sets of rules vary between games, and these rules are created and learned through practice. These rules are not to be understood as prior to language, they emerge from linguistic practises. The ways in which we speak create the rules. There are for example certain rules for how one expresses knowledge, which will be central to this essay. The language-game of knowing does not "allow for" (i.e. *it is not the way we speak*) knowledge statements of things which are certain without inquiry. We do in ordinary circumstances only express knowledge statements when there is an explicit or implicit inquiry behind what is stated. A knowledge statement which plays by the rules could thus be "I know that it's raining" because some sort of inquiry, such looking out the window or checking the weather app, has taken place before the statement. The language-game does not "allow for" statements such as "I know I have two hands" for in no ordinary circumstances does one engage in inquiry leading to that 'knowledge'. Again, it is the practice that sets the rules. This leads us to the next term in need of explanation.

¹ Pritchard. Wittgenstein and the groundlessness of our believing, 257

Secondly, *Certainties* are what Wittgenstein calls all beliefs we hold that are not the result of inquiry. *Hinge propositions* will be used synonymously to certainties, originating from the hinge metaphor used in *On Certainty*. Certainties are not doubted in ordinary contexts, they are immune to both *doubt* and *reason*, in virtue of being anterior to inquiry and more certain than anything that could counter or support them.² Being immune to reason, certainties are *assumed*, not justified. Such certainties are for instance, other than our hands' existence, that the earth has existed for many years prior to us, that the earth is the planet on which we are right now, that every adult has once been a child, and many other assumptions we carry with us without ever questioning *in practice*. However, in extraordinary situations, for instance if one has suffered an accident after which one wakes up at the hospital with hands bandaged, *then* what is usually certain (one having two hands) becomes uncertain. Such circumstances are, however, much rare, and for the purpose of clarity extraordinary situations will mostly be disregarded. That certainties are never questioned *in practice* is crucial, for while everything *can* be questioned *in theory* this is not what is important when discussing Wittgenstein's account against scepticism. Hinge propositions, or certainties, are defined as that which does not come into question in everyday life, and their role is to act as scaffolding for inquiry. For, if *everything* were questioned in practice, then it would be impossible to embark on any inquiry, let alone to use language at all.

In order to propose my argument I will in chapter 1 present the sceptical argument, and Moore's attempted refutation of it, followed by Wittgenstein's response to Moore and his critique of sceptical doubt. Wittgenstein's model of certainties will be further explained in chapter 2, followed by my complementary addition, *the intrasocial realm*. Thereafter I will divide knowledge onto two levels in order to make Wittgenstein's account more clear. It will also be explained how the sceptical argument differs from scepticism in its pure form, which will be important for understanding Wittgenstein's position against scepticism. A reservation against Wittgenstein's account, and my response to it will be presented in chapter 3. In chapter 4 is where it will be argued that we should accept Wittgenstein's account against scepticism.

² Siegel, H. Hinges, Disagreements, and Arguments: (Rationally) Believing Hinge Propositions and Arguing across Deep Disagreements, 1107

1. Scepticism, Moore, and Wittgenstein

Scepticism, or more specifically external world scepticism, is a persistent account which has been claimed to undermine epistemology. External world scepticism, also known as brute scepticism, global scepticism, etc., has its modern roots in Descartes' evil demon, said to deceive us at every instance. This kind of scepticism arises from the intuition that all we perceive as true may in fact be a product of delusion, implying that knowledge is ultimately uncertain. In this first chapter we shall look at the sceptical argument in 1.1, followed by Moore's famous attempt to refute it, in 1.2. In 1.3 Wittgenstein's critique of Moore and of the sceptical doubt will follow thereafter.

1.1 The sceptical argument

The argument for external world scepticism is as follows:

S being the subject. *e* being something usually considered as known, e.g. the existence of an external world. *sh* being 'sceptical hypothesis'.

(P1) If *S* knows *e*, then *S* knows that not-*sh*

(P2) *S* does not know that not-*sh*

(C) Therefore, *S* does not know that *e*³

A common sceptical hypothesis is Brains in a vat (BIV), a modern version of Descartes' demon. In the form of the argument above, the BIV hypothesis states that if *S* knows that they are, for instance, seated (*e*), then they know that they are not a BIV. However, *S* cannot know that they are not a BIV, which leads to the conclusion that *S* does not know that they are seated. Being a BIV is incompatible with being seated (*e*), since a BIV is simply floating around in a vat, being fed the illusion of being seated. In extension: it is fed the illusion of the existence of the external world. Thus, all proof of one's position in the external world *can* ultimately be an illusion, which leads to the sceptical conclusion that it is possible that we cannot really know anything about the external world or its existence. This is what in this essay is named 'the limit of knowledge' - the inability to surpass human experience to prove anything 'objectively'.

³ Prichard. The structure of the sceptical argument, 37

As will be seen below, G.E. Moore set out to counter the sceptical argument by stating that we *can* know *e* thanks to the experiential evidence of the external world.

1.2 Moore's anti-sceptical argument

G.E. Moore's anti-sceptical arguments in "A Defence of Common Sense"⁴ and "Proof of an external world"⁵ are arguably the most famous attempts at refuting scepticism. In the former work, he claims that propositions such as "The earth has existed for many years past" are "wholly true".⁶ That is, we can know these sorts of propositions, even though, as he admits, a compelling analysis of such propositions has not been provided. Moore's most famous argument, extracted from "Proof of an external world", is the following:

(P1) Here is a hand

(P2) If there is a hand, then there is an external world

(C) There is an external world⁷

By showing his hands while lecturing, Moore intended to disclose the absurdity of the sceptical argument. In addition to the existence of his hands, Moore stated numerous examples of things he deems certain, for instance that most human beings have bodies and have had experiences, both physical and mental. This cannot be doubted, according to Moore, and these common-sense facts about the world have thus been called Moorean facts. These facts are everyday things that we are most confident of and are *provable* by experience and common-sense.⁸

Although Wittgenstein shares Moore's disagreement with the sceptical argument as a green light to doubt everything, he does not agree with Moore's means of counterarguing. Moore's argument is begging the question due to that knowledge of his hands presupposes an external world, which then does not really tend to the issue of the limit of knowledge which scepticism is ultimately interested in. In basing his argument on sense perception, Moore says nothing of value to sceptics who would doubt sense-perception altogether. In order to avoid this issue of sense perceptions, Wittgenstein instead counters scepticism by presenting an analysis of what a doubt really is and how it works in language-games. Scepticism is shown

⁴ G. E. Moore. "A Defence of Common Sense", *Contemporary British Philosophy (2nd series)*, 1925. Reprinted in G. E. Moore. *Philosophical Papers* (1959)

⁵ Moore, G.E. "Proof of an External World." In *Analytic Philosophy: An Anthology*

⁶ Moore. "A Defence of Common Sense", 15

⁷ Moore. "Proof of an external world", 173

⁸ *ibid.* 173

to not respect the rules of doubting. But before presenting Wittgenstein's analysis of the doubt, we will begin with his critique of Moore.

1.3 Wittgenstein's response to Moore

Ludwig Wittgenstein's *On Certainty*⁹ consists of short notes in numbered paragraphs. Via these notes, we see that Wittgenstein shares Moore's disapproval of scepticism, but that he finds Moore's argument flawed. As stated above, Wittgenstein finds Moore's argument question-begging. Knowledge statements of something within the external world cannot prove the existence of the external world itself. Wittgenstein states:

"I know" is here a logical insight. Only realism can't be proved by means of it.¹⁰

Wittgenstein claims that Moore presents no proof of his hands when expressing knowledge of them. Moore's argument would equally work to 'prove' colours - "I know there are colours (because I see them)".¹¹ Perception of the world does not guarantee anything apart from *how* it is perceived.

Moreover, Wittgenstein acknowledges that Moore's use of "knowing" is nonsensical. The language-game of knowing needs an element of uncertainty, there has to be an inquiry leading up to the knowledge in order for knowledge statements to have sense. Wittgenstein argues that certainties, such as the existence of hands, are not knowledge in an ordinary sense, since there is no question about the hands' existence. Knowledge statements of certainties are superfluous. Wittgenstein widens the width of Moorean facts and calls these *hinge propositions* (certainties). These propositions are necessarily *assumed* and indubitable, not *known*.

That is to say, the *questions* that we raise and our doubts depend on the fact that some propositions are exempt from doubt, are as it were like hinges on which those turn.¹²

That is to say, it belongs to the logic of our scientific investigations that certain things are *in deed* not doubted.¹³

⁹ Wittgenstein. *On certainty: Über Gewissheit*, 1974

¹⁰ *ibid.* §59, 10e

¹¹ *ibid.* §57, 9-10e

¹² *ibid.* §341, 44e

¹³ *ibid.* §342, 44e; *in deed* is spelled as such, presumably because Wittgenstein is alluding to the practice, the *deed*, in which doubt takes place.

We just can't investigate everything, and for that reason we are forced to rest content with assumption. If I want the door to turn, the hinges must stay put.¹⁴

The hinge metaphor, used in the first and last quote, shows just how important these certainties are; the “door”, meaning all language, thought, inquiry, etc., cannot “turn” without hinges. These hinges are necessarily not questioned in practice, for without a set of certainties, no inquiry, speech, or action would occur.

When Moore states knowledge about hinge propositions, he commits the following mistake, according to Wittgenstein:

If "I know etc." is conceived as a grammatical proposition, of course the "I" cannot be important. And it properly means "There is no such thing as a doubt in this case" or "The expression 'I do not know' makes no sense in this case". And of course it follows from this that "I *know*" makes no sense either.¹⁵

Therefore, one may as well say “I have hands” and leave out “I know”. The implication is that one does not *know* that one has hands, it is merely certain. ‘Knowing’ is reserved for situations where an inquiry is made, meaning where there is an actual, possible doubt.¹⁶ Such are the rules of the language-game of knowing. To speak of hinge propositions as knowledge, like Moore does, is to break the rules of the language-game of knowing, because the hinges cannot (and *do not*) ever come into question, if we want any linguistic expressions to make sense. With the help of hinge propositions, or certainties, we can express knowledge statements, such as “I know it is Thursday today”. This statement is hinged on the concept of a day named Thursday existing, of “today” as an informative indexical, and so forth. One may not, and *does not*, state “I know that ‘today’ exists”, for the concept of “today” is necessarily certain.

A hinge proposition is thus what is certain to us without any prior investigation. They are the foundation of the language-games, and the scaffolding for all inquiry.¹⁷ Moreover, the hinge propositions are *arationally* grounded, and immune to doubt. These characteristics are crucial for they highlight the assumptive nature of such propositions. They are necessarily *assumed* and not *known*, and their role is to exist in the background of language, thought, and inquiry, to support those. Without these certainties in place there can be no reason or doubt

¹⁴ Wittgenstein. *On certainty*, §343, 44e

¹⁵ *ibid.* §58, 10e

¹⁶ *ibid.* §11, 3e

¹⁷ Pritchard. Wittgenstein and the groundlessness of our believing, 256

whatsoever.¹⁸ A hinge proposition held collectively is for instance that the earth has existed longer than any currently living person, and one held individually is my having two hands. These beliefs never come into question when inquiring about other matters, they are epistemically fundamental. One simply does not, in practice, begin an investigation by asking if the earth really did exist before one's birth, or if one really does have hands. Non-hinge propositions are those which can be reached through inquiry, whether that be about some person's whereabouts, or anything else which is not certain. It is significant that non-hinges are *based* on other propositions in practice, whereas hinge propositions are certain devoid of inquiry, in practice. Note, however, that circumstances do to some extent alter the hinge-status of propositions. The same proposition can be a hinge or non-hinge depending on the circumstances in which it is uttered.¹⁹

These non-hinges are such that there are possible mistakes which could counter them. The statement "I know it is Thursday today" is fallible, because it can possibly and plausibly turn out to be any other day of the week. Hinge propositions cannot be mistaken in this way. There is no conceivable mistake that could counter them. In other words, "I know ..." has to be tied up with a possibility of being wrong, which we can only be of non-hinge propositions, in ordinary circumstances. *Extraordinary* circumstances would include scientific revolutions, groundbreaking experiments, accidents, etc., which are not relevant for the assumptions we make in ordinary life. Again, the *practice* is important for Wittgenstein's analysis of language. In extraordinary situations where what is *usually* certain *becomes dubitable*, such as after an accident where one *might* have lost their hands and cannot tell because they are bandaged, then what *used* to be certain (having two hands) is no longer certain. In such ways circumstances change the hinge status of propositions. For the sake of clarity, however, extraordinary situations will onwards be exempt.

The definition of hinge propositions I have drawn from *On Certainty* has been questioned or seen as obscure. For example, Pritchard writes that it would seem that hinge propositions are not entirely arational and epistemically fundamental, since it seems they can be deduced from non-hinge propositions.²⁰ However, Wittgenstein does tend to this concern in the opening paragraph of *On Certainty*, where he states that *all* propositions (even hinge propositions) *can* be derived from one another, but that the propositions from which one derives hinge

¹⁸ Pritchard. Wittgenstein and the groundlessness of our believing, 257

¹⁹ See the explanation of *certainties* in the introduction, and the following passage.

²⁰ Pritchard. Wittgenstein and the groundlessness of our believing, 259

propositions are also assumed.²¹ For instance, if I derive “I have hands” from “I have a body, and bodies have hands”, or “hands have been anatomically researched, and therefore I know I have hands”, then I am relying on other certainties (perception of the body, and scientific facts) which are just as certain and unjustified as the hands themselves. But such thoughts do not occur normally, we always just assume that we have hands. I thus believe that understanding hinge propositions as beliefs that *never come into question in ordinary situations* is sufficient for this discussion and concerns we might have about the clarity of the distinction is not damning to my account. Therefore we can accept hinge propositions as arational and epistemically fundamental.

The practical nature of language-games is essential for understanding Wittgenstein. Language-games emerge from practice, their rules are decided by *how* we speak. Moving on to his analysis of the doubt, it is crucial to have the practical nature of language-games in mind.

1.4 Wittgenstein’s analysis of the doubt

Wittgenstein counters scepticism in three ways. His first means of countering scepticism is through rules of language-games, much similar to how Moore’s usage of “knowing” was impugned. That is what this section will discuss.

The language-game of doubting needs something to be fixed in order to play by the rules; “If you tried to doubt everything you would not get as far as doubting anything. The game of doubting presupposes certainty.”²² Just like knowledge statements require a possible uncertainty (“I know today is Thursday” is appropriate because it is fallible), so a doubt in the language-game of doubting requires something to be possibly certain. For instance, “I *doubt* that it is Thursday today” is a doubt playing by the rules, for I may have some *reason* to believe that it might be Friday, which is then based on the certainty of, or ‘hinged on’ there existing a weekday such as Friday, and on the notion of “today”.

Deducing doubt of *everything* from a sceptical scenario, such as BIV, is thus to disobey the rules of doubting. There is then no certainty which can support the doubt: if *everything* is

²¹ Wittgenstein. *On Certainty*, §1, 2e

²² *ibid.* §115, 18e

doubted, if nothing is certain, then the doubt loses its meaning.²³ Wittgenstein states: “A doubt that doubted everything would not be a doubt.”²⁴

A universal doubt with no adhesion to some certain alternative to what is doubted is therefore not a real doubt, in the language-game of doubting. The sceptical doubt of the world as a whole is therefore not admissible, for it has no certainty behind it. A universal doubt saws off the branch on which it is sitting, for all becomes nonsensical if everything is uncertain. Any language-game needs certainties on which it is hinged in order to function.

However, this first way of countering scepticism does not seem not enough in itself to account for the limit of knowledge which gives rise to the sceptical hypotheses in the first place. Acknowledging that an expression of universal doubt is disobedient by the rules of language still does not explain how and why scepticism persists, why it seems possible that the human mind cannot ultimately prove the existence of the external world, as independent of us. In the following chapter this limit will be explicated further.

2. The frame of language and thought

In this chapter I will attempt to define the limit of human knowledge, which is understood as the main concern of scepticism. As mentioned in section 1.3, language-games are essential in understanding Wittgenstein’s position against scepticism. His second means of countering scepticism is to show that the sceptical argument is fallacious in its deduction from P2 to (C). In order to fully account for this second countering, I will in this chapter explain the significance of context for knowledge. This will be done by first showing in section 2.1 how hinge propositions *frame* language-games and, subsequently, our scope of reference. Thereafter I will in 2.2 introduce a complementary addition to Wittgenstein’s concepts (certainties and language-games), namely the *intrasocial realm*. The intrasocial realm is the domain or sphere in which our entire experience (both inner and outer) is created and sustained, and it should explain how deeply we are in fact governed by the language-games and hinge propositions when expressing knowledge, or otherwise operating in the world. Moreover, I will divide knowledge onto a first and second level in section 2.3, in order to highlight the contextual significance of knowledge statements within the intrasocial realm, as opposed to allusions to ‘absolute knowledge’ outside of it. Lastly, it will in 2.4 be shown that

²³ Wittgenstein. *On Certainty*, §460-1, 60e

²⁴ *ibid.* §450, 58-59e

the *sceptical argument* and *pure scepticism* should be separated, because the sceptical argument errs, while scepticism devoid of the argument remains intact for now.

2.1 Framing the language-games

Wittgenstein shows that hinge propositions are fundamental for any linguistic practises, and that they are both indubitable and unjustified. Recall, if hinge propositions would be doubted, then the doubt would lose its meaning, leaving sceptical doubt nonsensical. And if one tries to *justify* hinge propositions, like Moore does, then one merely ends up with other certainties as justification, meaning they ultimately remain unjustified. This section will show that hinge propositions, or certainties, are the frame or limit of human knowledge, which, by extension, is the reason why sceptical hypotheses, such as BIV, arise.

Wittgenstein shows that the sceptical argument fails because it doubts everything, which is not possible in the language-game of doubting. It deduces from sceptical hypotheses (stating that we cannot ultimately know if, e.g., we are BIV) that no knowledge is possible at all. That was his first means of countering scepticism. His second way is to show that within a language-game knowledge *can* be expressed (and hence *known*), as long as it is not about hinge propositions (in ordinary situations).

To bring light to the crucial role that language-games and certainties play here, and why I argue that the concept needs refinement, we will first have to see how hinge propositions (certainties) frame the language-games. The frame is, then, a sort of limit of our language, and by extension our knowledge. Villarrea shows this in the following passage:

Wittgenstein uses the term "certainty" to refer to that which supports all our thoughts, expressions and actions. The exploration of the rules of language refers us to a realm beyond language, which cannot be analysed further. The inquiry comes to an end when we understand that the field of certainty exists and constitutes us, but that we cannot make its nature explicit. In the end, what is certain and why it is certain, remains beyond our understanding.²⁵

The key phrases in this passage are “the field of certainty exists and constitutes us”, and that the certainties’ nature “remains beyond our understanding”. The language-games operate in the realm of certainties which is *constitutive* of all thoughts, actions, and speech. What this implies, then, is that we cannot put ourselves outside of this framework, we can gain no

²⁵ Villarrea. Another turn of the screw, 13

perspective from *outside* of it. Without their existence no language or action could take place, they are the scaffolding that holds everything together.

2.2 The intrasocial realm

The *intrasocial realm* is a necessary clarification, I argue, in order to understand the limit of knowledge, and thus scepticism's persistence. The intrasocial realm is my addition to Wittgenstein's frame of certainties. Its object is to more adequately account for this frame, and to underline that it is not merely a frame belonging to individuals, but that it belongs to humanity collectively as a whole.

The rules of language can be experienced (it is more or less obvious when someone breaks the rules in, for instance, a conversation) and analysed (like Wittgenstein does when deeming sceptical doubt, and Moore's knowledge statements as nonsensical, i.e. not abiding by the rules). The rules can be analysed, but not their *nature*, because their origin is not a product of thought. Again, the rules arise from the action of speech, not the other way around.

According to Wittgenstein, the rules of language and thought are *inherent* to humankind. He uses many names for this inherent structure, Villarrea sums them up as "the inherited tradition, the community of origin, our behaviour, our animality, and even our mythology."²⁶

There is thus something fundamentally *human* in that which constitutes our framework.

Wittgenstein states:

The propositions describing this world-picture might be part of a kind of mythology. And their role is like that of rules of a game; and the game can be learned purely practically, without learning any explicit rules.²⁷

The language-game is constituted by hinge propositions whose nature is abstractly human, judging by Wittgenstein's descriptions quoted by Villarrea above, and the rules which govern language are learned implicitly through practice within the world. The intrasocial realm is needed to *encapsulate* this constitutive mythology.

Underlining that our framework (including language, thought, action, etc.) is both internal (intra) *and* external (social) is the most significant feature of the intrasocial realm. The intrasocial realm constitutes our inner world *as well as* the external world, as we perceive it.

²⁶ Villarrea. Another turn of the screw, 13

²⁷ Wittgenstein. *On Certainty*, §95, 15e

We learn *inside* the world, and the world becomes our inside. The intrasocial realm is the domain of humanity; it cannot be escaped by us any more than we can escape the species of humankind. A child is inescapably born into the world with a human perspective, and this *humanness* is what I interpret “the inherited tradition”, “the community of origin”, “our behaviour”, “our animality”, and “our mythology” to be. Hinge propositions are not enough to account for this *humanness*, I argue, as they are learned progressively throughout life and depend on culture, eras, and age (different things are deemed certain at different times and places). What the intrasocial realm supplies is a holistic view of human conception, which is dependent on both external experience and the internal, inherited mechanisms which govern the way we perceive, reason, and speak of the world. In the intrasocial realm exist hinge propositions and the rules of language, they are the matter which makes communication and explicit thoughts²⁸ possible. But the realm itself is silent, it is the backdrop of our position in the world.

Since what is learned is absorbed in a way that is out of our control (we learn from others and through experience, and we have a human way of perceiving and learning, thus we cannot choose what to absorb or how to absorb it), we lack perspective from *outside* of what has been absorbed into the intrasocial realm. To connect to the earlier discussion of knowledge statements: We cannot make knowledge statements about absorbed certainties for one did not learn, for example, that one has hands, through reason. It is simply absorbed and certain. This is what Wittgenstein shows when saying:

We teach a child "that is your hand", not "that is perhaps [or "probably"] your hand". That is how a child learns the innumerable language-games that are concerned with his hand. An investigation or question, 'whether this is really a hand' never occurs to him. Nor, on the other hand, does he learn that he *knows* that this is a hand.²⁹

But perhaps I might nevertheless be unable to help myself, so that I kept on declaring "I know . . .". But ask yourself: how did the child learn the expression?³⁰

The certainties are fixed once absorbed into the intrasocial realm, they do not come into question. What is fixed is part of the scaffolding, and accordingly, as has been shown in sections 1.3-4, these certainties cannot be justified or doubted. The child did not learn to

²⁸ Thoughts of other kinds may be able to occur without language.

²⁹ Wittgenstein. *On Certainty*, §374, 48e

³⁰ *ibid.* §581, 77e

inquire about the fact that it has hands and therefore such inquiry does not occur in ordinary circumstances. Thereby the child does not *know* that it has hands, it is merely certain.

Adding the notion of intrasociality as the intricate context of our entire experience helps bring light to Wittgenstein's thoughts on truth. He asks, for example, why there seems to be no doubt that his name is L.W.³¹ when "[i]t does not seem at all like something that one could establish at once beyond doubt."³² He states further: "It is part of the language-game with people's names that everyone knows his name with the greatest certainty."³³ Hence, one's name is a certainty, a hinge proposition. But can it be established beyond doubt? If one recalls the definition of certainties, one remembers that they are unjustified and indubitable. But 'indubitable' does not mean 'established beyond doubt', just that they cannot be (and *are not*) doubted in practice if language should continue working. 'Established beyond doubt' seems to refer to *truth* rather than function. I agree with Wittgenstein, it does not seem that a name, or any other certainty, can be established beyond doubt. Meaning, their truth cannot be established. This is not a problem, however, if one considers that certainties have relevance in the intrasocial realm. In language-games of names, the names do have a function, making names a significant part of the intrasocial realm. Extracting the meaning and function of a name from the intrasocial realm is nonsensical, it is only for the *human* context where the concept of *our* names has sense. Hence, it seems a name, or any other certainty, cannot be established as *true* outside of the intrasocial realm, but nonetheless has significance and relevance within the realm. It is in the realm, and only there, where it has meaning. Certainties being true or not, outside of the intrasocial realm is irrelevant for their role within the realm, namely their functions in the language-games. It thus remains nonsensical to doubt a name, or any other certainty, even if it cannot be proven beyond doubt.

The discrepancy brought to light with the example of his name is between, on the one hand, what is true *within* the intrasocial realm, and, on the other, what might be true *outside* of it. He says: "The *truth* of certain empirical propositions belongs to our frame of reference."³⁴ 'Frame of reference' could here be understood as the intrasocial realm. This would imply that there *are truths within* the intrasocial realm, which are true only within said realm. I think he is moving towards a division between, on the one hand, truth, expressed through ordinary knowledge statements, within the intrasocial realm, and, on the other, 'absolute truth',

³¹ Wittgenstein uses "L.W." as an abbreviation for his name throughout *On Certainty*.

³² Wittgenstein. *On Certainty*, §470, 62e

³³ *ibid.* §579, 76e

³⁴ *ibid.* §83, 12e

expressed by statements claiming ‘objective’ knowledge. This will be tended to in the next section.

2.3 Knowledge statements on the first and second level

In this section knowledge statements will be divided onto a first and second level. The division of knowledge statements onto two levels should be of aid when dealing with the intrasocial realm as the limit of knowledge.

Knowledge statements of events *within* the intrasocial realm is knowledge on the first level, and this knowledge can be true or false, in context. Knowledge statements on the second level regards what is true, or false, *outside* of said realm. Such statements are not expressed relative to a context and do subsequently not have context-related truth values. Villarrea makes a similar distinction between propositions of knowledge.³⁵ She states that knowledge propositions of the first kind (first level in my division) are meaningful and that they have context-related truth values.³⁶ Statements of knowledge on the second level, in my division, do not have context-related truth values, since they do not have a context. In my view, they regard what is true outside of our intrasocial realms, truth values that are unavailable to the human mind. Attempting to prove that second level knowledge statements are true or false outside of our scope of reference is nonsensical, for one cannot access a perspective from which such statements are meaningful. Thus, the knowledge statements on the second level alluding to absolute truth do not contain any actual knowledge, making the statements absurd.

In *absolute* terms there might not be truth conditions at all, hence Wittgenstein’s intuition that he *seems* both to know his name (first level) but still cannot have complete confidence of it *actually* being true (second level). The name is bound to the intrasocial realm by function and is learned by experience and integration, but outside of the intrasocial realm it loses its function and, subsequently, its truth values. Recall that truth belongs to our frame of reference. In the following quotes Wittgenstein is pondering this.

³⁵ Villarrea. Another Turn of the Screw, 5-6; Villarrea’s division is tripartite: (1) meaningful empirical usage of knowledge propositions, (2) absurd dogmatic usage of knowledge propositions, such as Moore’s hand-argument against scepticism, (3) senseless and nonsensical *quotation* of empirical propositions used in philosophical analysis, making them “grammatical” or “special” propositions. I have disregarded her third classification which is relevant only for her thesis, and have instead focused on the intention of expression of first and second level knowledge statements. My two levels are strongly related to her (1) and (2) categories.

³⁶ Villarrea. Another Turn of the Screw, 7

It is queer: if I say, without any special occasion, "I know" - for example, "I know that I am now sitting in a chair", this statement seems to me unjustified and presumptuous. But if I make the same statement when there is some need for it, then, although I am not a jot more certain of its truth, it seems to me to be perfectly justified and everyday.³⁷

In its language-game it is not presumptuous. There, it has no higher position than, simply, the human language-game. For there it has its restricted application.

But as soon as I say this sentence outside its context, it appears in a false light. For then it is as if I wanted to insist that there are things that I *know*. God himself can't say anything to me about them.³⁸

The statement free of context becomes a knowledge statement of the second level, implicitly intending to state absolute truth, which cannot be justified. However, as he says, when uttered *in a context* the statement becomes meaningful and justified *within that context*. For instance, if someone argues that you are sitting on a sofa, you are justified in claiming "I know that I am now sitting in a chair." The statement seems true relative to the intrasocial context - meaning the statement aligns with the rules of the language-game, it has proper function, although the absolute truth values remain undisclosed.

Great caution is needed here. For it has already been shown that knowledge statements of certainties (such as of hands or names) are not admissible in the language-game, because they cannot be doubted in ordinary situations. However, at this point the situation has changed; it is now admissible to express knowledge even of certainties. Wittgenstein is not content with this consequence.³⁹ He says regarding certainties that he would like to instead affirm them by saying "I know that - so far as one can know such a thing." although "[t]hat is incorrect, but something right is hidden behind it."⁴⁰ By saying that he knows a certainty so far as anyone can know it, although this would be 'wrong' (presumably because the usage of 'knowing' is reserved for more definite usage than "so far as anyone can know it") but that there is something *right* to it, I find that first and second level knowledge statements is a justified addition. Wittgenstein's own account does not allow for knowledge statements about certainties, but clearly it is in some ways possible to express such knowledge, even if one has to add 'so far as anyone can know it'. To use the example of hands again, one should be able to say "I know that I have hands, so far as anyone can know it" because it doesn't allude to

³⁷ Wittgenstein. *On Certainty*, §553, 72e

³⁸ *ibid.* §554, 73e

³⁹ *ibid.* §622, 82e

⁴⁰ *ibid.* §623, 82e

absolute truth. It is a first level statement; one does not claim that it is *beyond doubt* or absolutely *true* that one has hands. The statement is simply that I believe that my knowledge is as sure as it can be. If, on the other hand, the statement would be expressed as second level knowledge (I *know* that I have hands), alluding to absolute truth, then it once again “appears in false light” because no justification whatsoever can be given such statements.

It is thus important to keep first and second level knowledge statements apart, for first level knowledge statements are true or false within their context, whereas the *same* knowledge statement expressed as second level knowledge has no truth values available to us, because they allude to something outside of the intrasocial realm. What Moore does when using the knowledge of his hands’ existence in order to prove the external world’s existence, is to express it as knowledge on the second level, as means of proving something beyond his intrasocial realm, namely the absolute truth of the external world’s existence. This, as has been shown, is not justified because he has no means of proving its existence without appealing to things within the same context - things which are just as certain (and thus unjustified and indubitable) as the certainty of his hands. Of course, he can in this way prove that the external world exists *as he experiences it* from *within* the intrasocial realm, but that is not what scepticism is asking for. Recall that scepticism is interested in what lies beyond our scope of reference, outside of what I call the intrasocial realm.

The intrasocial realm is the limit of knowledge, and inquiry into what the world is really like outside of this frame is what I argue gives rise to scepticism. How can we know that the world is like it appears if all we experience and know exist inside this human framework? To return to the hypothesis of BIV: If we are indeed BIV, then we have no means of proving it for all proof available to us comes from within the illusion we are being fed. We do not have access to a perspective from outside the illusion. Again, this issue of our confinement to *our* perspective, our frame of reference, is precisely what gives rise to scepticism. In my words, then, this problem is described as follows. Second level knowledge, absolute truth, is out of reach from within our intrasocial realms, absolute truth values are unable to be disclosed by research into the world as it is perceived by us. But one can nonetheless have knowledge *on the first level*, i.e. within the intrasocial realm. Wittgenstein’s awareness of the limit of knowledge (which in *On Certainty* is described as being simply the hinge propositions) does therefore not imply the sceptical claim that no knowledge whatsoever is possible due to it being impossible to prove that \sim BIV. On the contrary, it shows that knowledge is possible within, what I call, the intrasocial realm, but not outside of it.

On page 62e Wittgenstein writes, in relation to the concern of the truth of his name: “Here is still a big gap in my thinking and I doubt whether it will be filled now.”⁴¹ and it is followed by: “It is so difficult to find the *beginning*. Or, better: it is difficult to begin at the beginning. And not try to go further back.”⁴² I do not think this is a mistake. Wittgenstein has run up to the walls of the intrasocial realm which *is* his entire world as he knows it. He tries to bend the rules of the game by trying to go further back than “our animality”, but finds that he is still confined to the game board. One has to realise, and stop at, the limit of inquiry and knowledge. Attempting to go further than the intrasocial realm results in nonsense.

The question of knowledge risks becoming trivial with an analysis of the intrasocial realm and its subsequent division of knowledge. Knowledge within the intrasocial realm is relating to, and only to, what is already in the particular realm, and it is irrelevant if it is true or false in the absolute sense. Wittgenstein says: “the concept of knowing is coupled with that of the language-game.”⁴³ Meaning one can express knowledge of a particular event, using the language-game of knowing, but one cannot express knowledge of what is not in context of a language-game. If stated devoid of a language-game, devoid of a context, then it is alluding to something outside of the intrasocial realm, and it then becomes an unjustified second level knowledge statement. All proof one can provide for such knowledge statements, such as science, perception, and other means of inquiry, resides within the intrasocial realm, which, then, cannot prove or justify the statement since such proof is on the first level - we do not know of their absolute truth. Hence, only an expression of knowledge which is uttered appropriately in a language-game is justified. And this is perhaps a rather trivial analysis: We can only access what is within the intrasocial realm and build comprehensible theories and structures to explain what we experience. But fundamentally there seems it can be no proof *of* our experience other than that *it is*.

2.4 Scepticism ≠ the sceptical argument

At this point, it may be necessary to explicitly separate scepticism in its ‘pure form’ from the sceptical argument. I argue that they are vastly different.

⁴¹ Wittgenstein. *On Certainty*, 62e

⁴² *ibid.* §471, 62e

⁴³ *ibid.* §560, 74e

The sceptical argument wrongfully deduces from P2 that no knowledge *at all* is possible given the fact that sceptical hypotheses cannot be refuted. This is wrong according to the wittgensteinian theory, because knowledge *is* possible within appropriate language-games. Wittgenstein shows that knowledge *is* possible on what I have called the first level, due to its being context-dependent. Thereby it is shown that the sceptical argument is fallacious, for the conclusion does not follow from the premises: there is a wrongful deduction from the unknowable BIV-hypothesis to knowledge overall. The sceptical argument should therefore be separated from *pure scepticism*, arising from the realisation that one cannot refute sceptical hypothesis. For it remains true that any attempt to prove that \sim BIV follows Moore into the question-begging pitfall. But the scepticism arising from the realisation that the external world cannot be ‘objectively’ proven (devoid of proof that presupposes the external world) does not commit any fallacy, because it does not make any claims. This will be called ‘pure scepticism’, as opposed to *the sceptical argument*.

In this chapter, then, Wittgenstein’s second way of countering scepticism was explained, namely that the sceptical argument makes a wrongful deduction between the unknowable beyond our frame of reference to the knowable within it. The intrasocial realm was introduced to clarify the fundamental role hinge propositions and language-games play in our entire conception of reality. Knowledge statements of events within the realm can be justified in their context, and such knowledge was named knowledge on the first level. The intrasocial realm accounts for the sphere in which we operate through various language-games, and clarifies that what is beyond this realm is inaccessible. Knowledge statements expressed outside of a language-game were shown to allude to what is outside of the realm, and those were named knowledge statements on the second level, which are unjustified. Lastly, it was shown that pure scepticism does not commit any fallacy, like the sceptical argument does. How pure scepticism can be handled, if not refuted, will be the object of the next chapter, when answering the criticism Pritchard advances.

3. Issues with Wittgenstein’s account

In this section will be presented a concern with Wittgenstein's account and how one could go about answering it. This weakness regards it seeming that accepting hinge propositions as arational assumption are compatible with scepticism. I will show that even though *pure scepticism* is compatible with Wittgenstein’s account, due to the acknowledgement of the

limit of our knowledge, Wittgenstein does nonetheless prove it impossible to *be a sceptic*, which, then, makes pure scepticism unharmful to, even if compatible with, his account. This is Wittgenstein's third and final means of countering scepticism. Pritchard's concern will be tended to in 3.1 and answered in 3.2.

3.1 Hinge propositions and scepticism

The issue that Pritchard advances is that Wittgenstein's account does not counter scepticism, because the acknowledging of arational hinge propositions would be compatible with scepticism.⁴⁴ Pritchard finds that since Wittgenstein's model rests on hinge propositions as certainties, being indubitable, and arational (we do not reason about the hinges, they are taken at face value) it is difficult from a sceptical perspective to see how this does not lead to a sceptical conclusion.

Even if doubt of hinge propositions is not technically allowed for in the language-game of doubting, one can perhaps still intellectually doubt them, simply because they are not rationally held beliefs. The issue we have at hand is, then, that it seems scepticism cannot be countered by Wittgenstein's account since hinge propositions are not in themselves able to be proven true or false. In Pritchard's words: "that which we are most certain of is not rationally supported at all, but is rather hinge relative to which we rationally evaluate - and thus 'test' - other propositions."⁴⁵ Hinge propositions being simply *there* in the background of our thinking, speaking, and acting is thereby not enough to counter scepticism, if Pritchard is right.

I interpret Pritchard to mean that if hinge propositions cannot be sufficiently justified, then it seems that using hinge propositions to deny sceptical hypotheses, such as BIV, is insufficient. It amounts to little more than just saying that BIV is a *possibility*, for what is beyond the limit of knowledge cannot be known. If we cannot prove the external world in an absolute sense, then the BIV-hypothesis remains a possibility. Scepticism is thereby not countered by Wittgenstein's account. However, I will argue that it does not appear to have been Wittgenstein's intention to refute scepticism in this manner, instead he shows that scepticism

⁴⁴ Pritchard. Wittgenstein and the groundlessness of our believing, 259

⁴⁵ *ibid.* 257

is unsustainable as an intellectual position. Therefore I argue that Pritchard's concern is misguided.

3.2 Answering the critique

If Pritchard is correct in that Wittgenstein is indeed unsuccessful in his response to scepticism because of his hinge propositions, then the entire wittgensteinian account may seem inaccurate. However, as we shall see (1) Wittgenstein did not intend to reach incompatibility with (pure) scepticism, and (2) he shows that scepticism as an intellectual position is impracticable, and thereby refuted.

Firstly, Wittgenstein is rather clear in that nothing can be proven beyond a doubt.⁴⁶ Expressions of knowledge are only justified within language-games, and this is evident in various parts of *On Certainty*. For instance in this paragraph, stating: “‘I can't be making a mistake’ is an ordinary sentence, which serves to give the certainty-value of a statement. And only in its everyday use is it justified.”⁴⁷ This would imply that one can *always*, theoretically, be mistaken, but that statements of certainty, “I can't be mistaken”, are nonetheless *useful* in the language-games because they communicate certainty-value, but it does not prove anything beyond doubt. Communicating certainty is necessary in language-games, because it discloses something other than weaker modes of expressions would. If one *is certain* of something, then this cannot be adequately communicated by belief statements. Wittgenstein's admitting that one is always able to be mistaken, in theory, is a sceptical approach to knowledge, which then shows that Wittgenstein did not intend to eradicate scepticism in this manner. Hinge propositions are, in other words, not intended to be *incompatible* with scepticism.

As for my second point, Wittgenstein does not allow for the sceptical position, meaning the position of “being a sceptic”. Using mathematical certainty as paragon for what is most certain, he states: “[C]an I prophesy that men will never throw over the present arithmetical propositions, never say that now at last they know how the matter stands? Yet would that justify a doubt on our part?”⁴⁸ To his first question the answer is no, judging by the surrounding paragraphs.⁴⁹ But this does not lead him to conclude that *everything* is uncertain

⁴⁶ Wittgenstein. *On Certainty*, §642; §645; §648

⁴⁷ *ibid.* §638, 84e

⁴⁸ *ibid.* §652, 86e

⁴⁹ *ibid.* §653-8, 86-87e

and unknowable like “a sceptic” would. Instead, as his second question in the quote indicates, he finds that such *doubt* is nonetheless unjustified. If doubt about *everything* should be justified, then there should have to be a *possible mistake* leading to the doubt. This is argued in the following paragraph:

If I were to say "I have never been on the moon - but I may be mistaken", that would be idiotic. For even the thought that I might have been transported there, by unknown means, in my sleep, *would not give me any right* to speak of a possible mistake here. I play the game *wrong* if I do.⁵⁰

So even if a mistake is always possible *in theory*, those theoretical mistakes are not enough justification to express doubt of events we are certain of. Such mistakes are simply not *possible*, and using them as means for doubt ruins the language-game of doubting. For, if one recalls the discussion in 1.4, a doubt in a language-game requires certainty. If theoretical mistakes are always introduced to unjustify knowledge statements, then nothing remains certain, which, then, ruins the language-game of doubting altogether.

Pritchard’s concern that Wittgenstein’s account of certainties is insufficient to counter scepticism is therefore uncalled for, and misguided. Wittgenstein did not intend to prove that hinge propositions are certain beyond all doubt, which *does* make his claim compatible with scepticism, initially. But he then also shows that sceptical doubt is impracticable: The hinge propositions are not justified, but their certainty makes it impossible to doubt them in language-games, as “a sceptic” would. This relates to the separation between *the sceptical argument* and *pure scepticism*. The sceptical argument is *scepticism in practice*, claiming that no knowledge is possible, that everything can be doubted. This position is impossible to maintain in language-games, because *everything cannot be doubted*. Pure scepticism, however, remains intact in that it arises from the realisation that our conception of the world is ultimately and fundamentally *assumed*, not proven. But pure scepticism cannot make any claims of a practical nature, it is just the realisation of the intrasocial realm (or hinge propositions, in Wittgenstein’s account) as the limit of knowledge. Therefore, there is no issue with Wittgenstein’s account being compatible with scepticism, for he adequately shows that being a sceptic, or holding scepticism as an intellectual position, is impossible. One must

⁵⁰ Wittgenstein. *On Certainty*, §662, 88e

still regard knowledge statements within language-games as justified within context, because otherwise language falls apart.

Wittgenstein's third way of countering scepticism is, then, to show that scepticism is impracticable as an intellectual position, because language falls apart if everything is doubted. This was shown to be due to there being no *possible mistake* which justifies sceptical doubt. This third way of countering scepticism is related, but not identical, to the first (tended to in 1.4) in that it is the rules of doubt that scepticism fails to follow.

4. Accepting Wittgenstein's account

As I have shown, Pritchard's critique of Wittgenstein is unsuccessful. Wittgenstein argues that scepticism saws off the branch on which it is sitting - without certainties supporting the language-games sceptical doubt loses its meaning, which means that scepticism as an intellectual position is impossible to maintain. We can only doubt when there is a background picture of the world which is fixed.

I think we should accept Wittgenstein's account because he adequately shows how the sceptical argument is fallacious, and that pure scepticism is unhelpful because it has no practical bearing. Wittgenstein sufficiently proves that scepticism is erroneous, while he simultaneously is aware of our restricted ability to prove our assumptions. In my view, this is the most important feature of Wittgenstein's account, for it adequately explains where the sceptical intuition stems from, while at the same time not allowing for scepticism as an intellectual position.

Wittgenstein shows that scepticism as an intellectual position is impracticable because the doubt that scepticism proposes breaks the rules of the language-game. His language-games and hinge propositions do sufficiently refute scepticism, by virtue of the practical nature of rules of language. Wittgenstein's account forms a coherent system which explains the important role of language-games, either when expressing knowledge, or doubt. Deeming statements of knowledge and doubt as unjustified when they are expressed outside of a language-game is a powerful way of showing how both Moore and scepticism err in their claims.

Anyone wishing to stand by the sceptical argument would have to counter Wittgenstein's model with a *possible mistake* which could explain how we are wrong in all statements of knowledge. This mission ought ultimately to fail, for implausible hypotheses with the intention to unjustify knowledge are not enough to give us the *right* to speak of *mistakes* of certain events. Such are the rules of the language-games.

5. Conclusion

This essay has shown Wittgenstein's account against external world scepticism. His account differed from Moore's realist position in that Wittgenstein did not allow for any absolute proof of the external world due to the inadmissibility of such proof. Hinge propositions, the certainties that do not come into question in ordinary circumstances, are fundamentally certain to us, hence using them as proof of, for example, the external world is to say nothing meaningful of the world objectively, since they are assumed by us. Such proof relates only to what is already in the human context in which we operate, in what I called the intrasocial realm.

Wittgenstein's refutation of the sceptical argument and scepticism was threefold, it was shown that (1) the sceptical doubt is not admissible because it does not presuppose certainty, (2) that the sceptical argument makes a wrongful transmission between what I called knowledge on the first level and knowledge on the second level, leaving the argument fallacious, and (3) that pure scepticism, as apart from the sceptical argument, is unharmed to epistemology because it cannot make any claims, and as an intellectual position it is consequently impracticable.

With the additions of the intrasocial realm and knowledge statements on the first and second level, Wittgenstein's account forms a coherent system which explains how humans do have knowledge, while at the same time having a strict limit of knowledge. The limit of knowledge was shown to not have any practical sceptical implications. Therefore, Wittgenstein's *On Certainty* can certainly be regarded as a defeat of scepticism.

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