

# 12

## Epistemology Dehumanized

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Fundamental disagreements in epistemology arise from legitimate differences of interest, not genuine conflict. It is because of such differences that there are three varieties of epistemology: naturalistic, subjective, and what I shall call epistemology-as-logic. All three have been with us at least since Socrates. My chief concern will be with the third, but I must begin with the first and second, which constitute standard epistemology.

### 1. Naturalistic epistemology

It seems obvious that epistemology should be naturalistic. Its name is a synonym of “theory of knowledge”, the knowledge in question is human, and humans are parts of nature, of its *fauna*. Epistemology naturalized is epistemology humanized: it is about humans. Not only does it ignore god, angels, and extraterrestrials, it ignores even bats. This is why, however, it also lacks the generality and abstraction distinctive of philosophy, which perhaps alone justify its existence alongside the other cognitive disciplines. Humans belong in the subject matter of several special sciences seeking detailed information about such traditional epistemological topics as perception, imagination, memory, and reasoning. This is why naturalistic epistemology is largely programmatic, the substantive work being done by biology and psychology. Quine, who championed it, often mentioned the role of “surface irritations”, but wisely

302 / Panayot Butchvarov

left the study of those irritations to neurology. Naturalistic epistemology remains focused on human matters even when straying into non-human biological and non-biological computational states. The intrinsic interest of such states is indisputable, but epistemology considers them mainly for the light they cast on human epistemic states.

Of course, there is a way in which humanity is central in epistemology—namely, that leading to Kant’s transcendental idealism and its recent successors—for example, Goodman’s irrealism and Putnam’s internal realism. How we perceive and understand the world, and thus the world itself as perceived and understood, depend on our faculties of perception and understanding; they depend on *us*.<sup>1</sup> But this is not a proposition of zoology—zoological facts, too, depend on us in this way. It is not a proposition about humans, even though we are humans. It is a virtual tautology. (I shall say more about it at the end of Section 2.) Even astronomy is “humanized” in this sense, but it is about stars and planets, not humans. This is why the proposition implies no relativity to humans, let alone to any particular human culture, age, tradition, language, or writing. Nor does it imply that *everything* depends on our cognitive faculties. Kant pointed out that the notion of things as they are in themselves is not self-contradictory, and a central thesis of his transcendental idealism was that there are such things.<sup>2</sup> If we disagreed, we would be committing ourselves to a peculiar sort of creationism, to epistemic creation *ex nihilo* by humans. Nor is idealism implied, if this is the metaphysical view that only minds and their states exist. Kant vigorously defended both “transcendental idealism” and “empirical realism”—that is, realism with respect to the observable world, finding the two not only compatible but requiring each other. And the distinction between perception and understanding need not be sharp. They are not separate and unequal stages of cognitive development. While a neonate may “see”, in the sense that it is not blind, only much later does it see Mother. Mere sensation is at most a necessary prelude to cognition, and itself cognitive only by courtesy. It should not be confused with experience, which Kant described as “a species of knowledge which involves understanding”.<sup>3</sup> Kant’s view of the understanding

<sup>1</sup> I discuss this topic in ‘Metaphysical Realism and Logical Nonrealis’, in Richard Gale, (ed.) *Blackwell Guide to Metaphysics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 282–302.

<sup>2</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), B xxviii.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, B xvii.

**Epistemology Dehumanized / 303**

was mentalistic, his concepts prime examples of what Sartre sarcastically called “inhabitants of consciousness”. In this respect its successors, for which the understanding is essentially linguistic, seem superior. We may question the existence of inhabitants of consciousness, but we are not likely to question the existence of language. There is no need, however, to subscribe to the extremist view that all cognition involves language. A prelinguistic child’s recognition of Mother does not. But surely any cognition at all developed and distinctively human does.

Naturalistic epistemology may be only programmatic, but the pedigree of the program is impressive. Allowing for the differences in our knowledge of nature, we must concede that much of Aristotle’s epistemology was naturalistic. When he described the parts and functions of the soul, he was not doing anything in principle different from what biologists and psychologists do today. And the rationale of the program is impeccable. Surely, human beings are parts of nature. This is why the study of them and of their epistemic states belongs today in the natural sciences. It would be strange to propose to study them non-empirically, in a “philosophical” way. If epistemic states are parts of nature but irreducibly mental, their study would still belong in the natural sciences, though these might then include introspective psychology. Wundt was a scientist, in any reasonable sense of the word. He did not rely only on his own introspective findings, but took seriously and gathered what others reported, engaging also in genuine, not “thought”, experiments. Even if human epistemic states were not parts of nature, perhaps by being states of immortal souls, the study of them would not fall wholly outside the natural sciences. Neither Plato nor Aquinas ignored human biology and psychology. An immortal soul is still human because it is the soul of a human being, a certain animal.

If human beings, including their epistemic states, belong in the subject matter of disciplines other than philosophy, the obvious question is what room is left for naturalistic epistemology. Concern over this question explains the shift to a conception of epistemology as just “conceptual”, not “factual”—neither about natural facts nor about non-natural facts—and its consequent preoccupation with “definitions”, “analyses”, or “elucidations” of the “workings of our language”. This shift, of course, was not limited to naturalistic epistemology. For much the same reasons, it is distinctive of

304 / Panayot Butchvarov

analytic philosophy as a whole, including analytic ethics.<sup>4</sup> But, if concepts are in nature—presumably, in human brains or languages—they, too, are outside philosophers’ competence: there is neurology, as well as linguistics and lexicography. (If they are not in nature—for example, if they are Platonic Forms—then a naturalistic epistemology should have no concern with them.) The study of brain states and words calls not for “definitions” or “elucidations”, tested by “intuitions”, but for meticulous empirical descriptions and fruitful hypotheses, tested by standard scientific methods. The very idea of aiming at elucidations of brain states is foreign to neurology. As to words, it has been more than half a century since Wittgenstein pointed out that they are not used in accordance with necessary and sufficient conditions, and thus that their uses cannot be captured in definitions. It would be a non-starter to suggest that at least one can study one’s own uses of words or the contents of one’s own concepts. Even if we allow that someone might own private meanings or concepts, and know introspectively what they are, it is unclear why we should be interested in them.

Epistemology is the theory of knowledge, but the word “knowledge” is ambiguous. It may be understood in two ways: as standing for a disciplinary achievement, as in grammar (Aristotle’s favorite example), astronomy, and arithmetic, or for a personal achievement. The first way leads to the philosophy of science and the sociology of knowledge, both understood as seeking accounts of certain collective human activities, and thus as naturalistic. Epistemology took the second way.

That way calls for a further distinction. I may concern myself with *human* personal knowledge. I may ask whether, how, and what knowledge is possible for a human—for me, you, or Jack—given the facts about our common as well as our idiosyncratic cognitive functions and capacities. If so, my epistemological endeavor is still humanized and naturalistic. Or I may concern myself with my knowledge. I may ask whether, how, and what knowledge is possible for *me*, abstracting from the fact that I am human, and ignoring you and Jack. This is the skeptic’s question, especially when it concerns the existence of a material world, things “outside us”, bodies, including yours, Jack’s, and mine. If so, my epistemological endeavor is subjective.

<sup>4</sup> See my “Ethics Dehumanized”, Proceedings of the Spindel Conference 2002, *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, supplementary volume, and “Saying and Showing the Good”, in Heather Dyke (ed.), *Time and Ethics* (Kluwer, 2003).

## 2. Subjective epistemology

While naturalistic epistemology lacks sufficient generality to be philosophical, subjective epistemology lacks generality altogether. It is baldly and bleakly about only one person—hardly a topic of scientific or philosophical interest, whoever and whatever that person might be. But if when concerned with my knowledge I presupposed, explicitly or implicitly, my humanity, including my body, language, and place on earth or time in history, then my epistemological endeavor would remain humanized and naturalistic, though perhaps narcissistic. It would not be subjective. The term “subjective” should not be understood as a synonym of “mental” or “mentalistic”. Quine’s rejection of Cartesian epistemology on naturalistic grounds was both too narrow and too wide. It was too narrow because what is characteristic of Descartes’s epistemology was not its subject matter, a “thinking thing”—he had to *argue* for its existence—but the exclusive use of first-person indexicals in its defining initial stages. One need not be naturalistically, “scientifically”, minded to object to it for that reason. And Quine’s rejection of Cartesian epistemology was too wide because in those stages, including the proof of “I exist”, it was consistent with a materialist ontology, as Chisholm has suggested.<sup>5</sup> *Pace* Descartes and almost all other philosophers, his *cogito* had no ontological content. If minds were immaterial, your mind would be something objective from my perspective, as God and angels are for the religious person. And my brain, like Chisholm’s “microscopic part” of it, would be something subjective, if I could refer to it only as *my* brain. Epistemological ventures, whether Descartes’s or Quine’s, seldom benefit from ontological adventures.

This is why subjective epistemology is not a capricious narrowing of the subject matter of naturalistic epistemology from all humans to just one. If it were, it would be of no philosophical interest. It arose as a distinct variety of epistemology in order to face the skeptical challenge. The skeptic cannot assume that he or she is human, since being human involves having a body, a part of the material world. Therefore, the subjective epistemologist also cannot make this assumption. It would beg the question against the skeptic. A subjective epistemologist cannot consistently write “An essay concerning human understanding”, or “A treatise concerning the principles of human

<sup>5</sup> Roderick M. Chisholm, *A Realistic Theory of Categories* (Oxford: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 99–105.

306 / **Panayot Butchvarov**

knowledge”, or “A treatise of human nature”—these would belong in naturalistic epistemology, and today in psychology and biology. While there have always been rough equivalents of naturalistic epistemology, subjective epistemology was essentially Cartesian, though it was anticipated by the Greek skeptics, especially Sextus Empiricus. Its *raison d'être* was the project of answering the skeptic. If and when it succeeds, its mission is accomplished, and only naturalistic epistemology and epistemology-as-logic are left.

Naturalistic epistemology does not beg the question against the skeptic by taking its subject matter to be human because it is not concerned with the skeptic's question. In fact, though a “theory of knowledge”, it need have little concern with knowledge itself. It is best taken to be concerned with cognition, as this is understood by cognitive psychology and the other cognitive sciences—that is, as the faculty of knowledge. Knowledge is success in the employment of that faculty, but the faculty is of interest even when not employed successfully. Sense perception, imagination, memory, and intelligence are worthy of investigation even when not leading to knowledge. In subjective epistemology, however, only success counts, since as an attempt to answer the skeptic its concern is with the veridicality of cognitive states. Its focus, therefore, must be on knowledge. Alleged cognitive states such as rational, justified, probable, and warranted belief or opinion are at best images of knowledge, and we seek them only as a consolation prize. We seek them when knowledge is absent or impossible, in the hope of finding something still worth having.

This is why, as used in epistemology, “rational”, “justified”, “probable”, and “warranted” are technical terms, usually taken as primitive and thus of obscure meaning and uncertain reference. For example, in everyday usage “justified” is a deontic term, and thus “justified belief”, the central phrase in recent epistemological discussion, is a solecism: actions are justified or unjustified, but beliefs are not actions. If told that the phrase stands for belief resulting from reliable processes, this would be a verbal stipulation, far removed from common usage, without discernible rationale, and therefore misleading. Even the word “belief”, plain and unadorned by adjectives, is used in current epistemology with questionable sense and reference. “S believes that *p*” (e.g., “S believe that Jones owns a Ford”, uttered as contribution to office chatter) functions there roughly as a synonym of the colloquial “S thinks that *p*”, and is no more enlightening in philosophy or needed in psychology than the latter. It is not used for expression of religious faith or other

Epistemology Dehumanized / 307

commitments, which do have psychological reality and thus are of interest to psychology and, perhaps, to philosophy. The words “rational”, “justified”, “probable”, and “warranted”, whether applied to such a phantom belief or to the sentences, statements, assertions, judgments, hypotheses, and so on supposedly expressing it, are often prefaced by the adjective “epistemic”. But this makes them even less clear, because in English the noun corresponding to that adjective is “knowledge”—exactly the word they are used to displace. None of them is the natural and traditional word for describing what we might have in cases where we have no knowledge but hope we are not entirely ignorant. That word has been “evidence”.

The root of “evidence” is the same as the root of “evident”. But to be *evident* is to be *seen* or at least to be readily visible, whether literally or metaphorically, thus *known* or readily knowable, and therefore (if a proposition) *true*. “Seeing is believing,” the saying goes, but it usually means that seeing is knowing. Hence, the traditional account of knowledge as apprehension, intuition, awareness, acquaintance. But for our purposes it suffices that being evident entails being known, and we can bracket the question whether being known entails being evident. As we shall see shortly, there is also what has been called the weak sense of “know”, and of course there are many other senses.<sup>6</sup> But we need not, and for the reasons mentioned earlier should not, seek a definition of “know”, or of any other everyday word.

Often, something is evident not by being seen to be true by itself, but by being seen to follow from something else that is seen to be true. We seldom say, however, that the latter is *evidence* for the former. We seldom call the premises of a valid deductive argument evidence for its conclusion, even if they are evident and the argument has a form as simple as *modus ponens*. Rather, we speak of evidence when what we want to know is neither evident nor seen to follow from anything evident, yet think or hope that something else “supports” it in some other manner. J. L Austin wrote:

The situation in which I would properly be said to have *evidence* for the statement that some animal is a pig is that, for example, in which the beast itself is not actually on view, but I can see plenty of pig-like marks on the ground outside its retreat. If I find a few buckets of pig-food, that’s more evidence, and the noises and the smell may

<sup>6</sup> The distinction between a weak and a strong sense of “know” was made by Norman Malcolm in “Knowledge and Belief”, included in *Knowledge and Certainty* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963), 58–72.

308 / Panayot Butchvarov

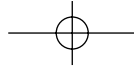
provide better evidence still. But if the animal then emerges and stands there plainly in view, there is no longer any question of collecting *evidence*; its coming into view doesn't provide me with more evidence that it's a pig, I can now just see that it is, the question is settled.<sup>7</sup>

Austin might have agreed, however, that, when the animal is plainly in view, it is *evident* that it is a pig. And we might add that this is *self-evident*, as long as we mean nothing more than that, though evident, it does not owe its being evident to something else that is evident.<sup>8</sup> Taken literally, of course, the term "self-evident" is a pleonasm, just as "self-seen" and "self-visible" would be. But it serves to mark the important difference between what is evident by itself and what is evident only by being seen to follow from something else that is evident by itself. Even in a *modus ponens* argument with evident premises, the conclusion might not be evident unless *seen* to follow from the premises. It might be evident only in relation to them.

Skepticism and thus subjective epistemology begin with the fact that usually what we want to know is neither self-evident nor made evident by anything else that is evident, We try to render this fact less disconcerting by appealing to something else we hope is relevant to what we want to know. And we call it "evidence", even though it does not make what we want to know evident. This is how Austin used "evidence" in his example. Religion and the law are home of such uses of the word, which often are exquisitely self-conscious, though of course they are common, though less delicate or deliberate, also in the lab and the street. The notion they express is a degenerate offspring of the notion of the evident. But it is understandable and often harmless. We may *need* to know, not merely believe, that God exists, yet recognize that we do not. So we look for "evidences" of his existence. In the courtroom, a verdict of guilt or innocence may be *mandatory*, though neither guilt nor innocence is self-evident or made evident by anything that is self-evident. So we look for something else we hope is relevant to guilt or innocence, and call it "evidence", whether "beyond reasonable doubt" or not, and whether just "circumstantial" or not. If we think such evidence is "strong" enough, we may even say that we *know* that for which it is evidence. Saying this makes explicit our reason for appealing to it in the first place—that is, our desire

<sup>7</sup> J. L. Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), 115, emphasis in original.

<sup>8</sup> This is how G. E. Moore explained what he meant by calling the fundamental propositions of ethics self-evident. See *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903), preface.

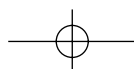
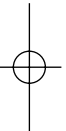
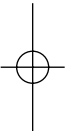


## Epistemology Dehumanized / 309

for truth—and provides the appeal with a sort of blessing. How strong the evidence must be to justify saying that we know is never made clear, because it cannot be made clear, given the sort of reasons that lead us to employ such a notion of evidence. As cognitive beings, we seek knowledge because it is truth we want, not mere evidence even if dressed up as “epistemic probability” or “epistemic justification”. The idea that such evidence comes in degrees and that possession of it yields an approximation of knowledge, something still worth having when knowledge is absent or impossible, suggests that there can be such a thing as an approximation of truth. But, while truth may be incomplete, irrelevant, or misleading, there is no such thing as two-thirds or 86 per cent truth. Yet this is exactly what the idea of degrees of evidence suggests, and it is made explicit in the vulgar thought of knowledge as belief that is 100 per cent probable.

However, though as cognitive beings it is knowledge that we seek, we are not purely cognitive beings. Those uses of “evidence” and “know” in religion and the law are understandable and defensible, for the reasons mentioned earlier. They are often needed and perhaps mandatory even in the lab and the street: to go about our business we often need and perhaps must think of some judgments as final, *settled*, even if we soon revisit them. In all four, there are practical reasons for resorting to the degenerate notion of evidence. No such reasons exist in epistemology, however, which is neither a religion or a courtroom, nor a lab or the street. Our concerns in it are purely cognitive. This is why in it the degenerate notion of evidence is not harmless. It generates the illusion that what knowledge requires is merely the limit, perhaps only ideal, of a range of degrees of such evidence, of “epistemic probability” or “epistemic justification”, and that what falls short of that limit nevertheless might suffice. But it is never made clear what it might “suffice” for, given that it does not suffice for truth, since no practical considerations are relevant. Not surprisingly, it has not sufficed for the skeptic.

In everyday life and thought, the degenerate notion of evidence provides a way of achieving clear epistemic conscience. It is analogous to the degenerate notion of duty, “subjective duty”, which provides a way of achieving clear moral conscience. The weak sense of “know” grounded in it is analogous to the weak sense of “ought”. If ignorant, as we often are, of what we ought to do, of our “objective duty”, we may settle for doing what we *think*, or perhaps just *feel*, we ought to do, for doing our “subjective duty”. We may even insist that one always ought to do what one thinks or feels one ought to do. However, just



310 / **Panayot Butchvarov**

as our real concern as cognitive beings is with truth and therefore knowledge, our real concern as moral beings is with objective duty, with doing what we really ought to do. The weak senses of “know” and “ought” are natural, in view of the scarcity of cases in which we can use “ought” and “know” in their strong senses. There is no need for legislation against them. But we are deeply aware of the difference between the two when facing important matters. We do not say we know we will be alive tomorrow, and thus need no life insurance today, regardless of how healthy and safe we think or feel we are today. And we do not say that our children ought to sacrifice their life whenever they think or feel they ought to.

This is why the strong sense of “know”, which requires that what we say we know be self-evident or seen to follow from something self-evident, has been central in subjective epistemology. Self-evidence and what it makes evident are the core of what one has in mind when seeking knowledge about important matters. The attraction of religion is that it promises certainty, not mere probability, about matters of ultimate concern. The attraction of subjective epistemology is similar. Its main topic is also a matter of ultimate concern: whether material things—the earth and the sun, your body and mine—really exist.

However, the principal Cartesian question, which inaugurated modern subjective epistemology, was not “What is knowledge?” This question had been asked before and until recently answered, briefly and informally but sufficiently, in the same way—it is apprehension, grasping, getting hold of the truth, and then steadfastly keeping it. The Cartesian question was whether there is knowledge at all, especially knowledge of a material world. Cartesian epistemology began by taking skepticism seriously, even though hoping eventually to refute it. For this reason, it was essential that its question be expressed with the indexical “I” (or its synonyms and associated forms), that it ask whether *I* have knowledge.<sup>9</sup> And it could not take “I” to refer to the entity to which non-indexical terms, such as “Descartes” and “the author of the *Meditations*”, or “PB” and “the author of this paper”, refer. If it could, it would be irrelevant to the skeptical challenge because it would beg the question. The skeptic challenges also any claim to knowledge of the existence

<sup>9</sup> Bertrand Russell used the suggestive term “egocentric particulars”, instead of “indexicals”. He wrote: “One of the aims of both science and common sense is to replace the shifting subjectivity of egocentric particulars by neutral public terms” (*Human Knowledge* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1962), 85).

Epistemology Dehumanized / 311

of human beings, including Descartes and PB. They are parts of the material world. Of course, the skeptic does not say, “There is no material world,” only “I do not *know* that there is one.” But, if Descartes had *shown* that there is a material world, then *ipso facto* he would have come to know that there is one. And, if the skeptic agreed that Descartes had shown this, then the skeptic would have agreed that there is one. Both were interested in knowledge only as the way to truth.

This is why what was distinctive of Descartes’s epistemology was not his initial commitment to the existence of only one entity, or to its peculiar nature (a thinking thing), but his initial use only of indexical expressions without presupposing reference to anything. And this is a cause for concern. When I say that now it is cold here, I am not saying that on 7 November 2002 it is cold in Iowa City, even though on 7 November 2002 I am in Iowa City. Yet neither am I referring to a place other than Iowa City or a time other than 7 November 2002. This causes no geographical or historical problems as long as I am willing to replace “here” with “Iowa City” and “now” with “7 November 2002”, or with some other name and date—there would still be a place and a time I am talking about. But, if I am unwilling, then it is unclear that this would be so. I might be like a geographer of *here*, or a historian of *now*.

Nevertheless, there is a difference between indexical and non-indexical expressions. There is a difference between saying “It is cold in Iowa City” and saying “It is cold here” or ‘Il fait froid ici’—though not the sort of difference there is between the English and the French sentences, or that between “It is cold in Iowa City” and “It is cold in the university town on the Iowa River”—notwithstanding that all four seem to say the “same thing”. It certainly is not just a difference of words. Perhaps this is a reason for thinking that there is an entity or property such as *here* or *hereness*. Perhaps the difference between “It is cold now” and “It is cold on 7 November 2002” is a reason for thinking that there is an entity or property such as *the present* or *presentness*.<sup>10</sup> This reason is more compelling, in view of the seeming connection between the notion of time and the notion of existence. Augustine noted that what does not exist *now* seems to not exist at all, which is not the case with what does not exist *here*; Kant held that, while space is the pure form of outer sense, time is the pure form of both outer and inner sense; Heidegger named his

<sup>10</sup> For a detailed argument, see Quentin Smith, *Language and Time* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

312 / Panayot Butchvarov

classic work *Being and Time*, not *Being and Space*. And throughout the history of philosophy it has been held that there is an overwhelming reason for thinking that there is an entity—the subject, ego, self—that is the primary reference of “I”. However, my concern in this chapter is not with these metaphysical and semantical matters, but with the nature of a certain variety of epistemology. I shall argue that subjective epistemology must use “I”, or a synonym of it, yet when doing so it can refer to *nothing*, neither to Descartes or plain PB, nor to a thinking thing, his or mine, not because there is nothing to refer to or because of the semantics of “I”, but because of the very nature of its project.<sup>11</sup> If so, subjective epistemology has no subject matter and thus, strictly speaking, is not a theory, not even a theory of knowledge. But we must not infer from this that it is a mistake. For “I” does have a use, even if not sense or reference, that cannot be captured by mentioning to what it refers.<sup>12</sup>

John Searle gives the following example. If I make a mess in a supermarket by spilling a bag of sugar on the floor, I may be ashamed, look to see if anyone saw me, and worry about what to do. Whether I use “I” or “PB” does not affect the truth value of the statements I make about the incident, but surely makes an important difference. As Searle says, it is essential to the case that “it is *me* that is making a mess”.<sup>13</sup> There *is* a difference between my making a mess and PB’s making a mess. For less Anglo-Saxon examples of this sort, such as hearing steps behind me when peeping through a keyhole, we should go to Sartre.

Such a difference is also manifest in a Cartesian context. When asking what if anything I know, I cannot assume the reference of “I” to be PB, even though I am PB. If I write an autobiography using “I”, “PB” could replace “I” throughout without change in truth value—there would be a change

<sup>11</sup> David Kaplan has distinguished between “pure indexicals”, such as “I”, which involve no genuine demonstration and do not admit attachment of a noun, and demonstratives, such as “this”, which do, e.g., in “this man” (“Demonstratives”, in J. Almog *et al.* (eds.), *Themes from Kaplan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977)).

<sup>12</sup> Following certain remarks by Wittgenstein in *The Blue and the Brown Book* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958), 66–7, G. E. M. Anscombe has argued that “I” is not a referring expression. In using it, she says, “getting hold of the wrong object is excluded, and that makes us think that getting hold of the right object is guaranteed. But the reason is that there is no getting hold of an object at all” (“The First Person”, in Samuel Guttenplan (ed.) *Mind and Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 45–65). Her point is not Hume’s. It has nothing to do with what she could or could not “find”.

<sup>13</sup> John Searle, *Intentionality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 218. But Searle’s conclusions are different from mine.

Epistemology Dehumanized / 313

merely in literary genre, from autobiography to biography. There would be no difference in reference, and, if we say there would be difference in “meaning” or “sense”, we would be using these as technical terms requiring extensive and inevitably controversial explanation of the distinction between them and “reference”. But, whatever we say, in a Cartesian context none of the statements in the biography would be allowable because the truth of all of them would be questioned by the skeptic. Moreover, *pace* Descartes and most Cartesian epistemologists, this would be so even if “I” were replaced with “TT”, a name Descartes might have given to the thinking thing the existence of which he thought he had proved. The reason would not be that there is no such thing as TT, or that the proof was unsound, but that referring to TT also would beg the question against a sophisticated skeptic. While Descartes’s referring to Descartes would be like his referring to Louis XIII, his referring to TT would be like his referring to Louis XIII’s thinking thing. In his celebrated *cogito* argument Descartes inferred that a thinking thing exists, but *which* thinking thing was it? Surely, not Louis XIII’s, for Louis XIII, a human though royal being, would not exist if the material world did not.

Could I not say, if I were Descartes, that it was *my* thinking thing? No, because to speak of my thinking thing is to speak of a thinking thing that is related to *me* by a certain relation, presumably the generic relation of having, whatever its species might be, and so I must first find reference for “me”—that is, for “I”. Moreover, contrary to Descartes’s intentions, I would be implying that I am *not* that thinking thing, that I only bear a relation to it, the generic relation I bear also to my car and my nose, I being what has, and the thinking thing being what is had. And my entering in that relation to TT would be just as questionable as my entering in some relation, say, admiration or distaste, to Louis XIII’s thinking thing. The *cogito* was a proof of *my* existence, not of some other thinking thing’s existence. Any skeptic worth his salt would forthwith ask, “Why suppose that there is this thing to which supposedly I bear the relation?” The skeptic would ask the question just by being true to his mission, not because of metaphysical prejudice against thinking things or subtle semantical opinions about “I”.

It would not help to say that TT is the thinking thing to which only I have access. Even if this is so, and we ignore the unacceptably metaphorical sense of “access” as well as the implied crude distinction between “inner” and “outer”, saying this would presuppose an independent answer to the earlier question about the reference of “I”. Without answering that question, saying that TT is

314 / Panayot Butchvarov

the thinking thing to which only I have access might be no more relevant or noteworthy than saying that I sniff only with my own nose. The privilege my thinking thing and my nose enjoy endows neither with special significance. *Everyone* has such access only to his or her own thinking thing, just as everyone sniffs only with his or her own nose.

Indeed, not even the most frugal *cogito*, in which one infers only “There is a thinking” from “I think”, would be acceptable. *Which* thinking is that? For the reasons already given, we cannot say that it is Descartes’s, Louis XIII’s, PB’s, or even just mine. If we bite the bullet and say it is no one’s, we face irrelevance in addition to syntactical absurdity. There may be thousands of such orphaned thinkings. The existence of which one did Descartes infer? Could he just say: *this* thinking, and perhaps name it “T”? But which thinking is *this* thinking? Why suppose that another thinking is not also a *this* thinking? *Pace* Russell, “this” is not a logically proper name but a demonstrative pronoun, and many things, near and distant, past, present, and future, observable and unobservable, can be and often are referred to with it, even by the same person and at the same time—for example, when the person is chatting while typing, double-talking, or speaking with two or more mouths (Descartes could not assume that he had only one mouth). And, presumably, the existence of some orphaned thinkings would be just as questionable for the skeptic as that of Louis XIII’s thinkings. The existence of which thinkings, then, would not be questionable? To say “Those of which I am directly aware” would just take us back to problems already discussed.

It is not a principle of logic but surely true that “Someone is F” readily follows from “I am F” only if “I” could be replaced with a name or a non-indexical definite description, even if it is never so replaced and even if we don’t, perhaps cannot, know with which name or description to replace it. We readily accept statements employing indexicals because, as a matter of course, we are in principle willing, even if sometimes unable, to replace the indexicals with non-indexicals. We accept statements employing “here” and “now” since usually we are willing to replace these words with, say, “Iowa City” and “7 November 2002”. This is true also of “I” in ordinary contexts. “PB” could replace “I” in “I am writing this paper”, even if we agree that, as in the examples from Searle and Sartre, the replacement would produce a change not just of words. In some legal documents such replacement would be required. But in a Cartesian context it is prohibited. And, as we have seen, it is only an illusion to think that it would be allowed if we used “TT”, or

Epistemology Dehumanized / 315

even just “T”, in place of “I”. In the argument “I think, therefore I am”, the pronoun “I” is profligately used twice. Does it have the same reference in the premise and the conclusion, be it to a man, a thinking thing, or a mere thinking? If it does not, the argument is invalid. Does it have reference in the premise at all? If it does not, the argument would again be invalid. If it does, the question against the skeptic is begged.

Descartes did not see that there are these questions because all along he thought he was “directly aware” of a thinking thing and its states. But, even if we ignore our earlier questions about which thinking thing or states he was aware of, a further problem arises, which is fundamental but ignored by Descartes and other subjective epistemologists. If a necessary condition of awareness is that its object exist, then the skeptic would ask whether we are *really* aware of a thinking thing and its states, exactly as the skeptic asks whether we really perceive bodies. On the other hand, if the existence of its object is not a necessary condition of awareness, then the skeptic would question the cogency of any inference to it from the occurrence of the awareness. Descartes thought he might be deceived by God or an evil demon regarding  $3 + 2 = 5$ , but did not see that if so then he might be deceived also about what he thought he was aware of, “found” in his mind. The failure to see this vitiates Descartes’s inferences from the existence of his idea of God to God’s existence. Could not God, or at least an evil demon, be deceiving him into thinking that he had that idea? The failure to see that in this way the skeptic could question any appeal to awareness also vitiates twentieth-century appeals to “acquaintance”.

It appears that to confront the skeptic without begging the question, the subjective epistemologist must renounce claims to any subject matter. In “I think”, the premise of his *cogito* argument, Descartes could not have used “I” to refer to anything, not even to himself, since that he exists was the conclusion of the argument. While naturalistic epistemology has a subject matter too limited to be philosophical, subjective epistemology appears to have no subject matter at all, not even a solitary thinking thing or orphaned thinkings. I have suggested that its *raison d’être* is to meet the challenge of skepticism. Otherwise, there would be no rationale for distinguishing it from naturalistic epistemology, though perhaps including introspective psychology, albeit it would be a naturalistic epistemology concerned, inexplicably, with just one natural object, the epistemic states of only one human being. It must refer to entities only by means of indexical expressions, even if in fact—exactly the fact questioned by the skeptic—they can also be referred to with non-indexical expressions. To

316 / Panayot Butchvarov

hold that in its use of the indexical expression “I” it refers to an entity that also can be referred to with a non-indexical such as “Descartes”, “PB”, “TT”, or “T” would be to hold that there are such entities as Descartes, PB, TT, or T, and thus to beg the question against the skeptic. This has always been obvious in the case of “Descartes” and “PB”, but, as we have seen, it is also true in the case of “TT” and “T”. Both to have a subject matter and not to beg the question, subjective epistemology must be satisfied with a subject matter that consists of entities that *could* be referred to only with indexicals like “I”. It must allow for the *possibility* that only such entities exist. But would anything be an entity if it could be referred to only with an indexical, if it were in principle unnamable, if it could present itself in only one mode and thus be referred to through only one sense? To suppose that there could be thinkers who are only *Is* borders on incoherence, just as to suppose that there could be times and places that are only *nows* and *heres* borders on incoherence. Even saying this already involves three grammatical monstrosities. Subjective epistemology seems to be, so to speak, an epistemology of solitary pronouns, pronouns without nouns, modes of presentation without presentation, aspects that are aspects of nothing, mere perspectives. This is why it is often described as epistemology from the first-person perspective. The description is suggestive, but incomplete. The first person is *only* a perspective, and subjective epistemology is *only* perspectival. There is no *entity* that is just *the first person*, and so the subject matter of subjective epistemology is not that privileged entity. *The first person* is not a person.

Before his optimistic inferences to God and beyond, Descartes seemed to have only himself, to be left in a state of absolute solitude. But in fact he did not even have himself. The deeper fallacy in his *cogito* argument is not that it is an inference to a thinker from a thinking but that it is an inference to a *thing* from a mere *perspective*. Subjective epistemology began as a search for an answer to the skeptic. We can now see that such an answer is not possible because the very search for it is misguided. Subjective epistemology must presuppose that the indexical terms it uses have reference because to answer the skeptic it must rely on premises that are true. Only from true premises would an adequate answer follow. But it also must not presuppose that the terms have reference, because this would beg the question against the skeptic.

After saying all this, however, we must acknowledge that, though subjective epistemology is only perspectival, the rationale for the perspective is impeccable. The lack of subject matter does not imply unimportance. The perspective is overwhelmingly important, even though it is a mere perspective.

### Epistemology Dehumanized / 317

The first-person pronoun is important, indeed indispensable, but not because of what it refers to. It is important because of the role it serves. It is essential to all talk and thought, and thus to all inquiry. Subjective epistemology may be an epistemology of pronouns without nouns, but to get nouns we must, so to speak, begin with pronouns. Of course, it is not the word “I” that is essential, but rather its use, even if other expressions are put to that use. In some languages, first-person reference is achieved with the verb, not a separate word. Sometimes, nouns or words destined to be nouns work. Baby might not yet be able to say “I cry”, Baby might just say “Baby cries”, but “Baby”, then would not function as it does in “Baby cries” when said by Baby about another baby.

In normal contexts, heedfully to assert  $p$  one must be willing to assert “ $p$  is true”. But heedfully to assert “ $p$  is true” (rather than the very different “I think that  $p$ ” or “ $p$  is probably true”), one must be willing to assert “I know that  $p$ ”. Even heedfully to assert “He (she, Jack, the expert) knows that  $p$ ”, one must be willing to assert “I know that  $p$ ”. In any inquiry, one must begin with the first-person perspective, with the use, however implicit, of “I”, even if only in judgments, implicit or not, such as “I’ll look for it in the bush”, “I’ll ask Jane”, or “I’ll check the dictionary”. This is a proposition neither of physics nor of metaphysics. It’s like “Every journey must begin somewhere”, not like “Every journey must begin in Iowa City”. Yet the proposition enjoys the abstraction characteristic of philosophy, and bequeaths it to subjective epistemology. “I think” must be able to accompany all our representations, Kant held, even though, as Sartre later argued, it seldom actually does. Russell wrote:

When you are considering any sort of theory of knowledge, you are more or less tied to a certain unavoidable subjectivity, because you are not concerned simply with the question what is true of the world, but ‘What can I know of the world?’ . . . You cannot go outside yourself and consider abstractly whether the things that appear to you to be true are true.<sup>14</sup>

Russell was wrong in thinking that there is an “inside” to be contrasted with an “outside”, but otherwise his grasp of the rationale for subjective epistemology was firm.

This is why the allure of the subjective turn that led to Cartesian epistemology is ever present. It would be sad if subjective epistemology were all there

<sup>14</sup> Bertrand Russell, *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism* (Chicago and La Salle: Open Court, 1985), 37.

318 / Panayot Butchvarov

is to epistemology, but outrageous to deny its essential place in thought. It is futile and usually misguided, but as indispensable and unavoidable as being aware that to get anywhere one must start somewhere. The mistake is to suppose that it is about *me*, even if there is such an entity, be it a human, a mere thinking thing, or just a thinking. It is the mistake of supposing that subjective epistemology has a subject matter and thus is a cognitive discipline, a theory of something, presumably knowledge or cognition, when in fact it is only the necessary entry to any subject matter and the prelude to any discipline.

In Section 1, I drew attention to the proposition that how we perceive and understand the world, and thus the world itself as perceived and understood, depend on our faculties of perception and understanding, that they depend on *us*. I also pointed out, however, that this is not a zoological proposition, that it is not about *humans* even though we are humans. We can now see better how it should be understood. Indeed, it is not about humans, but neither is it about non-humans. It is not about entities at all, but rather about the necessary conditions of thought, talk, and inquiry about entities. As such, it is intimately related to subjective epistemology, as intimately as Kant was related to Hume. That Hume's skepticism led to Kant's transcendental idealism was not just an event in Kant's life, however important he thought it was. It manifested a phase in the very logic of the development of epistemological thought, just as the emergence of Descartes's epistemology manifested a no less necessary earlier phase. The subjective epistemologist makes essential use of the first-person *singular*, "I", but it is the first-person *plural*, "we", that is essential to the transcendental idealist. The self-centered focus on the conditions one's own heedful talk, thought, and inquiry must satisfy deepens and broadens into a focus on the conditions all talk, thought, and inquiry must satisfy, somewhat as youth deepens and broadens into adulthood. But adulthood is not a substitute for youth. To heedfully assert '*p*', one must still be willing to assert "I know that *p*." This is so even when *p* is about the conditions of all talk, thought, and inquiry. However, now we can see this requirement as a necessary prelude to cognition, not a barrier to it.

### 3. Epistemology-as-logic

Subjective epistemology has no subject matter. Naturalistic epistemology does, though one that is human and thus lacking the abstraction and generality

### Epistemology Dehumanized / 319

needed to be properly philosophical. Epistemology-as-logic also has a subject matter, but it exceeds the bounds of the special science and does belong in philosophy. Like formal logic, it is unambiguously “dehumanized”. All three varieties of epistemology, however, are legitimate, given their very different yet not incompatible purposes. Their differences call not for mindless quarrel but for mindful distinctions.

Contrary to what textbooks sometimes say, formal logic is concerned not with inferences as activities, presumably human and thus properly studied by psychology, but with their formal validity, the relation of the truth value of the premises to the truth value of the conclusion, in particular the formal consistency of the conjunction of the former and the negation of the latter. Its general subject matter thus consists of alethic relations. If some propositions, or at least sentences, are neither true nor false, as a consequence of the truth-value of other propositions or sentences, this fact too would belong in its subject matter. Formal logic epitomizes the generality and abstraction characteristic of philosophy. This is why Aristotle assigned “the principles of the syllogism”, especially the principle of non-contradiction, to the science of being qua being. And this is why Frege wrote: “Just as ‘beautiful’ points the way for aesthetics and ‘good’ for ethics, so do words like ‘true’ for logic . . . [I]t falls to logic to discern the laws of truth . . . The *Bedeutung* [reference, meaning] of the word ‘true’ is spelled out in the laws of truth.”<sup>15</sup> Elsewhere, he explained: “What is distinctive about my conception of logic is that I begin by giving pride of place to the content of the word ‘true’ . . .”<sup>16</sup> If metaphysics is the science of being qua being, logic may be said to be the science of being qua truth, ethics of being qua goodness, and aesthetics of being qua beauty. The subject matter of all four is what the medievals called transcendentals.

Epistemology-as-logic differs from formal logic by focusing on the validity—legitimacy, cogency, worth—of non-formal inferences, but its subject matter, too, consists of alethic relations, in particular the relation of the truth value of the premises of the non-formal inference to the truth value of its conclusion. It too enjoys the level of generality and abstraction characteristic of philosophy. Like formal logic, it is concerned with inferences not as human activities but with their cogency, and generally with the alethic relations they exemplify. Unlike subjective epistemology, it does not lack subject matter, it is

<sup>15</sup> Gottlob Frege, “Thought”, in M. Beaney, *The Frege Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell), 325–6.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* 362.

320 / **Panayot Butchvarov**

not just perspectival. And, unlike naturalistic epistemology, which does have a subject matter, it is not just programmatic. Of course, epistemology-as-logic does apply to human matters, just as formal logic does. But it is not about them. There is nothing puzzling about this. Arithmetic is applicable to humans, bats, and stars, but it is not about humans, bats, or stars. It is about numbers.

In its attempts to answer the skeptic, subjective epistemology sought cogent non-formal inferences from premises known to be true. Epistemology-as-logic, however, does not ask whether the premises of the inference are true, nor does it agonize over the fact that it is not deductive, that the conjunction of the premises and the negation of the conclusion is not a contradiction. It is free from obsession with skepticism, just as naturalistic epistemology enjoys such freedom. In this it follows the lead of its older sibling. In evaluating a deductive argument, formal logic is not concerned with the truth of its premises. And it does not fret that, even if they are true, the formal validity of the argument might not suffice for the truth of its conclusion because God might be deceiving us about logic just as he might be deceiving us about arithmetic.

Epistemology-as-logic may seek a general theory of the alethic relations exemplified in non-formal inferences. But it can begin by examining specific kinds of such inference, just as formal logic began with the examination of specific kinds of formal inference and only later, mainly through Frege's work, offered a general theory of the alethic relations they exemplify. Inferences involving probability, induction, and abduction are standard topics in subjective epistemology. They would be also topics in epistemology-as-logic, though in abstraction from possible use against skepticism. Appeals to probability did not satisfy the skeptic, who either denied that it is enough (would a religious person be satisfied if told that God only probably exists, and would anyone be satisfied if told that other people only probably exist?), or questioned the truth of a premise (do the universe and other humans' behavior really display design?). But the calculus of probability remains an established discipline of some distinction. Appeals to induction and abduction, notoriously, also have failed to satisfy the skeptic. Nevertheless, they remain standard topics in the philosophy of science, which seldom strays into Cartesian discussions. And the tradition has held, independently of epistemological concerns, that there are relations of *non-formal* entailment. A standard example is the entailment of being colored by being red, and anyone who, like Kant, regards mathematical truths to be necessary but "synthetic" would allow for non-formal entailments in

Epistemology Dehumanized / 321

mathematics. Such entailments would also be examples of the sort of relations belonging in the subject matter of epistemology-as-logic. The philosophy of mathematics exists not because of worries that God might be deceiving us even about  $3 + 2 = 5$ .

Here, however, I shall limit myself to the non-formal alethic relation of presupposition. It was the focus on it that marked the development of epistemology beyond its subjective stage. If we call subjective epistemology Cartesian, then epistemology-as-logic, insofar it focuses on that relation, may be called Kantian. Hence the application of Kant's term "transcendental" to recent arguments from presupposition. But epistemology-as-logic need not adopt Kant's essentially mentalistic approach to epistemology, nor any of his specific doctrines. It is not what Kant meant by transcendental logic.

The relation of presupposition became a major topic in the philosophy of language because of Strawson's criticism of Russell's theory of descriptions.<sup>17</sup> He gave as examples the presupposition of "There is a king of France" by "The king of France is wise", and the presupposition of "He is not dead" by "He cares about it".<sup>18</sup> A proposition  $p$  presupposes a proposition  $q$ , according to Strawson, when both "If  $p$  then  $q$ " and "If not- $p$  then  $q$ " are true—when, though neither  $p$  formally entails  $q$ , nor not- $p$  formally entails  $q$ ,  $q$  is a necessary condition of both the truth and the falsity of  $p$ , of its being coherent.<sup>19</sup> In the example of the king of France, the presupposition manifests itself in our dismissing anyone who said that the king of France is wise but denied that France has a king, or said that the king of France is not wise but denied that France has a king, as confused, not as inconsistent. Our judgment of anyone who said, "He cares about it but he is dead", would be similar.

Presupposition is neither entailment, formal or non-formal, nor a probabilistic, inductive, or abductive relation. This is why appeals to it have seemed to provide answers to skepticism entirely different from those dating from the seventeenth century. The latter are almost certainly either formally invalid or contain premises the skeptic finds as questionable as the conclusion. The

<sup>17</sup> P. F. Strawson, "On Referring", *Mind* (1950), and *Introduction to Logical Theory* (London: Methuen, 1952), 175–9. In the former, more influential work, Strawson did not use the term "presupposition", and wrote instead of "some sense of 'imply'" that is "not equivalent to 'entails' or 'logically implies'".

<sup>18</sup> "Does he care about it? He neither cares nor doesn't care; he is dead" (*Introduction to Logical Theory*, 18).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* 175.

322 / Panayot Butchvarov

anti-skeptic's predicament has been that to answer the skeptic one must assume more than the skeptic would allow, but, if one assumes less, then the answer does not follow. In appeals to presupposition, however, the consequence of denying the presupposed proposition is not the falsity but the incoherence of the proposition presupposing it, whether a trifling incoherence, as in the example of the king of France, or a deep one, as in the examples I shall give shortly.

Some have said that presupposition is merely a feature of language, just "pragmatic", not "logical" or "semantic", as if pervasive features of language are ever merely features of language. Aristotle defended the principle of non-contradiction, not by trying to infer it from "more certain" propositions, but by showing that it is presupposed even by reasoning intended to cast doubt on it. And Russell repeatedly pointed out that all deductive reasoning presupposes the "primitive proposition" that "what follows from a true proposition is true".<sup>20</sup> The complaint that presupposition has no place in logic is not just false; it shows misunderstanding of the very nature of logic. Of course, that the natural sciences are rife with presuppositions has always been evident. Physics presupposes, does not discover, the existence of space and time. Psychiatrists presuppose, do not discover, that mental illness is not caused by evil spirits.

The examples from Strawson I mentioned are of little intrinsic interest. This cannot be said of those in his major metaphysical work, *Individuals*, or his book on Kant, *The Bounds of Sense*. Certainly, it cannot be said of the examples in Kant's own works. Kant defended important but controversial philosophical propositions on the ground that they are presupposed by other propositions that are not controversial. His argument that morality presupposes freedom is familiar. Indeed, freedom seems to be presupposed by all genuine actions, moral, immoral, and non-moral, and thus by any fully human life. It is what seems to distinguish them from mere bodily movements. No less famous but much more difficult is Kant's argument that objective order in time presupposes causal necessity. It is complex and not to be dealt with lightly, whether in agreement or disagreement, but we need not go into its details to get a glimpse. If we ask whether Jack first met Mary before or after she moved to town, the answer would depend in part on reasoning about when and where

<sup>20</sup> Alfred North Whitehead and Bertrand Russell, *Principia Mathematica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913), 1.1, Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), 71–2.

Epistemology Dehumanized / 323

he *could* have met her. If it really mattered (as it might in a court of law), we would be foolhardy to rely just on memory impressions, on what Kant called a subjective play of fancy. As this example shows, what is presupposed need not be a single proposition, just as a deductive proof ordinarily does not rest on a single premise. It might even be a *system* of propositions, and what presupposes it might also be a system. This is why the philosophically interesting examples of presupposition seldom have the simple structure of the examples about the present king of France and the man who is dead.

The presupposition especially relevant to traditional epistemology is that of the existence of a material world. It assumes many forms, and is neither simple nor obvious. It can be argued that in doubting the existence of the material world Descartes's presupposed the existence of certain parts of it. Therefore, his doubt was incoherent, like doubting that France has a king when asserting that the king of France is wise. In particular, it can be argued, as G. E. Moore noted, that Descartes would have had to doubt the existence of philosophers, past and present, including those he had read, heard, argued with, and whose works and views were the context of his doubt, through agreement or disagreement.<sup>21</sup> Philosophers are human, therefore parts of the material world. The history of philosophy is not a history of philosopher-angels. Descartes could not have taken his doubt seriously as *philosophical* if he had considered these details about what he doubted, what would be the case with respect to his own doubt if there were not a material world. Philosophical skepticism about the material world questions its own existence. Let me explain.

The philosophical context of philosophical thinking, such as Descartes' doubt, is *essential* to it, however original the thinking may be. It is essential to it even more obviously than, as contemporary essentialists have argued, the biological origin of an organism is essential, "metaphysically necessary", to that organism. The "historicity" of a philosophical view is no more a contingent fact than the historicity of a political event. Both bear necessary relations to their past. Neither Cartesian epistemology, nor Democratic or Republican politics in the twenty-first century, would be comprehensible if stripped of those relations. Skepticism questions what makes possible its being the philosophical view it is: its roots in what other philosophers have held. It

<sup>21</sup> G. E. Moore, "A Defense of Common Sense", in *Philosophical Papers* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1959), 32–60. I discuss the argument in *Skepticism about the External World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

324 / Panayot Butchvarov

would not exist if the material world did not exist. Descartes's methodological doubt would not have occurred had the propositions the truth of which he doubted not been true.

Indeed, the very language in which he developed and explained it would not have existed. Presumably, employment of language is essential to philosophical thought, even if some thoughts are possible without language. Philosophical thought, whether superior or mediocre, involves argumentation, good or bad, with a fairly complex structure, distinct premises and conclusions, each with its own structure, and logical connections rooted directly or indirectly in that structure. The terms employed are chosen from a fairly extensive and often technical lexicon, with deliberation and discretion. But any actual language employed in philosophy, say, Descartes's French or Latin, involves phonemes and inscriptions, and is shaped by a human community. All these are parts of the material world. Therefore, it must be possible for argumentation in a subjective epistemology such as Descartes's, one that takes the skeptic and thus itself seriously, to be developed and explained in a *private* language, at least in the minimal, not necessarily Wittgenstein's, sense that the language was created by the epistemologist alone and without reliance (as in devising a secret code) on a public language. But surely such a private language would be too primitive for epistemology. The reader is invited to try constructing a fragment of one and then translating into it a philosophical fragment from Descartes's *Meditations*. Writing philosophy is not like recording one's sensations. Perhaps a private language for the latter is possible, and sometimes actually concocted by hypochondriacs, but we would be only posturing if we said that the sort of rich and sophisticated language the argument of the philosophical skeptic requires could be one. Might that argument take place just in the skeptic's thought, without use of language? Even if some thought without language is possible—for example, recalling an unusual sensation—to suppose that philosophical thought might be one would be like supposing that we might understand differential equations without using symbols, or even just what it is for a car to travel at 79, rather than 78, miles an hour. The skepticism in Descartes's first meditation was not like a tipsy sailor's declaration: "Maybe I know nothing." It was a professional, serious and informed, philosophical view. This is why we still take it seriously. Of course, that philosophical skepticism about the material world questions its own existence does not entail that it is false. It does not render it self-contradictory. But it does make

Epistemology Dehumanized / 325

it deeply incoherent. For, if the material world did not exist, then it too would not exist.

A strikingly original appeal to presupposition was made by Sartre in defense of the existence of other minds. Our acceptance of the “Other” is not discursive, he pointed out. It is presupposed by certain psychological states of oneself. It is essential to them. Sartre gave shame as an example. It is “an immediate shudder that runs through me from head to foot without any discursive preparation”. But it is “shame of *oneself before the Other*”, even if no one is actually looking.<sup>22</sup> Perhaps what is presupposed is only the possibility of being the object of another’s consciousness. But this is what is denied by the interesting sort of skepticism about the existence of other minds, one that is not just a trivial consequence of skepticism about the existence of bodies. It questions the very intelligibility of there being anyone “other than myself”. Even skepticism about the existence of bodies is most interesting when it denies, as Berkeley did, that we can conceive of unperceived bodies.

Another kind of presupposition belongs to an even deeper level. We may call it conceptual. What is presupposed is a particular understanding of the concepts employed. For example, all discussions of the existence of bodies, skeptical and anti-skeptical, presuppose some particular understanding of the concept of existence. Even to ask whether bodies exist presupposes an answer to the question of what it is for a body to exist, and ultimately of what it is for anything to exist. Is existence a property? If not, then what is skepticism *about*? Could we intelligibly speak of the truth or falsity of sentences asserting or denying existence, and thus of knowledge or ignorance of it? Would such sentences express genuine propositions, or might they rather be analogous to “I will finish writing this page”, when this is said as an expression of determination, not as prediction?

Standard epistemology, whether naturalistic or subjective, provides little guidance. It usually takes for granted Kant’s view that existence is not a real predicate, meaning that it is not a property, a “determination”, of a thing (*res*), but fails to consider its deep epistemological implications.<sup>23</sup> Kant wrote that the existence of a thing has to do “only with the question whether [the] thing is given to us in such a way that the perception of it could in any case precede

<sup>22</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), 222, emphasis in original.

<sup>23</sup> Kant states his view succinctly at A598/B626 of *Critique of Pure Reason*.

326 / Panayot Butchvarov

the concept”.<sup>24</sup> This was not Berkeley’s “to be is to be perceived”. Nor was it Mill’s “matter is a permanent possibility of sensations”. Kant did hold that to be actual (*wirklich*) a thing must “stand . . . in accordance with the laws of empirical progression”,<sup>25</sup> but these laws, like any other laws for Kant, involve application of the pure concepts of the understanding. If so, the actuality or existence of a thing, like its causality, is “transcendentally ideal”, even if also “empirically real”. The application of a concept of the understanding was for Kant a matter not of *discovery* but of *imposition*. This does not mean that how we apply the concept of existence is mere caprice, any more than that how we apply the concept of causality is one. What is meant is closer to what Goodman meant by the “entrenchment” of the predicate “green”, which “grue” lacks, though for Kant it was grounded in the activity of our cognitive faculties, not in our linguistic practices. Clearly, such a view of existence requires that skepticism and subjective epistemology, insofar as they concern the existence of bodies, be drastically rethought—or altogether bypassed.

Might existence be just what the existential quantifier expresses, the satisfaction of a propositional function, as Russell argued and most contemporary epistemologists take for granted?<sup>26</sup> But this is a non-starter. Whether the propositional function “*x* is a horse” is satisfied depends on what we allow as values of the variable *x*. Is “*x* is a horse” satisfied by both Secretariat and Pegasus, or only by Secretariat? If we say the latter, our reason is that Pegasus does not exist, but in a sense of “exist” obviously other than, yet presupposed by, Russell’s. It is its ordinary sense, the one we employ in saying, for example, that the Loch Ness monster and Jack, a child’s imaginary friend, do not exist. I have suggested that, according to Kant, it expresses not a property we *find* in things, but rather a conception of them that we *contribute*.<sup>27</sup>

Conceptual presupposition differs from the other kinds of presupposition in that the skeptic is not likely to question it. An answer to a question obviously presupposes how the question is understood. The skeptic cannot deny the central place of the concept of existence in any question about what does or does not exist, or what we can or cannot know to exist. But the skeptic might well deny, however implausibly, that philosophical thought presupposes the existence of the material world, that objective order in time presupposes causal

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., A225/B272.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., A493–B521.

<sup>26</sup> Bertrand Russell, *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971), 164.

<sup>27</sup> I develop this point in *Skepticism about the External World*.

**Epistemology Dehumanized / 327**

necessity, or that the phenomenon of shame presupposes the Other. In any plausible case of inference involving presupposition, there is a natural desire to think of it as formal entailment, since that is the relevant alethic relation most familiar and best understood. And, when we see that the conditional corresponding to the inference does not have the form of a tautology, we are tempted to declare the inference invalid. Or, if we find it compelling, we are tempted to change the conditional, so that it becomes a tautology, and we bless the change by calling it an “analysis” or “translation”. This is what Russell did in his theory of definite descriptions. He saw that, if the present king of France is wise, then, of course, France has a king. He also saw, however, that this is not a tautology. He proceeded to “translate” it into one. In the philosophically substantive cases, however, such as those from Kant and Sartre, no such analyses or translations seem plausible. The conditional “If there is objective order in time, then there is causal necessity” is not a tautology, and to try to change it into one would hardly be a task worth undertaking. So we are tempted just to deny it.

Would the examples of presupposition I have given count as answers to the skeptic, whom naturalistic epistemology properly ignores and subjective epistemology is incapable of answering? They do not refute skepticism—they are not proofs that we do know what according to it we do not know—but they might silence the skeptic. Whether they do or do not, epistemology-as-logic is concerned with them independently of their relevance to skepticism. Skepticism is a problem for subjective epistemology. A question of the form “But how do I know that *p*?” as understood by it may be a question for *me*, but it is not a question for *us*. It has no theoretical substance, for subjective epistemology has no subject matter, its essential use of “I” involving reference to nothing. The question that does have theoretical substance is how we human beings know that *p*. But it belongs in naturalistic epistemology, and today calls for answers from the natural sciences specializing in human cognition, not from philosophy. Epistemology-as-logic asks neither question, just as formal logic does not.

