

RESPONSES TO SCEPTICAL ESSAYS

Barry Stroud

University of California, Berkeley

Email: barrys@berkeley.edu

I am pleased to be the target of these careful, appreciative essays. I am honoured by the attention the authors have paid to what I have been doing in philosophy, and I hope what I can say here advances the discussion at least a little on each of the questions they raise. But of course we will not get to the bottom of things in these pages alone.

Many of the essays are concerned with one or another aspect of my *The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism*, which, it is worth reminding ourselves, was published more than thirty years ago. The understanding of knowledge, perception, scepticism, and even of the prospect of understanding such things philosophically, is not the same today as it was then. What was written there in 1984 is not exactly what I would write today on any of the specific questions it deals with.

When that book was written, philosophical scepticism, perceptual knowledge, even general epistemological questions about knowledge of the world, were not at the centre of the most actively pursued philosophical interests. At that time I think it was widely felt that we already have a more or less satisfactory general picture of how we know the things we do, and that taking seriously an assortment of well-known ancient “sceptical doubts” about it would be to ignore both the facts of human psychology and how the words ‘see’, ‘know’, ‘reason to believe’, and so on are actually used in everyday life. “Answering sceptical doubts” then looked like an idle academic enterprise that could not be expected to add to the growth of human knowledge or to our understanding of it.

I think much more is at stake in the effort to understand, in the face of philosophical scepticism, how we know and have reasons to believe the things we do. In the book I tried to make as clear and as convincing as possible what some of those deeper and more challenging doubts might be if the philosophical problem of knowledge of the world is properly understood. The goal was to draw attention to the special character of the philosophical

problem, and to explain why the ways we actually think and speak about knowing things in everyday life do not really explain what we want to understand about ourselves.

That meant exposing what I saw to be the weakness or irrelevance of strategies then widely thought to be sufficient for overcoming and so ignoring whatever threats philosophical scepticism might be thought to present. The goal was not to silence anti-sceptical strategies, but rather to expand the resources available in defence of a sceptical answer to the philosophical problem. It was a matter of pressing the question to a deeper and potentially more illuminating level, and so hoping to learn something positive from the failure or impossibility of general scepticism, if it could be shown. This probably encouraged the apparently widespread suspicion that I am really a kind of “sceptic” after all, and the book is meant as a defence of that view (whatever that view is). I have never been much disturbed by that obviously unjust accusation (or commendation); it could only have come from careless reading.

The main philosophical doctrine under examination in the book is the conception of sense-perception and knowledge at the heart of Descartes’s first *Meditation*: that what we can know by sense-perception alone never reaches as far as any facts in the wider world that we think about and claim to know things about. I think that if that completely general doctrine about perception were true, nobody could know anything about the world around us by perception. That is what I have called the “conditional correctness of scepticism” about the so-called “external” world (‘external’ because it is beyond everything that is ever, strictly speaking, perceived).

One fundamental distinction I rely on throughout is the difference between someone’s being (even strongly) justified in believing and asserting a certain thing, p , and the person’s knowing that p . It is possible for the first to be true, to virtually any degree of justification, while the second remains false. Knowing is what puzzles us most; that is what is at stake in the philosophical problem. We are all familiar with this distinction. We draw on it whenever we find that something we think someone has every reason to believe is not in fact true. But even when we find that what the person believes is in fact true we recognize that there is at least a distinction between the two different states. This introduces complications into the question of how or whether a straightforward appeal to “what we would have every reason to assert in everyday life” can succeed in response to sceptical doubts, once the distinctive character of the philosophical problem is taken fully into account. Those complications are

explored in the middle chapters of the book in connection with the views of Austin, Moore, Kant, Carnap, and Quine.

In “The Semantic Realism of Stroud’s Response to Austin’s Argument Against Scepticism” Alexandre acknowledges the distinction I rely on - that justified assertion allows for the possibility of error, while knowledge or true assertion does not. He makes the promising suggestion that even if error is always possible, if it could be shown that there is no possibility of “massive error”, there would be no threat of a completely general scepticism. He sketches a possible way of trying to establish such a result, by finding a class of “paradigm” instances in which the correct use of certain concepts guarantees that those concepts are true of the items in question. The idea is that speakers who were always, or massively, wrong about the application of certain concepts would show by that fact alone that they do not understand those concepts.

Alexandre asks a good question: how could speakers even get the concept of something’s being S if they never found any example of something’s being S? This looks as if it could lead to a scepticism-free conception of human understanding. But I think it would still face the Cartesian problem. Even if speakers were mostly right in what they said, and they mostly agreed with one another, could they accept Descartes’ constraints on perceptual knowledge while satisfactorily explaining to themselves how they know the things they think they know about the world around them? This question arises for various forms of “externalism” about knowledge. I suggest a somewhat discouraging answer in my “Understanding Human Knowledge in General”.

I am not sure exactly what to say in response to Claudio’s “Stroud, Skepticism, and Knowledge-Claims”. He expresses a certain “dissatisfaction” (a polite word) with my treatment of Descartes’s *First Meditation* argument in chapter one of *The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism*. I think I know what gives him the “dissatisfaction” he says he feels, but I do not think what he has in mind is present in my account. Descartes’s problem in the *First Meditation* is whether he knows by mean of the senses that (as he believes) he is sitting by the fire. Claudio thinks that I require, of a positive answer to the question whether he knows he is sitting there, that Descartes knows that he knows that he is sitting there. He

thinks I fall into a “confusion of levels”: not distinguishing the requirements of knowing from the requirements of knowing that one knows.

It is not easy to see why Claudio thinks I have fallen (or leapt) into that confusion. He begins by presenting an elaborate, more or less formal argument he calls “the canonical form’ of that skeptical argument in that first meditation” (p. 41). Whether he thinks that argument is the argument I attribute to Descartes, and whether that argument is guilty of “confusion of levels” or not, I don’t know. But in examining what I actually wrote in *The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism*, Claudio says this:

According to Stroud, Descartes is trying to find a way to *establish that he is not dreaming*. . . . But, notice, if successful, Descartes would have established that his first-order belief that he is sitting by the fire is a case of *knowledge*, . . . He would then *know that he knows*. Wouldn’t that be the upshot of a successful attempt to establish that he does have the means to ‘tell that he is not dreaming’? (p. 50)

What Descartes says he realizes, after a brief reflection, is that he would not know on the basis of the senses that he is sitting by the fire if he were simply dreaming that he is sitting there. He recognizes that his knowing that he is not dreaming that he is sitting there is a necessary condition of his knowing that he is sitting there. That is why he thinks he must find some way of telling that he is not dreaming. Because of his restricted conception of the limits of sense-perception, Descartes sees that he could never discover on the basis of the senses alone that he is not dreaming. That is what makes purely sensory knowledge of the world in general impossible; one of its necessary conditions cannot be fulfilled. But even if Descartes somehow managed to fulfill that necessary condition and establish that he is not dreaming, he would not thereby “establish that his first-order belief that he is sitting by the fire is a case of *knowledge*”. He would at most have fulfilled a necessary condition of his knowing by means of the senses that he is sitting by the fire. So it would not necessarily be true, as Claudio says, that “He would then *know that he knows*”. To Claudio’s final question - wouldn’t that be the upshot? - I think the answer is No. Not even his *knowing* that he is sitting there would be the “upshot” of his fulfilling a necessary condition of his knowing it, let alone his *knowing that he knows* it. So I am puzzled why Claudio writes:

The Cartesian inquiry, according to Stroud, can succeed only if Descartes is justified in believing that his belief that he is sitting by the fire is a case of knowledge. (p.50)

Knowing that he is sitting by the fire would be enough.

Eros and Flavio in their “Stroud, Austin, and Radical Skepticism” think that in invoking the distinction between justified assertion and knowledge in response to Austin’s appeal to “what we would say” I “smuggle in” a commitment to “a version of *epistemic internalism*” that Austin would reject. I think my response relies only on the distinction between knowing that p and being justified in saying or believing that p , on the one hand, and the philosophical problem of our knowledge of the external world, on the other. And that problem as I understand it derives from the Cartesian assumption that nothing we can know by sense-perception alone reaches as far as any facts in the wider world. I now see that that is why Eros and Flavio think I am an “internalist” and so must describe the perceptual evidence accessible to a person without any reference to the objective circumstances of the person. But it is rather the Cartesian philosophical problem itself that I think imposes that condition. Without that requirement, the epistemological problem in its traditional form vanishes.

They argue against that conception of perceptual knowledge, and find that Austin in effect argues against it in *Sense and Sensibilia* in opposition to A. J. Ayer. They call a view that takes the objective circumstances of the perceiver into account “disjunctivism”, but without explaining what that label actually means. Austin himself is not described as a “disjunctivist”, but at most as “disclosing the possibility of disjunctivism”.

Whatever is to be said about Austin’s efforts in *Sense and Sensibilia*, Eros and Flavio see great anti-sceptical promise in the idea that the scope of our perceptual knowledge depends on the rich capacities we bring to the task as well as the objective circumstances in which we normally deploy them. And what they see as central to that promise is the idea that we are agents with abilities to act and perceive and believe things in the objective circumstances in which we find ourselves. I am very much in agreement with that, and have been working in my own way in that direction since *The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism*. Two papers of mine on perceptual knowledge appear in this volume.

Some of that more recent work of mine, its connections with *The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism*, and its wider implications beyond scepticism, is insightfully explained by Jason Bridges in his “Skepticism and Beyond: A Primer on Stroud’s Later Epistemology”. This essay is a model of sensitive, accurate philosophical interpretation, understanding, and exposition. It is a distinct, and rare, pleasure to me to be so well understood. I will say little more about it here, beyond strongly recommending the essay as a source of answers to the questions raised by the authors in this volume as well as by anyone else who takes an interest in these matters. The essay is especially good in identifying and explaining how certain philosophical concerns at the heart of *The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism* remain central to my more recent epistemological suggestions. The traditional - and disastrous - assumption of the restricted scope of sense-perception has always been the main target. I think fully overcoming it requires closer attention to the distinctive character of intentional states of mind and to the conditions of understanding ourselves as being in such states. I agree with Jason in seeing the traditional conception of something called “an experience” with its own special qualities as standing in the way of this. For me, seeing and thereby knowing that it is raining, for instance, is a perceptual experience. As for “the problem of the external world”, I fully concur with Jason’s concluding sentences:

Thought about the external world begins in our immediate knowledge of it. To recognize this is to recognize that there is nothing beneath, nothing beyond, this knowledge to which we might point to assuage worries about our capacities to think or know the world. (pp. 97-98)

Jorge, in his “What Do We Talk About When We Talk About Skepticism?”, is puzzled by several “tensions” or instabilities he finds in my treatment of scepticism. He sees that I stress how easily and naturally we all recognize the force of Descartes’s sceptical reflections and go along with them in the *First Meditation*. Jorge takes this to suggest that I think the doubts generated in such reflections extend to our everyday beliefs as well. He regards that as part of my attempt to reject the idea that concern with scepticism is “a mere game among philosophers”. He accordingly quotes me as saying that “skeptical doubts” are part of “a single conception of knowledge at work *both in everyday life and in the philosophical investigation*” (*SPS* p. 71 his italics). But where those words appear in *The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism* I was explaining why “the sceptical philosopher” holds that

philosophical sceptical doubts apply in everyday life, even though, as I say, they in fact deviate “so radically from what we require of ourselves and others in everyday life”.

I think we all know that we do not insist on such principles in everyday life, and one of the main questions of *The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism* is whether “the philosophical sceptic” can explain why we do not insist on them even though his sceptical conclusion is correct. That is a question of the relation between the study of human knowledge in traditional epistemology and the actual state of human beings who know things about the world. I do not hold, as Jorge says, that the doubts generated in philosophical scepticism are “intuitive” in the sense that they “do not presuppose any philosophical position” (p.128). In going along uncritically with Descartes’s presentation of the sceptical reflections we do not easily realize what philosophical doctrines we would be committed to if what we accept about this particular case were to be true in general. The doctrine that perceptual knowledge does not extend to any facts of the wider world we claim to know things about is one thing we would have to accept. But I think we can see that we cannot accept it. So I do not regard the alleged “intuitiveness” of the sceptical reflections as “evidence” for the truth of philosophical scepticism.

I don’t think this shows that any attempt to account for some domain of knowledge, or even of knowledge in general, must therefore be circular. Some “externalist” proposals have perhaps foundered for that or related reasons, but I think there is nothing circular in appealing to something that is known by perception to explain how certain other things are known to be so. In this I agree with Jorge in endorsing James Pryor’s rejection of any need for independent grounding of what we perceive and thereby know to be so. This is in line with the more general observations about knowledge of the world quoted approvingly from the end of Jason’s paper.

Jônadas’ “Taking Skepticism Seriously: Stroud and Cavell” is a careful, serious exploration of important issues that I obviously cannot take up adequately here. I can offer only a few comments on the differences he sees between Cavell’s treatment of philosophical scepticism and my own efforts in that direction. Jônadas does not see only differences. I am pleased that he also stresses what he sees as affinities between us. The similarities are not purely accidental. Cavell has been a rich source and stimulus for me from the beginning, not only in appreciating the complexities of scepticism but in my understanding of philosophy in

general and Wittgenstein in particular. Jônadas is right to stress the effects of Wittgenstein and Thompson Clarke on both Cavell and me. In my first semester at Berkeley in 1961 I participated in a seminar by Cavell and Clarke on Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* which I still remember vividly. Cavell was then writing what became *The Claim of Reason*.

It is true that I have found not fully satisfying some details of Cavell's account of how the epistemological sceptical threat actually works, or does not work. And it is true that Cavell has been deeply concerned with a richer, more complex set of "sceptical" attitudes and anxieties that he takes to lie behind the way sceptical doubts typically present themselves in philosophy. Those are real differences. As for similarities, Jônadas is very good in bringing out the importance for both of us of considering the particular example used in philosophy - e.g., Descartes sitting by the fire in his study - in a way that can appear to bring the possibility of knowledge of the world in general into question. That is crucial to the success of the "sceptical enquiry". Considering the example as a "best" or "representative" case of perceptual knowledge in general is an attempt to deflect the force of requiring, as Austin does, that there must always be *special* reasons for doubt in each particular case. The precise details of the example regarded as "representative" matter for this reason.

This is a point on which I have disagreed with Cavell. I think some of the things Jônadas says about my disagreement make the differences between us look greater than I think they are. Cavell thinks the differences are greater than I think they are. Cavell says the protagonist in the philosophical example must be described as *claiming* to know such-and-such. Only then, Cavell thinks, will there be something whose grounds or support can be assessed and so brought into question in the "sceptical scrutiny". I am not convinced that what is to be assessed must be a *claim* made by the person. Descartes makes no such claim in his *First Meditation*, yet he can ask whether any of his "opinions" are "certain and indubitable", without at least some reason to doubt. I thought Cavell did not sufficiently explain or support his requirement of a *claim*. My resistance was not that I think the idea is simply "wrong", as Jônadas says (p. 111), or that Cavell should have provided a "theory of the conditions of claiming" or "the conditions of making sense" in supporting it (p. 115).

I find myself in considerable sympathy with the main lines of the second half of Jônadas' paper, about my resistance to what Cavell describes as "the truth in scepticism". My original response to Cavell's formulation of what he said we can learn from scepticism - that "the human creature's basis in the world as a whole, its relation to the world as such, is not

that of knowing, anyway not what we think of as knowing” - was that it seems to leave us as vulnerable to dissatisfactions with the “basis” of our “position in the world” as philosophical scepticism was felt to leave us. Even if we are no longer to understand ourselves as *knowing* “the world as a whole” or “the world as such”, those phrases seem to offer only some *other* relation to a “world” understood “as a whole” or “as such”. That does not take us far enough away from whatever was troubling about the kind of self-understanding said to be embodied in philosophical scepticism. The trouble is not with the particular relation; the trouble is with understanding ourselves only as standing in some relation to something characterized independently, “as such”.

I think Jônadas is sensitive to this difficulty. He sees that what is needed is not just a different *relation* in which we are said to stand to something called “the world as such”, but some new or more illuminating conception of “us”, some more accurate and satisfying way of attending to the practices and commitments that those of us said to stand in such a relation actually engage in. This puts our agency, our abilities to act and perceive and interact with others, at the centre of the human picture, as Eros and Flavio have also emphasized. Jônadas suggests that the philosophical problem of our knowledge of the external world could be seen as an intellectualization of a certain kind of limitation we can feel: some gap between the best that is available to us on our own and something that remains forever beyond us. If so, and if the philosophical doctrine that our individual sense-experiences never reach as far as the independent world is an expression of some such felt human limitation, I think that feeling does not accord with our actual human practices in perceiving and knowing the things we do.

With Roberto’s “Stroud and Transcendental Arguments Revisited” we leave *The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism* and related matters behind us. I think the term ‘transcendental argument’, standing on its own, does not in itself have a very determinate reference. Many different things have been called “transcendental arguments”, some of which are not even arguments. I think it is better just to consider particular arguments, whatever they might be called, and examine their distinctive features, if any. About what Roberto calls “the original Strawsonian transcendental argument”, he asks, who or what is the target of that argument. I think that is a good beginning.

Roberto asks whether the argument is directed against a “Hume-like sceptic” or a “Hume-like reductionist idealist”. As an attack on the first kind of target, he thinks the

“Strawsonian” argument fails completely. Against the second kind of target, he thinks it is “as successful as any argument can be” (p.188). I have to say I think Strawson in *Individuals* did not have either of those targets in mind.

Roberto thinks the argument Strawson has in mind fails epistemologically, as trying to establish, against a “Hume-like sceptic”, that something or other is known, but he thinks the argument succeeds metaphysically, as “a proof for the fundamental ontology of bodies” (p. 203). I agree that Strawson’s main argument about the ontology of bodies in Chapter One of *Individuals* is metaphysical. And I agree with Roberto that “Strawson’s original argument does not progress from epistemic premises to an epistemic conclusion” (p. 203). As he says, “Its starting point is the existence of a conceptual scheme, and its conclusion is the existence of material bodies as the only explanation for the assumed existence of such a scheme” (p. 204). (Strictly speaking, Strawson claimed that material bodies are the “basic particulars” in any such scheme.)

Strawson’s argument for the existence of material bodies as “basic particulars” is the argument I meant to be examining in my “Transcendental Arguments” of 1968. I was struck by the fact that, as Roberto notes, the argument starts with the existence of a conceptual scheme. I take a “conceptual scheme” to be a way of thinking, a pattern of thought and inference we engage in about a world that such a scheme enables us to think about. I was equally struck that the conclusion of the argument, as Roberto notes, states that there are material objects of certain kinds in the world. My interest was in the question of how an argument that starts only with the fact that we think about the world in certain ways (whatever those ways might be) could reach conclusions about what is actually so in the world we think about. What kind of argument could that be? In general, thinking that things in the world are a certain way does not imply that that is the way things actually are. If it is also true, as Roberto puts it, that the existence of those material objects is “the only explanation for the assumed existence of such a [conceptual] scheme”, it looks as if the existence of certain objects in the world is the only explanation of our thinking of the world in the ways we do. This would be another intriguing feature of the argument.

I agree with Roberto that Strawson’s conclusion that there are material bodies of certain kinds as basic particulars is not itself an “epistemic” conclusion; it does not say anything about anyone’s knowing anything. Nor is it put forward as a conclusion drawn from something “epistemic”. But Strawson in *Individuals* did present his “transcendental” argument

as reaching its conclusion from true premisses to the effect that we think of the world in certain ways. If that is so, and the argument is sound, it would give anyone who knows those premisses about how we think of the world good reason to draw the conclusion about the way things are in the world we think about. The conclusion would be metaphysical, and a metaphysician could arrive at that conclusion by reflection on the ways we think things are. This is perhaps what Strawson had in mind by “descriptive metaphysics”. It is also reminiscent of the Kantian idea that discovering the necessary conditions of the possibility of human thought and experience is the only reliable path to secure metaphysical knowledge of the world. But it also requires knowing that those conditions are fulfilled.

Kant thought the truth of transcendental idealism is the only explanation of the possibility of that kind of metaphysics: the world we could know about in that way is a world of “appearances”, transcendently speaking. Strawson was never tempted by that way of explaining how we can go from what we know about how we think to facts about the way things are. Nor was he tempted by any “verificationist” conception of thought or meaning according to which our understanding or meaning something in a certain way implies that we have a conception of what would show that what we think is true, or that it is false; that it must be possible to find out. Strawson took the guaranteed identifiability of basic particulars to imply that those objects can be identified uniquely, as distinct from every other object in a spatial and temporal world. I think he saw that as incompatible with the idea that enduring objects can be reduced to nothing more than combinations of “Humean” ideas. Nothing Hume could introduce would imply uniqueness. So Strawson’s “transcendental” argument did not need to concern itself with that idea.

Strawson came to see and to acknowledge that the distinctive role of certain essential ingredients of our “conceptual scheme” - basic particulars, objects with causal powers, persons with both physical and psychological characteristics, and so on - can be identified, understood, and appreciated without going on to assert that such things exist in, or are part of, the independent world. What he thought is essential to a proper understanding of our “conceptual scheme” is the distinctive role of such fundamental concepts, and “a certain sort of interdependence between conceptual capacities and beliefs” in any conception of a world we can make sense of.

Sarah's "Stroud on Scepticism and Subjectivism About Value" takes us to yet another topic. She understands and explains very well my resistance to what she calls "global evaluative scepticism". 'Global' because the view in question is meant to apply to all "evaluative" thought and discourse whatever. Whether 'scepticism' is the right word for the view, I am not sure, for reasons Sarah explains. Mackie's declaration "there are no objective values" does not sound very sceptical. In resisting the global denial of the objectivity of evaluative judgements I resist the general view Mackie appears to be asserting, whatever he calls it. I think that view is not consistently acceptable by agents who understand what they are doing.

By "evaluative judgements" I mean all judgements to the effect that one thing or one action or one belief or whatever it might be is better in certain respects than another. I think all intentional action and all intentional attitudes involve judgements of that kind. We act and believe things for reasons, and we endorse those reasons in acting and believing as we do; that is what makes them *our* reasons for doing what we do. That is why I think evaluative judgements are indispensable to us as agents. We make such judgements every day and attribute such judgements to other agents in making sense of their doing and thinking what we understand them to do.

Because it is the objectivity of those judgments that I am concerned with, Sarah's shift of focus from "scepticism" to "subjectivism" is appropriate. She thinks that many things that are so in the world are "subjective" in the sense that their being so is in one way or another "dependent on us". It depends on what is true of certain human subjects. Whether a certain person is popular, or is a celebrity, or whether a certain activity is illegal in Utah, depends on what some people think or feel or have done; it is not fully "independent of us".

Sarah thinks that "many ordinary people would find it obvious" that "moral and evaluative properties" such as being wrong or being desirable are also "dependent on us", just as being popular or being a celebrity or being illegal in Utah are. If that is a verdict by those ordinary people on *all* moral and evaluative judgements, I think Sarah would take them to be saying or implying that all moral and evaluative judgements are "subjective" in the sense explained. Sarah then raises for me an excellent question: whether what I have said in opposing the denial of the objectivity of all evaluative judgements is enough in itself to "close off" or rule out the possibility of maintaining that all moral or evaluative judgements are "subjective" in the sense those people are described as thinking they are?

This is a huge question. I could not even hope to give a convincing answer to it here. I can at best indicate why I think the answer is Yes, it would rule out maintaining that completely general “subjectivist” view. I do not of course mean that I think I have actually achieved that result. I mean only that I see Sarah’s question about “subjectivism” as the very question I have been asking about evaluative judgements. In resisting the global denial of their objectivity I mean to resist the view those people are described as expressing: that all evaluative judgements are subjective. I do not deny that a great many people assert and appear to hold some such view. What I have been arguing is that that view is not consistently acceptable by competent agents.

To capture the idea of the “subjective” character of all evaluative judgements we need more than the general idea of something’s “depending on us”. Even evaluative judgements “depend on us” in the very broad sense that if “we” never made such judgements there wouldn’t be any at all. Similarly, whether a certain person is popular, or is a celebrity, “depends on us”, but not just in that very broad sense. A person’s being popular or a celebrity depends on certain fairly specific facts about “us”: certain determinate kinds of reactions, feelings, and thoughts many people have about that person. Some of those reactions might even involve evaluative judgements of the popular or famous person on the part of some of the people. But thinking that a certain person is popular, or is a celebrity, is not an evaluative judgement of those persons. It is simply to accept certain facts of the world that depend on people reacting or feeling or thinking in certain ways. And thinking that someone holds certain evaluative attitudes is not itself to make an evaluative judgement either. It is simply to accept an other kind of non-evaluative fact.

When a person faces an evaluative question - anything from ‘Should I go to the movies tonight?’ to ‘Is slavery wrong?’ - she is concerned to settle that question. She might acknowledge that other people have views on these questions, even evaluative views, but her question is not settled by their having those views. She might take those views of others into account in settling the evaluative question she faces, but what she judges when she arrives at her answer is not something the truth or correctness or defensibility of which depends on whether those other people have those attitudes. Her question is not settled even by *her* having the attitudes she has. Her thinking she should go to the movies is not what settles for her that that is what she should do; that is why she is still deliberating. And neither the fact

that *she* thinks that slavery is wrong nor the fact that *most people* for a very long time thought it is *not* wrong are enough to settle for her whether slavery is wrong.

Her questions are about whether she should go to the movies, or whether slavery is wrong. They are not questions about what views or other attitudes she or any other person has on those matters. The answers she gives to those questions do not imply that any person has any particular views or attitudes at all. What is in question, and what would answer the question, is in that sense independent of anyone's having whatever views or attitudes they actually have. The questions are not about something "subjective", and their answers do not state or imply anything "subjective" in that sense. The person answers the questions, the decisive evaluative judgement of the person is expressed, when she accepts or endorses or acts on the evaluative judgement she has made. It is because I think we can see that making judgments of this kind is indispensable to intelligent human life, and because such judgements are not "subjective", that I think no one can consistently accept the view that all evaluative judgments are "subjective".

I have left Plinio's "Stroud's Neo-Pyrrhonism and the Human Condition" until the end because it is a more general, more reflective presentation of what he sees as some central characteristics of my philosophical work as a whole. I am grateful to Plinio for his interest and for the serious attention he has given to what I have been doing. I am also grateful to him for having organized the symposium out of which all these essays and my responses have arisen.

It is not possible for me to reply in any detail to Plinio's rich and wide-ranging essay. I can only comment briefly on the general lines of a few of his observations. He wants to place my work, if possible, in some relation to his beloved Pyrrhonism. That is certainly an interesting idea. Robert Fogelin also was struck by what he saw as affinities between some of the things I have been saying and ancient Pyrrhonism. Fogelin called himself a Pyrrhonist, or at least a Neo-Pyrrhonist, and I think Plinio would like to enroll me as a member of that same club. He seems to want there to be at least two North-American Neo-Pyrrhonists. I can only say that whatever affinities there might be between ancient Pyrrhonism and what I have been doing, they really are only affinities. There has been no direct influence. I am familiar with the "excessive scepticism" that Hume first found himself confronted with, which he called "Pyrrhonism", but I understand that he was mistaken in calling it that.

The affinities I think Plinio has in mind have mostly to do with my distant or apparently “sceptical” attitudes towards philosophical questions themselves, and so towards philosophical theories or doctrines meant to answer those questions. Sceptics in antiquity did not stand in a comfortable relation to what they regarded as the “theoreticians” or “dogmatists” of their day either. They more or less ignored those doctrines and just carried on with their lives (at least that is what is said about them). In drawing attention to my idea that we can simply find no satisfactory answers to certain philosophical questions I think Plinio has primarily in mind my arguments in *The Quest for Reality: Subjectivism and the Metaphysics of Colour* and in *Engagement and Metaphysical Dissatisfaction*.

What I try to illustrate in those books is that on certain philosophical (primarily metaphysical) questions - about the metaphysical status of the colours of things, of causation, necessity, and evaluation - we cannot give a philosophically satisfactory answer either by accepting a certain philosophical doctrine that would answer the question if true, or by accepting the negation of that doctrine, which would give the opposite answer. Neither doctrine is in itself inconsistent; it is just that we cannot consistently accept either doctrine as a satisfying answer to the metaphysical question. At the very least, the position I arrive at could be called non-committal. Plinio likens my position on those questions to the Pyrrhonian *epokhé*, or suspension of judgement.

I cannot say anything helpful about to what extent my position is similar or parallel to the practices of the ancient Pyrrhonists. But I can say that the kind of “non-committal” position I have outlined is not reached by simply ignoring the philosophical questions and carrying on with your life. Maybe the ancient sceptics didn’t do that either. You have to understand very well what the metaphysical questions actually are - what they promise and so what they demand of any satisfactory answer - before you can abandon them because you have seen and can explain why we could never get the satisfaction we seek.

There seems to me to be a separate question about the extent to which what I have been doing in epistemology is similar to ancient Pyrrhonist attitudes to questions of human knowledge. Fogelin wrote a very good book he called *Pyrrhonian Reflections on Knowledge and Justification*. I agree with the conception of knowledge he defended in that book and with what he said a “consistent Pyrrhonist” could say about knowledge in everyday life. But I think even Fogelin was at least half-way seduced away from his enlightened “Pyrrhonism” by the felt conflict between the authority we claim in knowledge and the human fallibility we

cannot deny. That is what is exploited in one way or another in generating the completely general philosophical problem of our knowledge of the external world. My own response to that problem is not sceptical, as I have been explaining, and as Jason has explained so well in his essay. As with metaphysical questions, my response here too is more diagnostic. I think there is a great deal to be learned about ourselves, about the world, and about human knowledge of the world, in trying to identify and expose the doctrines that lie behind that philosophical problem, and so coming to understand how the apparent inevitability of philosophical scepticism about the world is to be overcome.