Wittgenstein's On Certainty as pyrrhonism in action

WITTGENSTEIN'S *ON CERTAINTY*

AS PYRRHONISM IN ACTION

DUNCAN PRITCHARD

University of California, Irvine & University of Edinburgh

ABSTRACT. I want to suggest a way of approaching *On Certainty* that treats what Wittgenstein is doing in the notebooks that make up this work as manifesting a kind philosophical *practice* that is broadly *Pyrrhonian*, at least on one reading of what this involves. Such a reading fits with the general philosophical quietism found in Wittgenstein's work, particularly in his later writings, and is also supported by independent textual evidence that he was profoundly influenced by Pyrrhonian scepticism. Crucially, however, it also helps to clarify the sense in which the Pyrrhonian sceptical techniques, and hence (I claim) the kind of philosophical quietism that goes along with them, can have an essentially *dis*quieting effect on the subject (which in the sceptical case I dub *epistemic vertigo*).

1. EXEGETICAL ISSUES

Wittgenstein's final notebooks, published as *On Certainty*, make for fascinating reading. These four notebooks constitute a sustained treatment of questions concerned with knowledge and certainty, and with the status of so-called Moorean certainties in particular. As notebooks, the remarks are impressionistic, and sometimes contradictory. As such, the notebooks raise all kinds of exegetical issues. For example, there is the fact that the first notebook seems to be more concerned with G. E. Moore's remarks on idealism rather than the Moorean certainties that are the primary concern of the other three notebooks.[1] There is also the issue of the proximal intellectual impetus for these notebooks. In their introduction, the editors of this work, Anscombe and von Wright, claim that Wittgenstein's concern was G. E. Moore's remarks on everyday certainties, at least as those remarks were interpreted and responded to by Norman Malcolm, who Wittgenstein stayed with around this time. This is certainly the most plausible impetus for these notebooks, but I think that

it is at least contentious. In particular, I would suggest that there is an alternative way of thinking about these notebooks available that takes the work of John Henry Newman as a more primary source.[2]

Even granted these exegetical issues, the consensus regarding *On Certainty* tends to cluster around two kinds of proposal. On the one hand, there are those who think that there is a canonical reading of what Wittgenstein had in mind in these remarks, whereby Wittgenstein is advancing a concrete philosophical thesis (or theses).[3] Accordingly, proponents of this view are obliged to claim that some of the remarks should not be taken at face-value, in order to preserve the overall consistency of the notebooks. Given that we are dealing with notebooks which were unedited by the man himself, and never intended for publication, this is an entirely plausible line to take. Indeed, one would find it surprising if a set of notebooks didn't contain apparent inconsistencies. Moreover, there is also the point that it is undeniable that Wittgenstein often explores ideas in his notebooks without ever explicitly advertising this fact. Accordingly, where remarks don't fit with the wider interpretation, there is always the option to maintain that Wittgenstein isn't advancing the claims that he seems to be putting forward in the problematic passages.

Still, while one can plausibly derive a consistent proposal from the notebooks that make up *On Certainty*, since they are unedited notebooks it is hardly surprising that there are many commentators who eschew the task of offering an overarching interpretation and content themselves instead with the much weaker goal of presenting a position that is merely inspired by Wittgenstein's remarks. This leaves the further question of whether Wittgenstein himself would endorse the position so described as at least not settled.[4] Indeed, in some cases, commentators who fall into this camp go so far as to suggest that their Wittgensteinian proposal is not one that they think Wittgenstein himself would endorse.[5]

I want to explore a different way of thinking about these notebooks, which does not fall into either camp. This is the idea that Wittgenstein might have been undertaking a kind of intellectual exercise that is broadly Pyrrhonian in spirit. In particular, the thought is that he isn't trying to advance philosophical theses in these works at all, but rather working through opposing arguments as a means of cultivating within himself a kind of sceptical attitude. Recall that Pyrrhonism was an ethical stance, in the sense that it was offering a radical conception of the life of flourishing, one on which the sceptical attitude was required for *eudaimonia*.[6] This was achieved via the sceptical modes. These were designed to create an opposition (*isosethenia*) that engenders a neutral attitude (*epoche*) which, in turn—at least if the process is repeated enough times anyway—eventually leads to a tranquil and untroubled state of mind (*ataraxia*). Sceptical doubt is

thus in the service of the good life. Could Wittgenstein be attempting something similar with his notebooks?

This way of thinking about *On Certainty* would certainly be very different from those proposals that maintain that Wittgenstein was advancing a particular philosophical thesis. After all, on this reading, Wittgenstein is not meant to be understood as advancing any kind of philosophical thesis. He is, instead, like the Pyrrhonians before him, simply manifesting a certain kind of approach to philosophical issues, without endorsing any particular claim. Relatedly, if one took this line about *On Certainty*, then it would be a mistake to set aside the general exegetical question of what Wittgenstein is up to in these notebooks and instead focus on a particular train of thought that one could plausibly take to be inspired by them. That's not to say that the Wittgenstein-inspired view would be lacking in philosophical import. Rather, the point is that one would be missing something very significant about *On Certainty* by not recognizing the distinctive philosophical approach that Wittgenstein is manifesting in this text.

There are some points that count in favour of this way of thinking about *On Certainty*. We know that Wittgenstein was deeply interested in Pyrrhonian scepticism, and was very influenced by the work of the Austro-Hungarian (near) contemporary Fritz Mauthner who was attempting to develop an updated version of the Pyrrhonian stance.[7] Indeed, it is arguable that Pyrrhonian scepticism informs all of Wittgenstein's work (going right back to the *Tractatus*), though I will focus my attentions to its influence on *On Certainty*. In addition, reading *On Certainty* this way means that we don't need to explain away the apparent contradictions in these notebooks. Instead, the contradictions could be treated as being instead evidence in favour of this interpretation; as Wittgenstein generating the kind of opposition needed to fuel his Pyrrhonian stance. Indeed, there are also some interesting overlaps between what Wittgenstein seems to be attempting in *On Certainty* (on this reading anyway) and the practices of Pyrrhonism, at least on a plausible interpretation of the latter. Moreover, reading *On Certainty* this way enables us to better understand the specific kind of philosophical quietism that Wittgenstein seems to be embracing in his philosophical method, one that is also in a certain important sense *dis*quieting. I will be explaining this feature of the view in terms of the phenomenon of *epistemic vertigo*. Finally, and relatedly, although this Pyrrhonian way of reading *On Certainty* diverges from the two interpretative camps noted above, it does have some affinities with the influential 'therapeutic' way of thinking about Wittgenstein's work in general, whereby we are not to understand what Wittgenstein is doing (e.g., in the *Tractatus*) as defending philosophical theses.[8]

Before we jump into considering these issues, however, I first want to register the spirit in which this enterprise is being undertaken. My claim is only that this is a fruitful way of thinking about *On Certainty*, and no more than that. That's a weak claim, from an exegetical point of view,

to be sure. But it also has a hidden strength. For if this claim is true, then the import of thinking about *On Certainty* in this fashion would survive even the unearthing of definitive evidence that this is not what Wittgenstein intended with these notebooks (e.g., a letter from him, written at the time, that explicitly disavows this possibility). *On Certainty* is an important philosophical work, and what such works have in common is that they can inspire interesting philosophical ideas that diverge from what the author intended. In any case, in what follows my primary motivation is to persuade the reader that this way of responding to *On Certainty* is philosophically enlightening, regardless of whether it turns out to be an accurate representation of Wittgenstein's motives behind this work.[9]

2. PYRRHONISM AS PERPETUAL INQUIRY

There is a common way of thinking about Pyrrhonism according to which it involves a rejection of the demands of rationality. Indeed, such a reading can seem obvious given that this is a form of scepticism, albeit one that is cast as an ethical stance. As Michael Williams (1988, 561-2) once provocatively described the view, one can think of Pyrrhonism as a kind of inversion of Stoicism. While the Stoics (very roughly) thought that the good life, the life of flourishing, involved suppressing the passions and living by reason, the Pyrrhonians were effectively advocating that one should suppress reason so that one can live by the passions (though they obviously would never put it in this way, since it is part of the Pyrrhonian stance that one wouldn't advocate a theoretical claim of this kind). It is thus reason, or at least the desire to present oneself as rational, that is problematic in terms of living the good life.[10] The sceptical modes are thus a means to an end (bearing in mind that we are taking an external perspective on Pyrrhonism here, in that they themselves advance no ends, and thus no means to ends either), in that they are designed to provoke a response, over time, such that one relinquishes rational inquiry altogether and acquiesces in non-voluntary responses to stimuli.

While this is certainly a plausible way of thinking about Pyrrhonian scepticism—and note that the exegetical issues surrounding Wittgenstein's relatively recent, historically speaking, notebooks are magnified several times when it comes to the relevant ancient texts—I don't think it is really true to how Sextus Empiricus, who is our key source when it comes to Pyrrhonian scepticism, describes the stance. Right at the very beginning of *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (SE 3), for example, Sextus emphasises a crucial difference between, on the one hand, the Dogmatists and the Academic sceptics—who, respectively, "have claimed to have discovered the truth" and "have asserted that it cannot be apprehended"—and, on the other hand, the Pyrrhonian sceptics who

simply "go on inquiring." If we take this description of Pyrrhonism seriously, then we are led to a conception of this stance whereby it isn't rejecting reason altogether, but rather rejecting a particular conception of rationality that embraces closed inquiries, whether in the positive sense of generating putative knowledge or the negative sense of generating (settled) doubt. The thought is that either outcome is contrary to the good life of human flourishing. In contrast, the Pyrrhonian skeptical attitude is meant to promote a genuinely open inquiry, one that would thereby be perpetually ongoing. In this way we have a model for thinking about Pyrrhonian scepticism whereby it embodies a rational perspective of sorts, albeit one that is principally opposed to reaching dialectically closed conclusions.

It is also significant that the passage just cited is fairly representative of how Sextus describes Pyrrhonian scepticism. For example, after describing the ethical goal of Pyrrhonian scepticism as being "quietude in respect of matters of opinion and moderate feeling in respect of things unavoidable" (SE I 19), he goes on to contrast the "quietude" gained by living the sceptical life with the "disquietude" of those who do not suspend judgement:

> "For the man who opines that anything is by nature good or bad is for ever being disquieted; when he is without the things which he deems good he believes himself to be tormented by things naturally bad and he pursues after the things which are, he thinks, good; which when he has obtained he keeps falling into still more perturbations because of his irrational and immoderate elation, and in his dread of a change of fortune he uses every endeavour to avoid losing the things which he deems good. On the other hand, the man who determines nothing as to what is naturally good or bad neither shuns nor pursues anything eagerly; and, in consequence, he is unperturbed." (SE I 19)

Again, then, we find that the sceptical good life of quietude is not fuelled by doubt as such (i.e., a settled conviction that one lacks knowledge), much less the suspension of all rational inquiry, but rather results from keeping the flames of inquiry alight, where this means ensuring that nothing is 'determined', whether positively (in the manner of Dogmatism) or negatively (in the manner of Academic scepticism).[11]

Indeed, it is arguable that by treating Pyrrhonism as a form of scepticism as we now understand that term, and hence as directed at bringing about doubt, we are implicitly appealing to a conception of scepticism that would be alien to the Pyrrhonians themselves (but which, for example, is very present in later forms of scepticism, such as Cartesian scepticism and its 'method of doubt'). *Skepsis*, after all, means inquiry rather than doubt. Moreover, doubt is too much like a settled conclusion for Pyrrhonian tastes. What they regard continual inquiry as generating is not the settled negative conclusion of doubt (e.g., regarding the possibility of knowledge in the target domain), which would be one, negative, way of concluding a rational inquiry, but rather the more unsettled *suspension of judgement*, something which could in turn generate further inquiry, and so on *ad infinitum*. On this reading, then, Pyrrhonism is to be thought of as a way of living, whereby the

employment of the sceptical modes will keep one's judgements suspended and hence ensure that inquiry is forever on-going.[12]

This way of thinking about Pyrrhonian scepticism also dovetails with another exegetical question about the stance, which is what the sceptical modes were aimed at. If the scope is any and all of one's beliefs, then that would suggest a radical form of scepticism. With the scope so broad, the traditional problem for Pyrrhonism of explaining how it offers a psychologically possible sceptical strategy would be acute.[13] But this isn't a very credible way of understanding the stance. This is because Pyrrhonism doesn't seem to be concerned with ordinary spontaneous belief at all, but rather with the kind of (putatively) rationally grounded theoretical claims that are characteristically not like ordinary, unreflective, spontaneous beliefs. Indeed, in the most straightforward case, these rationally grounded theoretical claims are the claims made by the philosopher. Here is Robert Fogelin on this point:

> "[…] the attacks of the Pyrrhonian skeptic are directed against the dogmas of 'Professors'—not the beliefs of common people […] the Pyrrhonian skeptic leaves common beliefs, unpretentiously held, alone." (Fogelin 2004, 163)

This point is sometimes expressed in terms of two styles of assent: one that is theoretical, putatively rational, non-spontaneous, and dogmatic (and so subject to sceptical doubt); and one that is ordinary, unreflective, spontaneous, and non-dogmatic (and hence avoids sceptical doubt). Here, for example, is how Williams expresses the idea of a style of assent that is immune to Pyrrhonian doubt:

> "[…] the Pyrrhonian has a distinctive style of assent: spontaneous, involuntary submission to his unrationalised impulses. Assent is a pathos, something that comes over one. […] Ordinary life, as Sextus sees it, is much more a matter of impulse and habit than of judgement properly so called." (Williams 1988, 561-2)

Again, we see why our ordinary unreflective judgements should be thought of as not the target of sceptical challenge.[14]

This way of characterizing the scope of Pyrrhonian scepticism accords with our earlier presentation of it in terms of perpetual inquiry. Our ordinary, spontaneous, unreflective beliefs are perfectly in order as they are, in the sense that they do not generate the disquiet that the Pyrrhonian sceptical modes are designed to treat. It is only once we begin making judgements of the problematic kind that we are led into disquiet, and away from *eudaimonia*. The sceptical modes are then needed to tackle this form of disquiet and bring about a certain kind of peace. But notice that the quietude that results from the employment of these sceptical techniques is not to be thought of in terms of a settled stance of its own. Indeed, this is the sense in which there can be no peace once one takes up inquiry, since the path to flourishing is now continual inquiry. Put

another way, while there is quietude of sorts, it is of a completely different kind to the 'quietude' available to those who unreflectively live their lives, in that it is active rather than passive (for there is something that needs to be quiet*ed*).

This interpretation of Pyrrhonian scepticism suggests that the successful application of the sceptical modes does not return one to a state of intellectual innocence, of a kind available to the unreflective. This point is crucial, since it entails that the Pyrrhonian strategy is not to be understood as *undoing* anything. Indeed, one could claim that the *eudaimonia* that result from employing this strategy is of a higher order, given its active nature, though this would bring difficulties of its own. (For example, how are we to mark this greater value, given that there is no philosophical thesis in play here that we can appeal to?)[15] In any case, for our purposes what is important is just that the Pyrrhonian sceptical modes are targeted at a particular kind of theoretical claim, that they lead to perpetual inquiry (i.e., rather than a settled state, including one of doubt), and that the *eudaimonia* that results is thereby by its nature also in one sense unsettling/disquieting, as distinct from the kind of *eudaimonia* available to those who are essentially unreflective.

3. WITTGENSTEINIAN QUIETISM

The conception of Pyrrhonian scepticism just presented aligns closely with the specific brand of philosophical quietism that Wittgenstein expresses, and which is most apparent in his later works, like the *Philosophical Investigations* and (I would say, *especially*) *On Certainty*.[16] In its most austere form, philosophical quietism simply holds that there is nothing to be gained from engaging in philosophical reflection, and hence that it should be abandoned. This is clearly not Wittgenstein's view, as he practiced philosophy right until the end of his life. But he evidently does regard philosophical problems as being in a certain sense illusory. Indeed, he maintains that philosophy is the source of philosophical problems. Nonetheless, he makes clear that philosophy—at least of the kind that he practices—is also the way to resolve them. ("To show the fly the way out of the fly bottle." (Wittgenstein 1953, §309)) Wittgensteinian philosophical quietism thus sees philosophy as playing an important role in resolving philosophical difficulties, in contrast to a more austere form of philosophical quietism whereby philosophy could serve no useful purpose.[17]

In order to understand Wittgenstein's philosophical quietism, however, it is important to recognise that Wittgenstein regards philosophy as a certain kind of *activity*, rather than involving the advancement of philosophical theses.[18] In particular, Wittgenstein doesn't resolve philosophical problems by putting forward philosophical theses of his own (which would obviously be in tension with his philosophical quietism). Rather, his philosophical approach

involves showing how the philosophical puzzle in hand is illusory by constant engagement with the phenomena in hand, by focussing on the details of cases and so forth.

We can bring this point out by considering one of the core lines of thought that is found in *On Certainty*. In the notebooks that make up this work Wittgenstein is clearly showing the illusory nature of a philosophical puzzle regarding knowledge (Cartesian scepticism, in short), by teasing out how it rests on the implicit import of a philosophical conception of the structure of rational evaluation that should be abandoned.[19] This is in contrast to the actual structure of rational evaluation found in our everyday epistemic practices, misdescribed by the philosopher, which are shown (through adducing many examples) to be entirely in order as they are. In a nutshell, what Wittgenstein demonstrates in *On Certainty* is that the traditional epistemological project of defending knowledge from sceptical attack presupposes, like the Cartesian form of scepticism that it is responding to, that there can be such a thing as universal rational evaluations. In contrast, Wittgenstein highlights how our ordinary practices of rational evaluation tacitly incorporate what he calls *hinge* commitments, which are essentially arational commitments that enable rational evaluations and hence are not themselves subject to rational evaluation.[20] Moreover, he makes clear that it is in the nature of rational evaluations that they involve hinge commitments in this way, and hence that this is not an incidental feature of our system of rational evaluations.

It follows that the philosophical problem of radical scepticism (of showing that knowledge is impossible), along with the traditional philosophical response to radical scepticism (of showing that knowledge is possible), is based on a faulty picture of the nature of our rational evaluations, one that illicitly imports a problematic conception of these rational evaluations as being, potentially anyway, harmlessly universal. In contrast, Wittgenstein's philosophical reflections help us to understand that our everyday epistemic practices, which have hinge commitments at their heart, are entirely in order as they are. He is thus offering what I have elsewhere called an *undercutting* response to the philosophical paradox involved in Cartesian scepticism, whereby what looks like a genuine philosophical paradox is shown to rest on illicit philosophical assumptions that should be abandoned. Our ordinary epistemic practices are fine as they are, with the apparent philosophical puzzle arising not out of these practices at all, but rather from a problematic philosophical account of those practices, one that we need to abandon. Undercutting responses to philosophical paradoxes are to be contrasted with overriding responses which effectively concede the paradoxical nature of the puzzle in hand (and thus there is something genuinely amiss with our everyday practices in the relevant respects), but nonetheless maintain that we can revise our everyday practices in certain respects in order to deal with the paradox.[21]

Notice, however, that it is crucial to Wittgenstein's approach that he is *showing* how we should deal with philosophical puzzles rather than advancing an opposing philosophical thesis. This is a natural consequence of his stance, for recall that he is trying to make clear how our everyday epistemic practices are fine as they are, and thus that the philosophical puzzlement arising from those practices is in fact the result of philosophical theses being smuggled into the description of them (a 'false philosophical picture'). The relentless focus on examples helps us to see that what we thought was a genuine philosophical puzzle about our everyday epistemic practices was in fact nothing of the kind. Wittgenstein shows that the puzzle is illusory not by arguing directly that this is the case, but rather by focussing on the nature of our everyday epistemic practices in such a fashion that we can come to understand how those practices can be in order as they are.

This is why there is nowhere in the notebooks that make up *On Certainty* a clear statement of a view (even though we can easily extract such a statement on his behalf, as indeed we just did). This is not an incidental lack, but part-and-parcel of the philosophical enterprise that Wittgenstein is engaging in, which does not involve the advancement of philosophical theses, but rather concerns a kind of philosophical therapy. There is thus a world of difference between, on the one hand, showing how a philosophical inquiry can undercut a putative philosophical paradox and, on the other hand, advancing a concrete philosophical thesis. The former can lead to quietude for those perplexed by the philosophical puzzle in play (I claim it can lead to *dis*quietude too, as I explain below). But if philosophy, in the sense of advancing philosophical theses, is the source of philosophical puzzles, then it is important to ensure that in offering the former one is not tempted into thereby offering the latter too, and hence being sucked back into the very faulty philosophical enterprise that was generating the fake conundra in the first place.

4. EPISTEMIC VERTIGO

That Wittgenstein isn't advancing philosophical theses in *On Certainty* removes one key potential inconsistency between his philosophical stance in this work and that offered by Pyrrhonian scepticism (which clearly does bring the sceptical modes to bear on the advancement of philosophical theses). But there is a second element of Wittgenstein's philosophical approach that is centrally important to this way of understanding *On Certainty*, and more generally to understanding the particular brand of philosophical quietism that he (and, arguably, Pyrrhonism) represents. This is that it is part of the very style of philosophical quietism that Wittgenstein offers

that it is in a certain sense also deeply disquieting. Elsewhere I have characterised this point via the notion of *epistemic vertigo*.[22]

One thing that we should remember about Wittgenstein's approach to philosophical therapy is that it is explicitly designed to help those who are already subject to philosophical difficulties. In short, it is directed at treating the afflicted. Those who have never succumbed to philosophical concerns will find no use in these reflections, which will simply seem strange and affected. Moreover, since there is nothing philosophically amiss with our ordinary beliefs on the Wittgensteinian conception, hence there is nothing for philosophical theorizing to contribute to their lives anyway. Note that we saw earlier that something very similar is true of the Pyrrhonian sceptical modes, at least on one way of understanding that form of scepticism, such that its target was not ordinary unreflective beliefs at all, but rather the kind of theoretical claims characteristically made by the philosopher.

It is a crucial feature of Wittgenstein's account of hinge commitments that we are ordinarily completely unaware of these commitments and the special role that they play in our everyday epistemic practices. This is something that Wittgenstein repeatedly emphasises with his examples. One is not taught that one has two hands, for example (much less that one knows this), but rather that one can do things with one hands, the existence of one's hands being part of the accepted backdrop of certainty against which one evaluates other specific claims that are raised. (OC, §153) If one does not ordinarily encounter hinge commitments *qua* hinge commitments, and the nature of their epistemic status is raised only in a philosophical context, then it follows that the epistemic status of hinge commitments is not something that is at issue in ordinary contexts. As Wittgenstein puts it at one point, the hinge commitments "lie apart from the route travelled by inquiry." (OC, §88)

What Wittgenstein demonstrates with his examples is that there is nothing at all epistemically amiss in our everyday use of hinge commitments, and that it only seems that there is because we have bought into a faulty philosophical picture (one that is not licensed by our everyday practices at all) according to which there can be universal rational evaluations. Our everyday epistemic practices are thus revealed to be entirely in order as they are. But notice an important difference between philosophers and the rest of the folk once this point is made. Those who are unselfconsciously engaged in these everyday epistemic practices, and hence are (rightly) unaware of the role that hinge commitments play in those practices, will also be accordingly unaware of why this challenge to the legitimacy of these practices is unsound. But our situation, as philosophers, is very different. We have adopted (or at least attempted to adopt, anyway) the disengaged philosophical stance and have accordingly become aware of our hinge commitments and the role that they play. This discovery cannot be unlearnt. It means that even after coming to

recognise that there is nothing amiss in our having hinge commitments, we cannot return to the state of epistemic innocence prior to their recognition.

Even in the grip of an adequate philosophical understanding of our epistemic position, then—one that in the most important sense "leaves everything as it is." (Wittgenstein 1953, §I.124), since it demonstrates that the everyday practices in question are unproblematic—one is nonetheless destined to take an 'unnatural' perspective on it. This is where the epistemic vertigo comes in. In becoming disengaged from our everyday epistemic practices, and thereby taking a detached perspective on them such that we can recognise our hinge commitments for what they are, one is naturally made intellectually uneasy, even if one is persuaded by the fact that these practices, and thus the arationality of our hinge commitments, is perfectly in order. We are now fated to be aware, as Stanley Cavell (1988) memorably put it, of the 'uncanniness of the ordinary.'

That vertigo is a phobic reaction is important here: epistemic vertigo is not the same as the *epistemic angst* that the radical sceptical problem gives rise to, as the latter concerns an anxiety about the legitimacy of our ordinary epistemic practices. For once the sceptical problem has been dissolved, and these practices are shown to be in order as they are, then there is no longer any impetus for such *angst*. But just as one can recognise, while high up, that one is perfectly safe and yet have a phobic reaction to heights nonetheless, so one can recognise, from a detached intellectual perspective, that there is nothing epistemically amiss with our hinge commitments being arational and yet feel a deep sense of epistemic insecurity regardless.[23]

The phenomenon of epistemic vertigo generalises. If philosophical problems more generally rest on illicit philosophical claims, of a kind that are produced by adopting a detached perspective that hides salient features of our actual practices, then one will expect a corresponding vertigo effect to occur as regards these other philosophical puzzles also. Once the disengaged stance is adopted, and one comes to see how features of our practices function in ways that were hitherto hidden, then even though one might further come to understand how these features of our practices are unproblematic, one can nonetheless no longer return to a philosophically innocent state where these features of our practices are once again tacit.[24]

In any case, what is relevant for our purposes is that a Wittgensteinian quietism, while in a sense leaving everything as it is, is also fundamentally disquieting. The positive effect of the quietism is the recognition that the philosophical challenge in play is illusory. But there is also an important negative effect too, in that one cannot simply return to one's old practices as before because one has now come to recognise, from the detached perspective of philosophical inquiry, those features of one's everyday practices that are ordinarily left hidden. There is thus no return to a state of philosophical innocence, prior to engagement with this problem. One is instead left in a kind of intellectual exile. Wittgensteinian quietism treats the afflicted, in the sense that it shows

them how our everyday practices are not subject to the philosophical challenges that we thought they were. But it does not offer a way back from the intellectual exile prompted by their attempt to adopt the disengaged philosophical perspective, as there is no cure for this affliction.

5. WITTGENSTEINIAN PYRRHONISM

Let's review where we are with regard to understanding what a specifically Wittgensteinian brand of Pyrrhonism would look like. One immediate worry, relating to how Wittgenstein seems to put forward philosophical theses in response to the problem of radical scepticism has been dealt with, since properly understood he is doing nothing of the kind. Wittgenstein's approach to philosophical problems is not to advance philosophical theses, but to manifest a certain kind of activity. We have also seen how Wittgensteinian quietism, while in a sense leaving our everyday practices exactly as they are, also has an intellectually unsettling effect on the practitioner. On the one hand, the quietism leads the practitioner away from the philosophical *angst* that the problem in hand was generating. But on the other hand, however, this doesn't lead the practitioner back to a state of intellectual innocence, prior to her engagement with the philosophical problem in hand. Rather it generates a new kind of unsettling state—philosophical vertigo—whereby the practitioner is aware of the fact that our everyday practices are not subject to the philosophical challenge posed for them while also now being unavoidably cognisant of intellectually unsettling features of those practices that are ordinarily hidden from view. The result is that one is now in a certain sense alienated from this practice.

Wittgensteinian quietism, so construed, may appear to be a rather dispiriting stance to take. But once we view this form of quietism through the lens of Pyrrhonian scepticism, then the outlook changes considerably. Recall that the favoured interpretation of the latter is as generating a permanently open-ended inquiry, one that is no more inclined towards doubt than it is towards claims to knowledge, where this is serving the ethical goal of generating quietude, and thereby *eudaimonia*. The sceptical modes are thus designed not to promote doubt, but to keep inquiry ongoing. The modes, recall, are not aimed at ordinary unreflective belief but at the very different kinds of reflective claims that depart from the ordinary, with philosophical claims being the clearest example of these. It is the latter that are contrary to *eudaimonia*, and must be opposed. The former, in contrast, are not disquieting in the relevant sense, and so are no barrier to *eudaimonia*. The proper application of the modes, however, does not return one back to ordinary unreflective belief, but rather enable one, as a reflective subject, to gain quietude through engagement in perpetual sceptical inquiry.

The parallels with Wittgensteinian quietism should be obvious. Just as the Pyrrhonian sceptical modes are not aimed at our everyday beliefs, so those who have not engaged with philosophical problems, and so are not excised by them, have no need of Wittgenstein's philosophical therapy, and hence no need for the undercutting anti-scepticism that he presents. Since Wittgenstein's philosophical quietism does not consist in the advocacy of philosophical theses—but is rather, like Pyrrhonian scepticism itself, a kind of philosophical activity—it is not in tension with the Pyrrhonian sceptical modes (which would be naturally applied to the defence of philosophical claims). Crucially, however, neither Wittgensteinian quietism nor Pyrrhonian scepticism are geared towards leading the philosophically engaged subject back to a state of innocence prior to their entanglement with philosophical concerns—this is simply not the kind of quietude that they offer.

For the Pyrrhonian, the road to *eudaimonia* for such a subject involves perpetual inquiry, and hence essentially involves a kind of intellectual disquietude, of a kind that can drive inquiry. One can now regard the Wittgensteinian quietist, in a Pyrrhonian spirit, as utilising philosophical vertigo to disquiet the philosophical subject and thereby keep the flames of inquiry alight. This is very clear in the case of the specifically epistemic vertigo at issue in *On Certainty*. Epistemic vertigo is the result of being aware of the (ordinarily tacit) role of arational hinge commitments in our epistemic practises, even while recognising that the philosophical challenges to those practices is based on faulty philosophy. The awareness of the hinge commitments prevents one from participating in those everyday practices as one did prior to engaging in philosophy, even now that one recognises that they are entirely in order as they are. It also means that one is aware of the essentially localised nature of rational evaluations, and that acts as a guard against the impetus towards philosophical dogmatism (indeed, dogmatism generally).

Epistemic vertigo—indeed, philosophical vertigo more generally—is thus a means towards generating the kind of *isosethenia* that would lead to *epoche*. In this way, Wittgensteinian Pyrrhonism, and the particular brand of quietism that goes along with it, is neither about advancing philosophical claims nor about eschewing philosophical inquiry altogether, but rather involves embracing an undogmatic, open-ended philosophical inquiry.[25]

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NOTES

[1] The contrast here is especially clear when one compares the focus of Moore (1925) and Moore (1939). The exegetical point in play is one emphasised by Williams (2004; 2005) and Pritchard (2015a, part two; *forthcomingb*).

[2] The text of particular interest in this regard is Newman (1979 [1870]). See especially Pritchard (2015b). See also Kienzler (2006) and Pritchard (2011b; 2017a; 2018b).

[3] The list of commentators who fall into this camp (at least to some significant degree anyway) includes Morawetz (1978), Strawson (1985), McGinn (1989), Stroll (1994), Moyal-Sharrock (2004), and Schönbaumsfeld (2016).

[4] For some of the key Wittgenstein-inspired proposals, see Williams (1991), Wright (2004), Coliva (2010; 2015), and Sosa (2013). I offer my own Wittgenstein-inspired stance—which I call the *non-belief reading* (since a key part of the view is the claim that the propositional attitudes involved in our hinge commitments are not to be understood as beliefs, at least in the knowledge-apt sense of that term)—in Pritchard (2015a, part two). See also Pritchard (2012; 2014; 2018a). (Note that in earlier work I advanced a very different Wittgenstein-inspired proposal, one which treated our hinge commitments as knowledge, at least in an externalist, non-rationally grounded, sense—see Pritchard (2001; 2005)). See also endnote 5.

[5] This is the line I have taken in previous work myself, as it happens. See, especially, Pritchard (2015a, part two). For a recent survey of interpretations of *On Certainty*, see Pritchard (2017b). See also Pritchard (2011c).

[6] I describe Pyrrhonism as a 'stance' in order to distance it from a philosophical position or proposal. Clearly the Pyrrhonians couldn't consistently advance any kind of philosophical thesis.

[7] See Sluga (2004) for further discussion of how Mauthner's brand of Pyrrhonian scepticism influenced Wittgenstein. Interestingly, Weiler (1958) argues that Wittgenstein's use in the *Tractatus* of the metaphor of the ladder that one should discard once employed, which will be familiar to anyone who has read Sextus Empiricus, was gained from reading Mauthner's work (though this metaphor also appears in other work that Wittgenstein is likely to have read, such as Schopenhauer (1909, 256)). See Wittgenstein (1922, §6.54), and Sextus Empiricus (2005, 183, II 480-81).

[8] I have in mind here especially Cavell (e.g., 1979). For something like the therapeutic line applied to *On Certainty*, see Conant (1998), Crary (2005), and Maddy (2017). See also the closely related 'resolute reading' of the *Tractatus* as offered by Diamond (1991) and Conant (1989).

[9] I have previously explored the relationship between Wittgenstein's *On Certainty* and Pyrrhonism in Pritchard (2011a; *forthcomingc*).

[10] There are very interesting commonalities here between Pyrrhonism (on this specific reading anyway) and the Madhyamaka Buddhist school of thought. For further elaboration, see Brons (2018).

[11] For a recent defence of this reading of Pyrrhonian scepticism, see Perin (2012). For an earlier, and influential, account of this reading, see Barnes (1982).

[12] For an overview of Pyrrhonian scepticism, roughly so conceived, see Vogt (2015, §31.1; 2017, 91-92).

[13] For some useful discussions of the 'liveability' of Pyrrhonian scepticism, see Naess (1968, ch. 2), Burnyeat (1980), Stough (1984), and Ribeiro (2002).

[14] For some other key discussions in this regard, see Burnyeat (1980; 1984) and Frede (1984).

[15] Since drafting this paper I have come across some very interesting unpublished work by Gutschmidt (2018a; 2018b). He argues for the related, though stronger, thesis that the employment of the Pyrrhonian sceptical modes is *transformative*, in the technical sense offered by Paul (2016). Like me, he also draws a connection between the Pyrrhonian sceptical strategy, so construed, and the kind of Wittgensteinian quietism that I describe below (indeed, he also makes appeal to my notion of epistemic vertigo in this respect, which we will discuss below).

[16] Though it was also present in the *Tractatus*. See, especially, the 'resolute reading' of this work as offered by Diamond (1991) and Conant (1989).

[17] See McDowell (2009) for a similar reading. See also Lear (1982). For further discussion of different varieties of quietism, see Virvidakis (2008).

[18] He makes this point explicit in the following famous passage from the *Tractatus*:

"The object of philosophy is the logical clarification of thoughts.

Philosophy is not a theory but an activity.

A philosophical work consists essentially of elucidations.

The result of philosophy is not a number of "philosophical propositions", but to make propositions clear.

Philosophy should make clear and delimit sharply the thoughts which otherwise are, as it were, opaque and blurred." (Wittgenstein 1922, §4.112)

[19] Elsewhere I have argued that the anti-sceptical import of Wittgenstein's remarks only applies to one aspect of the Cartesian sceptical problematic. See Pritchard (2015a) for the details.

[20] He actually refers to them as hinge *propositions* (OC, §§341-3), though as I explain in Pritchard (2015a, part two) it is more helpful to focus on the nature of the propositional commitment involved rather than on the particular propositional content that the subject is committed to (as the latter can lead to confusion).

[21] I discuss the contrast between undercutting and overriding strategies for dealing with (putative) philosophical paradoxes in more detail in Pritchard (2015*a*, part one). Similar distinctions regarding types of responses to philosophical paradoxes are advocated by Williams (1991, ch. 1) and Cassam (2007, ch, 1).

[22] See especially Pritchard (2015*a*, part four). See also Pritchard (*forthcominga*; *forthcomingc*).

[23] The pedantic reader should, of course, replace the 'vertigo' metaphor with (less catchy) *acrophobia*.

[24] I explore the more general philosophical consequences of epistemic vertigo in Pritchard (*forthcominga*). I take the general idea in play here to be one that is explored quite extensively, albeit often under a very different guise, in the work of Cavell (e.g., 1979; 1988; 2003).

[25] Acknowledgements.